

Billy the Ventriloquist at St. Jim's.

THE GEM LIBRARY

VOL. 3
No. 75.

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GUSSY'S GUEST.

Grand Long
Complete Tale by

MARTIN
CLIFFORD



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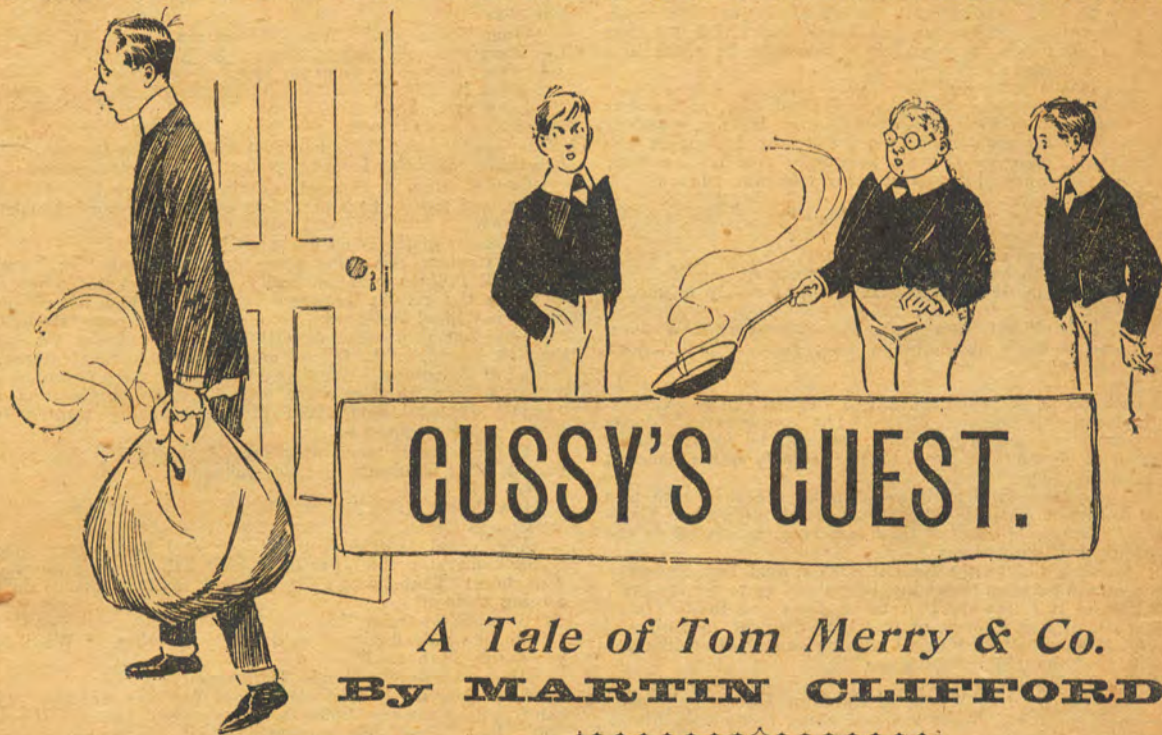
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A Tale of Tom Merry & Co.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

A Surprise for Gussy.

"BAI Jove, I don't know this handw'itin', you know!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, made the remark. He had taken a letter down from the rack, and looked at it, then screwed his eyeglass into his eye, and looked again.

But even the aid of the monocle did not make the hand-writing on the envelope familiar. He was sure he had never seen it before.

D'Arcy regarded it curiously, wondering. It did not seem to occur to him that he could discover more about the letter by opening it.

"Bai Jove, you know! I wondah whom this is fwom? I don't know the chap, anyway—at all events, I don't know his fist, you know."

"Hallo, Gussy! What are you mumbling about?" asked Jack Blake cheerfully, as he came along the passage.

"I was not mumblin', that I am aware of, Blake, deah gy. I was wondewin' whom this lettah was fwom. I don't know the hand."

Blake glanced at the letter. It was addressed to "Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, School

House, St. Jim's, Sussex," in a big, sprawling hand, and there were nearly as many blots, smears, and smudges on the envelope as there were letters of the alphabet.

"Why not open it and look inside?" asked Blake.

"Bai Jove, that's a wippen' ideah, you know! Lend me your penknife."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy slit the envelope and took out the letter within. Blake waited, looking at him.

"Bai Jove!"

"Well, any news?" demanded his chum. "Is it a fiver from your noble governor?"

"My governah would hardly w'ite in such wotten handw'itin' as that, Blake."

"Is it from your Aunt Adelina, then?"

"I wegard that question as fwivolous. It is fwom a fwriend—I should say, an acquaintance—and he's comin' here."

"Oh! Name?"

"He signs the lettah 'W. G. Buntah,'" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, glancing at it. "I pwesume the 'W.' stands for William, for it must certainly be the person we have heard addressed by the wathah familiah abbbreviation of Billy."

Jack Blake gave a start.

"Billy Bunter!"

A DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

No. 75 (New Series).

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He's coming here?"

"Yaas, apparently." D'Arcy rubbed his nose thoughtfully. "He says that there bein' a whole holiday at Gweyfwiahs, he has taken advantage of the opportunity to accept my kind invitation. I don't wemembah givin' him any kind invitation, you know, but I suppose I must have."

Blake grunted.

The St. Jim's juniors had lately met the Greyfriars juniors on the cricket field, and they had been on excellent terms with the eleven that came from Greyfriars. But there was one member of the Greyfriars party whom they had not much taken to, and that was Billy Bunter. And it was Bunter who had kindly accepted D'Arcy's kind invitation—given or not given—and was coming to St. Jim's.

"Well, Gussy, I must say that you might be a little more careful in the selection of your friends," said Blake, wagging a warning forefinger at the swell of St. Jim's.

"Weally, Blake, I always try to keep my circle of friends quite select, not to say swaggah," said Arthur Augustus. "But when I came to St. Jim's I was put into Study No. 6, and I was weally bound to chum up with you and Hewwies and Dig."

"What!" roared Blake. "I wasn't alluding to myself, you utter ass! I was thinking of this chap Bunter."

"Oh, I see! As a matter of fact, deah boy, I did not chum with this chap Buntah at all. I wegard him as a harmless sort of young ass, you know, but I did not take to him vewy much. But a chap is bound to be polite to a visitah. I looked aftah him a bit."

"And invited him—"

"Yaas, I suppose I must have invited him, as he says he's accepted my kind invitation," said D'Arcy, puzzled. "I don't wemembah it in the least, but I suppose it's all wight. Pewwaps, though, somebody else invited him, and he's got it mixed up. Did you invite him, Blake?"

"No, ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass! I—"

"When is he coming?"

D'Arcy glanced at the letter.

"To-day, deah boy. He says to-morrow, but—"

"Well, duffah, if he says to-morrow, probably he means to-morrow."

"No, I think not, because he says 'to-morrow, Wednesday, and to-day's Wednesday; and, besides, the lettah's dated yesterday.'"

"Ass!"

"I decline to be called an ass! I wegard you as wemarkably-stupid this mornin', Blake. The young boundah says he's comin' by an early twain, and will be at Wylcombe Station at eleven-thirty, and he particularly wants someone to meet him there."

"Young ass! It doesn't seem to have occurred to him that it isn't a whole holiday at St. Jim's as well as Greyfriars," grunted Blake. "How is a chap to get off in the morning, I'd like to know?"

"Pwobably he has not thought of that, deah boy. Pewwaps I can obtain permish to cut last lesson and go to the station."

"Blessed if I like this! Why couldn't you invite Harry Wharton, or Bob Cherry, or that chap Nugent, or Linley?" grunted Blake. "They're all ripping chaps. Just like you to pick out this chap Bunter—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"He's exactly like Wynn, of the New House, only more so—much more so. What are you going to do with him?"

"Weally, I haven't had time to think yet. I—"

"We shall all have to bear a hand, I suppose—"

"Weally, Blake, I can look aftah my guest all wight," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "Pewwaps he is not exactly the guest I would have chosen, and I can't think how it was I came to ask him, but—"

"Did you ask him?"

"Yaas, I must have—he says so," replied D'Arcy innocently. "Besides, Fatty Wynn paid a visit to Gweyfwiahs, and they tweated him well, he says, and so we could hardly fail to play up when a Gweyfwiahs chap comes here. I twist you are not goin' to be inhospitable, Blake?"

"We were going to play cricket this afternoon," growled Blake. "If it had been Wharton, it would have been all right. Shove a bat in his hands and he's happy. But this worm Bunter doesn't play cricket. He only came here with the team to look on and jaw."

"Yaas, but—"

"Of course, a chap doesn't want to be inhospitable," said Blake, relenting a little; "and the Greyfriars chaps always tweated us well."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But you might have selected—"

"Weally, Blake, it's too late to think of that now, and you must wemembah that the chap's our guest," said Arthur Augustus. "He will be the guest of Study No. 6, and it's up to us to give him a good time."

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"Well, we'll do our best. You can take him out for a walk while we're playing cricket," said Blake. "Of course, we can't put that off—or we could make him play. Every decent chap ought to be fond of cricket. We can assume that he's a decent chap, and make him play."

"Yaas, but—"

"That's settled! Hallo, there's breakfast bell."

"Yaas, but—"

"Come in; I'm hungry!"

And Jack Blake made for the dining-room, followed more slowly by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. D'Arcy was hospitality itself, but perhaps if he had had his choice he would have selected any guest but Billy Bunter. But courtesy to a guest came before anything else. It was "up to" Study No. 6 to give the visitor a good time; and Blake, in spite of his remarks on the subject, was certain to do as much as anybody else to keep up the reputation of the study.

CHAPTER 2.

The Terrible Three on the Track.

TOM MERRY, of the Shell, glanced across to the Fourth-Form table in the School House dining-room.

His glance rested upon D'Arcy's thoughtful face, and upon the equally thoughtful expression Jack Blake was wearing.

"Something's on," Tom Merry murmured to Monty Lowther, who was next to him at the Shell table.

Lowther looked up from his egg.

"What is it?"

"Look at Gussy."

Lowther looked.

The swell of St. Jim's had just set down his tea-cup, and had taken the letter from his pocket and was re-perusing it.

After reading it through again, he restored it to his pocket, and resumed his breakfast with a still more thoughtful frown.

The chums of the Shell exchanged glances.

It was pretty clear that there was something "on," and the Shell fellows were naturally curious to know what it was, for the rivalry between Tom Merry and his chums on the one hand and Study No. 6 on the other never slackened, except when they were disputing with Figgins & Co., of the New House, or the fellows of the neighbouring Grammar School at Rylcombe. Whether Study No. 6 were planning a "jape," or whether there was a chance of planning a "jape" against them, Tom Merry naturally wanted to know what was going on.

"I think I can guess what's up," Monty Lowther murmured, after a minute or two's reflection.

"Go it!"

"It's Cousin Ethel!"

"Cousin Ethel?"

"Yes," said Lowther confidently. "I know Gussy was saying something the other day about Ethel paying another visit here. That letter's from Ethel, and it means she's coming to-day."

"Shouldn't wonder!"

"Oh, it's a dead cert." said Monty Lowther. "What do you think, Manners?"

"Shouldn't wonder," said Manners.

"I tell you it's a dead cert," said Lowther warmly. "I can tell it by the expression in Gussy's eye. You see, if you don't hear something presently about his going to the station. Of course, he won't let on that Ethel's coming. He always tries to appropriate her—like his cheek."

"Yes, rather. But—"

"A little less talk at that end of the table, please," said Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, with a severe glance in the direction of the Terrible Three.

And the discussion ceased.

But the chums of the Shell were eager to know whether Lowther's surmise was correct—for was not Ethel Cleveland their chum as much as anybody's, and weren't they entitled to forestall D'Arcy in meeting her at the station if they could possibly fix it?

Already a scene was floating through Tom Merry's mind of locking the swell of St. Jim's up in the tool-shed, and going to the station in his place—with apologies to Cousin Ethel for the unavoidable absence of Arthur Augustus.

That D'Arcy would be keeping the matter dark was only to be expected; and the Terrible Three were too cautious to ask any direct questions.

They watched and waited.

Tom Merry & Co. had taken up the Boy Scout idea with great keenness; and they now had an opportunity of seeing within doors, which called for all their resources.

They had to keenly watch the chums of Study No. 6, to discover what was on, and to do it without exciting suspicion on the part of the Fourth-Formers.



D'Arcy adjusted his collar and tied his tie. And as he was thus engaged the door opened a few inches, and Tom Merry looked in. "Getting on allright, Gussy?" he asked. "Yaas, wathah, Tom Mewwy! But I weally wish you would not keep on intewwuptin' me in this fwivolous mannah!"

After breakfast, when the boys left the dining-room, the chums of Study No. 6 gathered in a group in the passage, and chatted there. D'Arcy produced the letter from his pocket, and handed it to Herries and Digby, who read it with interest. Then there was a general nodding and consulting.

Three Shell fellows were standing on the steps outside, apparently deeply interested in the movements of the pigeons in the quadrangle; but, as a matter of fact, watching the Fourth-Formers out of the corners of their eyes.

A sturdy, sunny-faced fellow came out of the house quickly and nearly ran into them, and stopped to speak. It was Harry Noble of the Shell—the junior from Australia.

"Hallo!" he said. "Coming to have a run round the quad, before school?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Come and bowl to me a bit, then."

"N-o-o, not just now."

"What about that game of fives, Lowther?"

"After school, old fellow."

"Coming for a trot, Manners?"

"Not just now."

The Cornstalk stared at the chums of the Shell in blank

amazement. What they could want to stand in a group on the House steps for was a puzzle to him.

"You're a set of slackers, and no mistake!" he exclaimed. "What's the little game? What are you sticking here for?"

"Oh, take a little run, Kangaroo!"

"But what—"

"Buzz off; we're busy!"

"Busy," said Kangaroo, without stirring. "Off your rockers, I think. What is there to keep on blinking at in there?" he added, looking into the house, and seeing nothing more interesting than a hatstand and a group of Fourth-Formers.

Tom Merry turned red.

Kangaroo's tones were not subdued, and they had reached the ears of the Fourth-Formers, who looked round.

"Oh, rats!" growled Tom Merry. "Come on!"

And they went down the steps. With Blake & Co. put upon their guard in this way, there was no use in keeping up the surveillance.

"Blessed if I can understand you chaps," said Kangaroo. "I suppose it isn't a case of softening of the brain, is it?"

"You've messed up the whole show," grunted Tom Merry. "We were watching the enemy."

"Eh!"

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An Extra-long Complete Tale of
Tom Merry & Co

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"SKIMPOLE'S DISCOVERY."

"Study No. 6 have got something on."

"Well, I suppose they have. I should be surprised to see them without anything on, like blackfellows in the bush—"

"Oh, leave those old gags to Lowther!" said Manners. "He deals in 'em."

"Look here, Manners—"

"Order!" said Tom Merry. "The fact is, Kangaroo, there's a jape of some sort on. We've got a strong suspicion that Cousin Ethel is coming to St. Jim's, and that those Fourth-Form kids have the fearful cheek to think they're going to keep her to themselves, and keep us out of it."

"Oh, I see!"

"We want to get on to the wheeze, and turn the tables on them—that's all."

"Right-ho!" exclaimed Kangaroo heartily. "I'm with you. Sorry I biffed into the thing like that; but I didn't know you were stalking them, of course."

"It's all right, we'll get on to it soon."

And the Terrible Three, aided by the Cornstalk, kept the chums of Study No. 6 under watch and ward. In the interval before morning school they discovered much. Blake was observed to be putting things away in his study, and making it look a little more tidy. It was the Cornstalk's keen eye that detected Blake in this unwonted occupation, and he gleefully reported to Tom Merry.

The hero of the Shell chuckled.

"Good—that shows there's a visitor expected."

"Yes, rather!"

"Any news, Monty?" asked Tom Merry, as Lowther came up to them with a grin on his face. Lowther nodded.

"I've just seen Digby conning over a time-table in the library. He was looking out the arrival of trains at Rylcombe."

"Jolly good!"

Manners joined them. He was looking decidedly thoughtful, and, in fact, a little worried. The Shell fellows gathered round him eagerly.

"What is it, Manners?"

"What's happened?"

"What have you found out?"

"Eh?" said Manners. "Oh, nothing!"

"What?"

"Nothing."

"Then what on earth are you looking so solemn about?" exclaimed Tom Merry, in disgust. "I thought you'd got on to the whole business."

"Oh, no! I was trying to find a rhyme for 'tearful,'" said Manners, innocently.

The three glared at him.

"You were what?"

"You see, I'm finishing that sonnet for the next number of the Weekly. I can't get the last line. 'And thou with eyes with sorrow wet and tearful,' that's the last I've got, and I want a rhyme."

"Try beerful," grunted Tom Merry, and he walked away, leaving Manners to solve alone the difficulty of the last line.

"Hallo!" muttered Kangaroo. "Look there!"

The Shell fellows stopped suddenly. At a short distance, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had stopped Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth-Form, as he came out of his study. Every word the swell of St. Jim's uttered was audible to everybody near him; he was making no attempt to subdue his voice.

"Pway, sir—"

"Eh? Yes, did you wish to speak, D'Arcy?" said little Mr. Lathom, stopping, and blinking at the swell of the School House through his glasses.

"Yaas, wathah, sir. I wish to wequest a little favah, sir."

"Proceed."

"I should like to be excused last lesson this mornin', sir."

"Really, D'Arcy—"

"I have a friend comin' to the school on a visit, sir, and I want to meet the twain, sir, if poss. It's vewy important."

"Ahem! I do not know—"

"The twain gets into Wylcombe Station at eleven-thirty, sir."

"Yes, but—"

"I weally wish you could give me permish, sir. I should take it as a vewy gweat favah indeed."

"Well, D'Arcy, this is very irregular, but I will not refuse you," said Mr. Lathom, in his benevolent way. "You may go."

"Thank you vewy much, sir. I am awfully obliged, sir."

And the swell of St. Jim's hurried away.

Tom Merry and his chums looked at one another. "That settles it," said Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather. Cousin Ethel's coming this morning."

"And that young bounder's going to meet her, without saying a word about it to any of us!" said Noble.

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"That's his little game."

"But we're done," said Monty Lowther. "We can't get off morning lessons like that. Linton isn't quite so good as Lathom in that way."

"N-o. But we must manage it somehow," said Tom Merry determinedly. "A couple of us would be enough."

"But what's the wheeze?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, as Gussy is keeping us out of the affair, it's only fair play that we should keep him out, isn't it?"

"Exactly."

"If he meets with any accident and can't go to the station, we can carry his apologies to Miss Cleveland."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And bring her to St. Jim's, and take the opportunity of fixing up something for the afternoon," grinned Tom Merry. "Gussy will be left on his cold lonesome, and serve the young bounder jolly well right! Fancy his having the cheek to keep Cousin Ethel to himself!"

"Awful nerve! It's a ripping idea if we can get off."

"We've got to get off!" said Tom Merry.

And the chums of the Shell set their wits to work to devise a plan for getting off in time to meet the 11.30 train at Rylcombe Station.

CHAPTER 3.

To Be or Not To Be.

"If you please, sir—"

Mr. Railton, the House-master of the School House, stopped with a pleasant smile as Tom Merry spoke to him. The big, athletic House-master always had a cheerful smile for the juniors, and Gore and Mellish and some other discontented spirits hinted that he made favourites of Tom Merry's study. But, except that he had a natural liking for brave and manly natures, and disliked anything in the shape of meanness and deceit, the House-master never showed favouritism.

"Yes, Merry; what is it?"

"Could you get me let off this morning, sir, in time to go to Rylcombe and meet the 11.30 train, sir?" asked Tom Merry meekly. "I've a particular friend coming by that train, sir, and I should like to be at the station."

"You must ask your Form-master, Merry."

"Yes, sir; but I—I thought you might speak a word for me."

Mr. Railton shook his head.

"It is absolutely a matter for Mr. Linton to decide, Merry. You must ask him."

"Th-thank you, sir!"

Mr. Railton walked on, leaving Tom Merry looking glum. Tom knew perfectly well that Mr. Linton was the right gentleman to approach in the matter; but the master of the Shell was a little uncertain in temper, and Tom was leaving him as a last resource.

"Any luck?" asked Lowther, who had been looking on from a distance, and had hurried up to hear the verdict.

"No. Refers me to Linton."

"Rotten! Try Kildare!"

Tom Merry nodded, and looked out for Kildare. The captain of St. Jim's was chatting on the steps with Darrel, another Sixth-Former. Tom Merry approached him with the meekest possible smile and the most insinuating manner. Had his old governess, Miss Priscilla Fawcett, seen him at that moment, she would have thought that her dear boy was really too good and virtuous to live in this wicked world at all. But Kildare, of the Sixth, knew that when Tom Merry looked most innocent, he was probably planning some jape, and he was on his guard at once.

"Well, what tricks are you up to now?" he demanded.

Tom looked shocked.

"Tricks, Kildare!"

The big Sixth-Former laughed.

"You've never heard of such things, of course!" he said.

"What do you want, anyway? What scheme are you planning for the benefit of the species?"

"I thought you might speak a word for me—"

"You can generally speak enough for yourself!"

"Yes; but this is to Mr. Linton," said Tom Merry. "A—a particular friend is coming to Rylcombe by the 11.30, and I want to meet the train. If you were to speak a word for me to Mr. Linton—"

"Can't be done! It's not a matter for me to interfere in."

"But as a favour, Kildare—"

Kildare shook his head.

"It would do you more harm than good. Mr. Linton would think that you ought to have come directly to him. That's what you'd better do."

"Ye-e-es; but you never know how to take him."

"Well, that's the best advice I can give you."

Tom Merry rejoined Lowther and Noble in the hall. His

expression told them that Kildare had "panned out" no better than Mr. Railton.

"No good!" he said. "I suppose we shall have to tackle Linton direct. I suppose we couldn't get Clifton Dane to hypnotise him, could we, Kangaroo?"

Kangaroo chuckled.

"I don't think Dane would care to risk it with a Form-master," he remarked. "And hypnotism only works with easy-going people who are easily led. And Mr. Linton is about as easily led as—as—"

"As a tiger or a bucking broncho!" grinned Lowther. "Hypnotism's no good! You'll have to put it to him gently, Tom, with your sweetest smile."

"Ye-es; but smiles are no good on Linton. He doesn't understand 'em, and he'll talk some piffle about lessons being interrupted, and so on, as if lessons mattered on an occasion like this! Blessed if I don't wish we were in the Fourth; we'd soon talk over Lathom!"

"I suppose it wouldn't do to cut?" suggested Lowther.

"Rats! There would be a row and a flogging, I expect; and when we came in with Cousin Ethel, it wouldn't be exactly pleasant to be yanked off before the beaks!"

"H'm! I suppose not!"

"But we've got to work it somehow. We've got to think it out—"

"Can I help you, Merry?"

The Shell fellows looked round at Skimpole's voice. Skimpole, the brainy man of the Shell, looked at them with a beaming smile, blinking behind his big spectacles.

"I heard you remark that you must think something out," he said. "Perhaps I can assist you. With my superior brain power, I could probably elucidate in one moment the difficulty that baffles you!"

"Yes, very likely," assented Lowther. "We were trying to work out a problem. If you take three apples from two boys, how many thick ears would you have left?"

"Really, Lowther—"

"We want to get a run this morning, Skimmy," said Tom Merry, laughing. "We've got to meet the 11.30 train at Rylcombe, and we want permission to get off."

Skimpole rubbed his big forehead thoughtfully.

"Couldn't you ask Mr. Linton?"

"Yes, ass; we've thought of that simple way, but we're afraid he'll say no. You never know how to take him."

"Oh, I see! Perhaps you could manage to leave the Form-room undetected," said Skimpole thoughtfully. "Let me see. With the aid of science most difficulties can be solved."

And he rubbed his bony forehead harder. The chums of the Shell watched him, grinning. They hadn't much faith in Skimpole's great brain power, though Skimmy was the most scientific youth at St. Jim's. What he didn't know about Socialism, Determinism, and all sorts and conditions of other "isms," wasn't worth knowing.

"Aha! I have it!" exclaimed Skimpole.

"Go it, fathead!"

"Better go to Mr. Linton, and instead of asking permission, claim it as a right. Explain to him that you are a free citizen of a partially free country, and that you insist upon your right to do as you like. As a reasonable man, he cannot fail to see that that view is the correct one, and—"

"And as a silly ass, I couldn't fail to get licked!" said Tom Merry. "If you can't think of anything better than that, Skimmy, you may as well sell your thinker for firewood!"

"Really, Merry—"

"Oh, take a little run, Skimmy!"

And Skimpole went his way. It was nearly time for morning chapel, which immediately preceded first lesson, and time was getting close. The chums of the Shell wrinkled their brows over the problem in vain. Gore and Mellish were looking at them, wondering what was amiss, and Gore ventured to inquire.

Gore, the cad of the Shell, was not on anything like good terms with Tom Merry & Co., but there was little that was retiring in his disposition. He was never backward in asking anything that he wanted to know.

"What's up?" was his inquiry. "Anything going on?"

"Yes," said Monty Lowther; "I am!"

And he went on, leaving Gore scowling.

"Oh, it's nothing!" said Tom Merry, more politely.

"We want to get permission to take a little run at 11.30, and we can't think how."

"Ask Linton," said Gore, with a sneer. "He'll let you go, if you flatter him—same old game. You're his favourite!"

Tom Merry looked steadily at the cad of the Shell.

"I suppose you can't help being a worm!" he remarked. "I'm no more Mr. Linton's favourite than anybody else in the Form. He treats me better than you, because I work, and don't tell him lies!"

"Oh, you can put it like that!" said Gore, shrugging his shoulders. "We all know how you suck up to Linton, and that he never shows anything but favouritism!"

"Yes, rather!" said Mellish.

"That's not true!" said Tom Merry. "And you jolly well know it's not! Mr. Linton is perfectly just, and you know it as well as I do!"

"Stuff! They've all got their favourites, and Linton's as bad as the rest. If you soft soap him the same as you do Railton, you'll get what you want! Ow!"

Smack!

Tom Merry's patience was exhausted, and his open hand smote Gore on the mouth, and cut his remarks short with startling suddenness.

"Ow! Yow!"

Gore hurled himself blindly forward at Tom Merry, but as he did so a voice, that made him suddenly stop and turn cold all over, called sharply to him.

"Gore!"

It was Mr. Linton's voice.

The master of the Shell had come out of his study, and the expression of his face showed Gore that he must have heard most of what was said.

Tom Merry turned red. He expected an imposition for "rowing" in the passage, but he did not regret the smack that had silenced Gore. But Mr. Linton's angry look was fixed upon the cad of the Shell.

"Gore, I heard what you said!"

"I—I—I was only joking, sir! I—I'm sorry!"

"You must not joke about your Form-master!" said Mr. Linton grimly. "You will come into my study after morning lessons, Gore!"

"Ye-es, sir! I—"

"Enough! Go!"

And Gore slunk away. Tom Merry waited for the thunder to burst upon himself, but it did not. Mr. Linton's face cleared.

"Merry, I could not help hearing what you said, and I am glad to see that you have such a good opinion of me."

Tom Merry turned crimson.

"Oh, sir! I—I—"

"There is nothing to be ashamed of, Merry, in having stopped an ill-natured and slanderous tongue," said the master of the Shell. "I gather that you were wishing to ask some favour of me?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"Well, you may ask."

Tom Merry hesitated. He had defended Mr. Linton without the faintest idea that the Form-master was within hearing, and he had a horrid feeling of being detected in a virtuous action, and looking like a "good boy" in a story-book.

"Come, Merry!" said Mr. Linton, with a smile. "What is it?"

"I—I—I was going to ask you, sir, if—if we could get off lessons this morning in time to meet the 11.30 at Rylcombe, sir!" stammered Tom Merry. "We—we've got a particular friend coming, sir!"

"Ahem! How many wish to go?"

"Four of us, sir," said Tom Merry, gaining courage.

"Manners and Lowther and Kang—er—I mean, Noble, and myself, sir. I know it's a lot to ask."

"Well, you may go, Merry. You can leave at half-past ten."

"Oh, thank you, sir!"

And the chums of the Shell went into chapel that morning feeling decidedly elated.

CHAPTER 4.

Arthur Augustus is Left Behind.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY, in the Fourth Form room, kept his eye on the clock during the lesson that morning.

The swell of the School House was not, as a matter of fact, particularly pleased by the promised visit from Bill Bunter, of the Greyfriars Remove; but courtesy and hospitality outweighed every other consideration. He was bound to meet the fat junior at the station, and to take ever care of him. And in point of fact he was not displeased to have a run in the fresh summer morning while his Form fellows were at lessons.

Most of them would very willingly have accompanied him. Indeed, Fatty Wynn, of the New House, considered that he had a right to do so. Under the very eyes of the quiet short-sighted little Mr. Lathom any amount of whispering went on in the Form-room; and so most of the Fourth knew by this time that a fellow was coming from Greyfriars on visit, and that D'Arcy had permission to go to the station and meet him.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn—Figgins & Co.—were special interested. For Fatty Wynn had only a short time before

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"SKIMPOL'S DISCOVERY."

paid a visit to Greyfriars, on Bunter's invitation, and had been royally treated there. True, he more than suspected that all the trouble and expense of the visitor's entertainment fell upon Bunter's friends, and not upon Bunter himself. Still, he had been "done down" rippingly, and if Bunter was returning the visit, Fatty felt that he ought to have a hand in it.

"The chap ought to have written to me, not to you, Gussy," said Fatty Wynn. "I asked him to visit me, when I was at Greyfriars."

"Bai Jove! Then he has probaboly made a mistake on the subject, for I do not memebah askin' him at all, deah boy!"

"More likely he prefers to visit a chap who's rollin' in tin!" murmured Figgins, who knew something of William George Bunter. "We could only stand him a study feed and show him round, but Gussy can roll him in gold."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"It's Gussy's filthy lucre that's done it," said Kerr. "I remember Bunter passing remarks on his banknotes."

"Weally, Kerr—"

"I expect he means to give me a look-in as well," Fatty Wynn remarked. "Bunter has his faults, but he's a ripping chap in some respects. He can cook, and he can appreciate another chap's cooking, and he's got an appetite that makes mine look silly. I like a chap who can eat."

"Yaas, wathah! I shall have no objection to you fellows helpin' me to entahtain the young boundah," said D'Arcy. "Fortunately, I am in considerable funds to-day, havin' had a fivah frowm my govannah yesterday, and a postal-ordah for two pounds frowm my Aunt Adelina at Leamington. In case I win short—"

"Run short!" murmured Figgins. "Listen to the giddy billionaire!"

"In case I win short of tin, I can bowwow some of Tom Mewwy, who had just had a weally handsome wemittance frowm his old govannah, Miss Pwiscillah Fawcett. It is a most fortunate circ, because we must weally do our best for a stwangah within the gates, you know."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Lathom. "I am sure there is some-one talking!"

He had just awakened to the fact.

Fatty Wynn rose in his place.

"If you please, sir—"

"Yes, Wynn?"

"I should like to go to the station with D'Arcy, sir. The chap who is coming is a most particular friend of mine."

"I am afraid I cannot give any further permits, Wynn. You may sit down."

Fatty Wynn sat down.

"Nevah mind," murmured D'Arcy. "You can help me to pweapare the gwub latah, you know. It's a half this atfahnoon."

Fatty Wynn grunted.

"I must insist upon silence being kept in class," said Mr. Lathom.

Half-past ten chimed out from the village clock-tower, and Arthur Augustus rose. Followed by envious glances from his Form-fellows, the swell of St. Jim's quitted the classroom.

At that unaccustomed hour the passages were deserted, and D'Arcy was naturally surprised as he passed the Shell-room to see the door open and four youths come out. They were Tom Merry, Manners, Lowther, and Noble.

"Bai Jove!" he said. "Where are you goin', deah boys?"

"Hallo! Is that you, Gus?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Going out?"

"Yaas, and I'm in wathah a huwwy. The twain gets in in an hour, and it takes me half an hour to get to Wylcombe."

"Then what's the hurry?" asked Tom Merry.

"I've got to change my clothes, deah boy." And Arthur Augustus hurried upstairs.

The chums of the Shell exchanged glances and chuckled.

"That shows it's Cousin Ethel, if we didn't know it already," grinned Lowther. "He's going to put on his best bib and tucker."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on," said Tom Merry. "We may as well follow his example. Must look decent when we meet Cousin Ethel. We'll have a trap to the school, too—luckily I'm in funds. Miss Fawcett sent me two pounds yesterday. It's come just a the nick of time."

As they passed the Fourth-Form dormitory, on the way to their own, the chums of the Shell heard Arthur Augustus D'Arcy within. He was busy, and Tom Merry opened the door and looked in.

"Hallo, Gussy!" he said, feeling for the key in the lock as he spoke. "Don't forget to put the bear's-grease on your air!"

Arthur Augustus looked round.

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"SKIMPOLE'S DISCOVERY."

"I wegard that wemark as uttably fwivolous, Tom Mewwy!"

"By Jove, look at the grease on his trousers, too!" exclaimed Lowther.

The elegant Fourth-Former gave a jump.

"Gwease! Gwease on my twousahs!"

"Sorry—I meant crease," said Lowther.

D'Arcy gave him a withering look. His trousers had the most beautiful crease that was to be seen within the walls of St. Jim's.

"Weally, Lowtah—"

The chums of the Shell chuckled, and closed the door.

"Got the key?" muttered Manners.

"No," growled Tom Merry. "It wasn't in the lock."

"Rotten!"

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows a little. It would have been a simple expedient to lock Gussy up in the dormitory, but as the key wasn't in the lock, that was out of the question. But his brow cleared in a moment.

"It's all right! He's certain to go down to No. 6 to finish," he said. "He's got a big glass rigged up there, you know—and he keeps his collars and ties there. I'll cut down and get the key now."

"Good egg!"

Tom Merry darted downstairs, and in less than a minute he was returning, with the key of Study No. 6 triumphantly in his hand.

"That's all right," he said. "Now, let's change." And they went into the Shell dormitory.

Meanwhile Arthur Augustus was proceeding cheerfully with his toilet. He was far from suspecting what was passing in the minds of the Shell fellows—and, in fact, he was too busy to even wonder what they were doing out of their Form-room at that hour in the morning.

He felt it to be necessary to dress for the occasion. There was the reputation of St. Jim's in general, and of Study No. 6 in particular, to be kept up.

Although he did not dress as he would have done had it been Cousin Ethel whom he was going to meet, the result when he had finished was decidedly striking.

As a matter of fact, dressing was a labour of love with D'Arcy, and he liked to take his time about it, and make it really successful.

Twenty-five minutes of the half-hour he had allowed himself had elapsed when he left the dormitory and descended to his study to put the finishing touches to his toilet there.

There was a large glass in the study, put up at D'Arcy's own expense, which gave a full-length view of his elegant figure. D'Arcy surveyed his reflection in the glass with some satisfaction.

He adjusted his collar and tied his tie. And as he was thus engaged the door opened a few inches, and Tom Merry looked in.

"Getting on all right, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah, Tom Mewwy! But I weally wish you would not keep on intewwuptin' me in this fwivolous mannah!"

"Sorry, I'll buzz off!"

And Tom Merry slammed the door—and in the echo of the slam D'Arcy did not hear the sound of the key turning in the outside of the lock.

He tied the necktie to his satisfaction, and then took a silk topper out of his hat-box, and brushed it carefully—not to say lovingly.

He adjusted the silk hat at the exactly correct angle before the glass, and took a last survey of his tout ensemble through his eyeglass.

"Bai Jove! I think that's all wight!"

There was a clink at the study window, and a pebble fell

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in upon the floor. Arthur Augustus glanced out into the quadrangle.

Four youths stood there, looking up at his window. They were nicely-dressed, and wore silk hats, which they proceeded to raise simultaneously to D'Arcy, as if moved by the same spring.

"Bai Jove! Did you throw that stone, Tom Mewwy?"

"Certainly. I wanted to attract your attention. We're just going."

"Weally, I am quite indiffereent whethah you are just goin' or not. I vegard this newened intewuption as bein' in vewy bad form."

"We had to say good-bye," said Tom Merry reproachfully. "We couldn't go without saying good-bye to Gussy."

"Certainly not," said Kangaroo. "You see, we're just going down to the station."

"To meet a particular friend," said Lowther.

"Who's coming by the 11.30," added Manners.

"And then the four said in chorus:

"Good-bye, Gussy! Sorry you can't come!" Then they marched off, chuckling.

Arthur Augustus gazed after them in astonishment.

"Bai Jove! Are they goin' to meet Billy Buntah? Weally, I do not quite compwehend this. I cannot help suspectin' that Tom Mewwy is wathah off his wockah."

And Arthur Augustus finished the finishing touches. He threw on a light overcoat, jammed his monocle into his eye, and crossed to the door. He was surprised when it refused to open.

He pulled at the handle—and pulled again! But the door did not budge.

"Bai Jove! It's locked on the outside!"

D'Arcy dashed back to the window.

"Tom Mewwy, you ass, come and unlock my door! Come back! Bai Jove, they've gone!"

The chums of the Shell were just leaving the gates of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 5. A Slight Surprise.

HA, HA, HA!

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"This is where we smile!" said Tom Merry. "I'd give a week's pocket-money to see Gussy's face when he tries to open the door!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Those beautiful trousers, that lovely waistcoat, that ripping topper—all put on for nothing!" said Lowther. "It's enough to make a dog weep!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He will stay there till after morning lessons," grinned Kangaroo. "Blake can let him out. He can't make anybody hear from the study—unless, perhaps, one of the maids. It's a chance for him to get his contribution done for the Weekly."

"Or get through his latest impot."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the chums of the Shell, greatly pleased with themselves, strode cheerily down the road towards the village.

They were sorry for Gussy, of course; but all was fair in war. They had "caught on" to the little game, and they were going to the station in D'Arcy's place—and they anticipated the merriment which the story would cause in the School House when it got round.

The laugh would be up against Study No. 6—especially if they could contrive to make an arrangement with the unsuspecting Ethel to take up the afternoon. It would make Blake & Co. look absolutely green, and the chums of the Shell chuckled gleefully over the prospect.

They lost no time in getting to Rylcombe. It was only twenty-five minutes after eleven when they entered the little station.

"Lots of time," said Tom Merry, looking carefully in the glass over an automatic machine, and flicking a speck of dust from his nose, and giving his necktie a tug to the centre. "That road's beastly dusty!"

"I'll give you a brush down if you like," said Monty Lowther, taking up a rough broom the porter had left leaning against the automatic machine.

"Well, you might, old chap— Hold on, you ass! Keep that broom away. This is no time for your rotten jokes."

"Well, you asked for it."

"Ass! Cousin Ethel may be here any minute."

"Well, we're all ready," said Monty Lowther. "We all look very nice, I'm sure, except Manners—"

"What's the matter with me?" demanded Manners.

"Only your face, old chap; but you were born with it, and it's too late to alter it now. Look here, what yarn are we going to tell Cousin Ethel about Gussy not coming?"

"No yarn at all—the frozen truth."

"Ye-es; but what variety of truth, then?"

"Look here, Lowther, don't be funny; it grows painful after a time. It's like the constant drop of water wearing away the hardest stone. We're going to tell Miss Cleveland the solid facts—Gussy's detained at the school and can't come."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hence our presence here, and we'll arrange for a drive in the afternoon," said Tom Merry. "We'll make her promise, and then the other bounders won't have a chance. Figgins will be on the track the moment he knows she's coming. You know that duffer."

"Yes, rather!"

"Hallo! Here's the train. Now, turn on your sweetest smiles, and all of you raise your hats when I raise mine."

"Right you are!"

The train was rushing into the station.

Eagerly the chums of the Shell scanned it as it drew to a clattering halt.

Doors flew open, and faces appeared at windows; and at the first glimpse of the charming features they knew so well, the juniors would have dashed to the carriage and torn the door open.

But the expected face did not appear.

There were only three passengers for Rylcombe in the train, only three individuals who alighted upon the platform.

One was a stout old farmer, and another was Pilcher, the son of the local butcher, and well known to the St. Jim's fellows. He put his thumb to his nose as he walked off the platform, but Tom Merry & Co. had no attention to waste on him.

The third passenger to alight was a fat little fellow in spectacles, who stood on the platform looking up and down as if in expectation of seeing someone.

There was something familiar in his aspect to the juniors of St. Jim's! but they were not looking at him now.

Where was Cousin Ethel?

It was possible that the girl had not noticed that this was her station, that she was deeply interested in a book, or even had fallen asleep. The juniors separated and rushed up and down the train looking into the carriages.

There were only four carriages on the little local, and only one or two passengers in each. But Cousin Ethel was not among them.

"Stand clear there!"

The dismayed juniors stepped back from the train.

The last door slammed, and the train rolled out of the station, and vanished down the curving line.

Tom Merry & Co. looked at one another.

"My only hat!" said Tom, rubbing his chin. "What does it mean?"

"Give it up!"

"Miss Cleveland hasn't come by this train," said Kangaroo. "She may have lost the connection at Wayland, and may be waiting for the next."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"There's five minutes to change trains at Wayland; she couldn't lose it," he said. "She knows these trains by heart."

"She may have lost her train starting."

"Not likely; Cousin Ethel never loses trains."

"But—but—what—"

"There's some mistake; we've misunderstood Gussy."

"You mean you've misunderstood Gussy," said Lowther meaningly.

"Oh, draw it mild! It was you first suggested that it was Cousin Ethel Gussy was coming to meet," said Tom Merry warmly.

"There's some mistake somewhere," said Kangaroo. "You've got it wrong. But if it wasn't Cousin Ethel Gussy was coming to meet, who was it? He was certainly coming to meet this train."

"Yes, there's no doubt on that point."

"Then who the dickens—"

"I say, you fellows—"

Kangaroo broke off.

It was the stout youth in spectacles who spoke.

The juniors of St. Jim's looked at him.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry. "I've seen you before somewhere."

The stranger blinked at him through his big glasses.

"Oh, really, I should say so!" he exclaimed. "You're Figgins, aren't you?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"No; I'm Tom Merry."

"Oh, yes, of course, I remember! I should know you anywhere. I guessed you fellows belonged to St. Jim's, so I thought I'd speak to you," said the short-sighted junior. "I was expecting D'Arcy to meet me here, but I suppose you've come instead."

"What!" roared Tom Merry.

"I was expecting D'Arcy—"

"D'Arcy!"

"Certainly. I'm Bunter—William George Bunter, of the Greyfriars Remove—the Lower Fourth, you know. I'm coming to St. Jim's."

"The dickens you are!"

"Yes. It's a whole holiday at Greyfriars to-day, and I'm taking the opportunity of accepting D'Arcy's kind invitation."

"My only hat!"

"I particularly requested D'Arcy to meet me at the station, but I suppose he was unable to come."

"Yes," said Tom Merry grimly, "he was unable to come."

"And you've come instead?"

"Yes, exactly; we've come instead."

"Good!"

CHAPTER 6.

Billy Bunter Takes a Snack.

BILLY BUNTER blinked with satisfaction. The juniors of St. Jim's were by no means so satisfied. They remembered Bunter very well, as a fellow who had accompanied the Greyfriars junior team when it came to play a cricket match at St. Jim's. They knew very little of him; but if he had been the finest fellow in the wide world they would have been exasperated now.

They had been expecting to see Cousin Ethel, and to raid D'Arcy's charming cousin would have been a triumph over Study No. 6.

But they had no desire to raid Billy Bunter.

D'Arcy would have been quite welcome to his fat visitor.

The four Shell fellows felt that they could have kicked each other, and themselves as well, hard!

The result of their ripping wheeze was that they had had a walk to the station, and had saved D'Arcy the trouble of coming down and meeting this chap from Greyfriars. It was quite on the cards that they might be done into looking after him all the afternoon, too.

But it was impossible to let Bunter see their thoughts.

Courtesy to a stranger was as strong an instinct with the Terrible Three as with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy himself.

The chap had come from Greyfriars to visit a St. Jim's fellow, and they had prevented that fellow from meeting him at the station. Common politeness required that they should assume D'Arcy's responsibility in the matter, and take every care of William George Bunter of the Greyfriars Remove.

Tom Merry gave his chums a comical glance.

"We're in for it," he murmured.

"Oh, you ass!" muttered Manners. "You want a study licking for this!"

"It's Lowther's fault."

"Oh, rats!" said Lowther.

"Eh? Did you speak to me?" said Bunter, blinking.

"Yes. I said it would be a beautiful day yesterday if it doesn't rain to-morrow," said Lowther. "Let's get off the station."

"Come on, then."

"I say, you fellows, is there any way of getting off the platform without going out at the entrance?"

"Yes; you could dodge out at the other end if you liked," said Tom Merry, in wonder. "But what on earth—"

"You see, I haven't a ticket."

"Eh?"

"I suppose they'll ask me for a ticket?"

"I suppose they will. What have you done with your ticket?"

"You see, I came without one. I was disappointed at the last moment about a postal-order I was expecting, and I came without. You see, they know me at the station I got in, and thought I was just going on the platform."

The juniors of St. Jim's looked curiously at the fat youth from Greyfriars. That there were many fellows who had loose notions on the subject of paying railway fares, they knew. But they had never heard anybody explain his dishonesty so candidly before, and in such an unashamed way.

"My word!" murmured Lowther. "I don't envy Gussy his friends. What on earth did he pick up this toad for?"

"And what did you do when you changed trains?" asked Tom Merry. "Didn't they want to look at your ticket?"

"Oh, I managed to dodge them! I'm awfully deep, you know!"

"Yes, you must be! Have you ever heard of the treadmill?"

"The—the what?"

"The treadmill. It's an invention for the use of deep."

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fellows like you. Ahem! Excuse me; I forgot you were Gussy's guest. Sorry!"

"I hope you don't think I mean to swindle the railway company?" said Billy Bunter, blinking indignantly at the St. Jim's juniors.

"What!" gasped Tom Merry. "What do you call it, then?"

"I am going to send them a postal-order for the money," explained Bunter. "The fare is eight shillings, and I'm expecting a postal-order for ten shillings every day. As soon as it comes I shall send them a remittance. This is really only a dodge for gaining time. See?"

"Hem! I see! And suppose your postal-order doesn't come?"

"Oh, it's bound to come. Now, how shall I get out of the station?"

"You'll walk out with me," said Tom Merry, passing his arm through the fat junior's. "I'll lend you the tin to settle for the fare."

"Oh, really, Merry, that's awfully decent of you!"

"Don't mention it," said Tom sarcastically. "You see, I can't help feeling that your postal-order mightn't come, and that if it did you might forget to send the remittance to the railway company."

"Oh, it's bound to come; and as a matter of fact, Merry, I'd rather leave it over till then, and you can lend me the eight bob. I've left all my money at home."

"Careless!" said Lowther. "I suppose you left your cheque-book on the grand piano in your study, and dropped all your banknotes on the tiger skin rug."

Tom Merry gave his facetious chum a warning glance.

They passed out of the station exit, and Tom, affecting not to hear the eager whispers of Billy Bunter, paid the fat junior's fare to the ticket-collector, and took a receipt for it. Then they poured out of the station.

It had been Tom Merry's intention to hire a trap, and take Cousin Ethel to St. Jim's in state, but he did not feel inclined to do so in honour of William George Bunter. Bunter could walk.

"I say, you fellows—"

"This way," said Tom Merry.

"I say, Merry, I'm hungry, you know. Is there anywhere in the village where a chap could get a snack?"

Bunter looked quite pathetic as he asked the question.

"Certainly," said Tom Merry. "This way."

And he led the way to Mother Murphy's tuckshop.

Though he had saddled himself with Gussy's guest, and a fellow he certainly did not take a fancy to, Tom Merry's hospitality was unbounded. If Bunter was hungry, Bunter was to be fed on the best that Rycombe afforded, at any cost.

It was fortunate that Tom Merry was in funds—very fortunate indeed, as it turned out.

Billy Bunter gave a grin of satisfaction as they entered the little shop of Mother Murphy, where the juniors of St. Jim's were well-known and very welcome customers.

The fat junior looked round the shop, his eyes glistening at the sight of pies and puddings, tarts, and cream-puffs galore.

If Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had met him, the Falstaff of Greyfriars would have indulged in a tremendous feed in the village tuckshop, and probably that was one of his reasons for being so extremely desirous that the swell of St. Jim's should be at the station on his arrival.

He blinked now in an inquiring way at Tom Merry.

Tom looked pretty prosperous, Bunter decided; and, anyway, no doubt he could run up an account, even if he ran short of cash.

And so William George Bunter of the Greyfriars Remove resolved not to stint himself. As for Tom Merry, he was all hospitality.

"Wire in!" he said tersely.

"Well, I'm not exactly hungry," said Billy Bunter. "I'm feeling just a little faint. I've got rather a delicate constitution, and I have to keep up my strength by taking constant nourishment. That's led some fellows to think I'm greedy."

"Hard cheese!" said Monty Lowther sympathetically. "Yes, but I'm used to injustice. I think I'll take a snack."

"Wire in, my son!"

Tom Merry pulled out one of the high cane chairs for Bunter, and Monty Lowther pushed one of the little round tables towards him. Bunter sat down, and put his hat on the counter, and wiped his glasses. He was evidently preparing for serious business. The juniors, who knew Fatty Wynn, and what he could do in the gastronomic line, had always thought him unbeatable—till now. They were about to discover that Fatty Wynn was a mere tyro in comparison with this cheerful youth from Greyfriars.

Billy Bunter started on pies and puddings of a solid description. They vanished at a rate that would have made the celebrated Fatty Wynn himself open his eyes wide.



"Hallo!" said Tom Merry. "I've seen you before, somewhere." The fat stranger blinked at him through his big glasses. "Oh, really, I should say so!" he exclaimed. "You're Figgins, aren't you?"

Having taken the edge off his appetite with as much as the Terrible Three would have laid in for a good-sized study feed, Bunter turned his attention to lighter articles. Mrs. Murphy's pastry was good—and Bunter said so—and proved his words by his deeds. If the proof of the pudding is in the eating, the quality of Mrs. Murphy's cooking was amply demonstrated.

The St. Jim's juniors watched him with growing interest. "Sorry you don't feel hungry," said Lowther. "You're not eating anything. Are you always like this?" "Oh, no!" said Bunter innocently. "I get hungry sometimes. Wharton thinks I'm greedy; Wharton's head of our study, you know. I'm not really greedy, but I admit I like a lot."

"There's a lot of difference there."

"Of course. Yes, I'll have some ginger-beer, Manners."

"Try the tarts."

"Certainly—with pleasure."

"The cream-puffs are all right," said Kangaroo.

"Good! You might pass along half a dozen."

Billy Bunter travelled through tarts and puffs, and then even he showed some signs of slackening.

"There's some jolly good apples here," said Lowther.

"Perhaps I might manage a couple, thanks."

"And the pears?"

"Well, only two or three."

"What about biscuits?"

"Not more than half a pound, please; I mustn't overdo it. You see, I suppose D'Arcy will be getting up a bit of a feed ready for me at St. Jim's, and I don't want to spoil my appetite."

Tom Merry nearly staggered.

If Bunter's appetite withstood the cargo he had taken on board, it must certainly be the healthiest appetite a junior ever possessed.

"But you must manage a bit of this cake," urged Lowther. "Let me tell Mrs. Murphy to cut off only a couple of pounds for you—just to taste it."

"No, really Lowther, better not; I've really had enough. I'm not a great eater, you know. Well, if you insist, just one slice. You may as well make it a thick one, ma'am."

"These table-jellies are ripping," said Manners. "Try—"

"Well, perhaps one."

Tom Merry tried to stop his chums by warning glances. He did not want to stint Bunter in any way, but he was growing seriously afraid that the fellow from Greyfriars would burst if this were continued.

"Have some nuts," said Monty Lowther recklessly.

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An Extra-long Complete Tale of
Tom Merry & Co.

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"SKIMPOLE'S DISCOVERY."

"I'll shove some in my pocket, to eat as we go along," said Bunter.

And he slid off the high stool.

"Here, I forgot the cocoanut-ice," said Lowther. "You must have a fragment of that—say a pound."

"I'll take it in my hand."

And Billy Bunter was contentedly munching cocoanut-ice as the party left the tuckshop at last. Tom Merry settled the bill—a very considerable one—ungrudgingly; but he wondered how William George Bunter could walk after that snack. But the fat junior seemed invigorated by it, and he arrived in high spirits with Tom Merry & Co. at the gates of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 7.

Tom Merry Does Not Score.

HALLO! This giddy door's locked!"

Jack Blake shook the handle of the door of Study No. 6. Morning school was over, and Blake and Digby had come up to the study for their bats. Herries had gone to feed his bulldog. Blake rattled the study door in amazement.

"What giddy ass has locked this? Gussy can't have—Hullo!"

"Is that you, Blake, deah boy?" came a voice from within the study.

"Gussy! That you, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I thought you were gone to the station."

"I have been the victim of a wotten twick."

"Ha, ha, ha! Unlock the door!"

"You uttah ass, do you think I should be in here if the door were locked on the inside?" demanded D'Arcy indignantly, through the keyhole.

"Never thought about it. The key's not on the outside."

"Then that wottah Mewwy has taken it away."

"Tom Merry!"

"Yaas! He locked me in."

"What on earth was he doing out of the Form-room, then?" said Digby, in surprise. "I don't quite catch on. I know a key that will fit the door, though."

He ran along the passage to Reilly's study, abstracted the key from the lock, and the door of No. 6 was speedily opened.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was seated gracefully in the arm-chair, reading the latest number of "Pluck," and apparently not dissatisfied with his imprisonment.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Blake. "You don't seem much the worse for it."

"Wathah not, deah boy. As a mattah of fact, I think Tom Mewwy must have been undah a remarkable misapprehension. He has gone to Wylcombe instead of me, with Manners and Lowther and Kangawoo. I think he must have heard somethin', you know, and jumped to the obvious conclusion that I was meetin' Ethel at the station. That is the only possible way I can account for his swange conduct."

Blake and Digby roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, I wogard it as wathah funnay, myself," said Arthur Augustus, with a grin. "As he has gone to the station instead of me, he will find out his mistake there, and as a decent chap he will be bound to do the honahs to William G. Buntah. So long as the chap is weceived and looked aftah, it's all wight. Tom Mewwy has saved me a walk to the station, and I have had a vewy pleasant wead instead while I was waitin' for somebody to open the door. I wathah think that the gwin will be up against Tom Mewwy this time."

"Ha, ha, ha! I should like to see his chivvy when he meets Bunter!" chuckled Digby.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I say, it would be a good wheeze to leave Bunter on Merry's hands for the afternoon," suggested Digby, "as he's taken him aboard; he might as well keep him, and we can get the cricket all the same."

"Not a bad idea."

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"I am afwaid it would not be poss. for me to neglect my guest," he remarked. "You see, the chap is my visitah."

"Well, he'll have to play cricket then," said Blake, "or else we shall leave him to you on your lonesome."

"It is necessary for you to back me up, deah boys, in entahtainin' a visitah, for the honah of the study."

"Then we'll put a bat in his hand," said Blake. "I suppose you'll have to give him some dinner. Where are you going to feed him?"

"I pwesume that he can dine in hall with us?"

"Yes, I suppose so. Better speak a word first, in case there isn't any plate or any grub for him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And D'Arcy went downstairs to see about it, while Blake

and Digby carried out their bats. But they did not go to cricket. Blake chuckled as he stepped out of the house, with a new thought in his mind.

"Let's get down to the gates and see Tom Merry coming in," he said. "I want to see how happy they are with Bunter."

"Good!" said Digby.

"Yaas, wathah!" remarked Arthur Augustus, rejoicing his chums. "It's all wight about the dinnah. It would be only decent to meet the chap at the gate."

And the Fourth-Formers strolled in that direction.

They waited in the gateway, chuckling over the little error Tom Merry & Co. had made, till the juniors from the village came in sight. Billy Bunter, with a smear of jam on his mouth and a fragment of jelly on his fat cheek, was looking very contented but a little tired. He did not like walking. Tom Merry & Co. were a little tired, too, but not of walking.

Billy Bunter blinked at the juniors in the gateway. Even the short-sighted Removite from Greyfriars recognised at once the resplendent attire of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's.

"Bai Jove, deah boy, I'm glad to see you!" said D'Arcy, with outstretched hand. "I'm so sowwy I couldn't come to the station."

"That's all right, D'Arcy," said Billy Bunter affably. "Your friends explained that you were detained, and they've looked after me rippingly."

"I'm awfully obliged to you, Tom Mewwy."

"Not at all," said Tom.

"Yaas, wathah! It was so kind of you to go down to the village on purpose to meet my fwienid Buntah."

The Shell fellows exchanged sickly smiles.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"Weally, Blake, there is nothin' to laugh at," said D'Arcy reprovingly. "It was simply wippin' of Tom Mewwy to take all this twouble; just as if it were Cousin Ethel who was coming by the twain."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" grunted Tom Merry. "No good rubbing it in."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway come with me, Buntah, deah boy," said D'Arcy, slipping his arm through Bunter's. "Dinnah will be weady shortly."

"I shall be ready for it," said Bunter. "I've had a snack in the village, but I'm a bit peckish to-day."

"Vewy good! Come on."

And D'Arcy walked off with his guest.

The juniors in the gateway looked at one another—the Fourth-Formers grinning, the Shell fellows very pink about the cheeks.

"What a giddy jape!" chuckled Jack Blake. "You've missed it this time, Tom Merry, and no giddy mistake."

"It's a jolly swindle!" said Tom Merry. "How was I to guess that Gussy was going to meet that—that oyster at the station?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I wish Gussy joy of him," grunted Lowther. "I'm going to book a front seat at dinner, and watch him. It's worth it."

CHAPTER 8.

Lowther is Hospitable.

DINNER at St. Jim's was at half-past one. There was an interval to be filled up before the meal was due, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy thought it could be filled up very nicely by showing his guest round St. Jim's. Bunter had been to St. Jim's before, but he had not been shown over the place, and a walk round ought to have interested him. He received the suggestion politely, but not very enthusiastically.

"But pewwaps you are tired," suggested D'Arcy; "you would wathah sit down?"

"Well, I am a little fagged," said Bunter. "I'm a good walker, but I'm out of form when I go off my feed; and I haven't been eating much lately. Still, I had a snack in the village. I suppose you have a tuckshop at the school? I think I remember it."

"Yaas, wathah! It's kept by Mrs. Taggles, the portah's wife," said D'Arcy. "She is an estimable old lady, and makes vewy fine pastwy. Shall we have a stwoll wound the wuined towah?"

"H'm—yes! What else is there to see?"

"The chapel, with painted windows datin' fwom the weign of Henwy the Eighth, or somebody."

"Hum!"

"Then there's the school libwawy, with the old manu-scripts; one of them that belonged to Chaucer himself."

"Don't know him," said Bunter. "Was he at this school?"

"Ahem! I wathah think not. Then there's the New House; that's the wival House, you know. You've met Figgins?"

"Ye-e-es."

"And there's the gym," said D'Arcy.

"Ah! I used to go in for physical culture a lot," said Bunter. "I was a demon at athletics at one time. That's what's made me what I am."

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon the ample form of Bunter.

"Bai Jove! Is it weally?"

"Yes. Nothing like it for bringing out the muscle. I gave it up, though; a lot of the fellows were getting jealous. Suppose we go and have a look at the tuckshop? I should like to see it. Our school shop is kept by an awfully unreasonable old woman; always makes a chap pay cash, or else refuses the order."

"Bai Jove!"

They walked away to the school shop.

Dame Taggles gave Arthur Augustus a cheery smile. Although he was not a great eater, he was generally overflowing with cash, and was a good customer.

Billy Bunter looked round the shop.

His fat face beamed, and his little round eyes glistened joyously behind his spectacles.

"This is a ripping show!" he remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What time did you say dinner was?"

"Half-past one, deah boy."

Bunter looked at his watch.

"H'm! 'Nother three-quarters of an hour. I'm feeling rather faint. I suppose I could have a snack now?"

"Yaas, wathah! Pway wire in."

"Jolly good! I think I'll try the rabbit-pies."

"Pway serve my fwient Buntah, Mrs. Taggles. I am wespensible."

"Certainly, Master D'Arcy!"

Dame Taggles willingly served Bunter. Bunter was also quite prompt in serving himself. The good things disappeared so fast that Mrs. Taggles had to keep a rapid account with pencil and paper.

Bunter blinked at D'Arcy, who stood by the counter politely waiting.

"Aren't you going to have a snack, D'Arcy?"

"Thanks, no, deah boy. I'm not hungry."

"These tarts are ripping."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther entered the shop as Bunter was busily engaged. They stared at him, and in their surprise forgot to make their purchases.

"My only hat!" said Tom Merry. "He's at it again!"

"Where is he putting it?"

"I say, you fellows," said Bunter, looking round, "these marmalade-tarts are just the thing! Won't you have some?"

"Not just now, thanks," said Tom Merry. "Don't want to spoil dinner."

"Dinner's another thirty-five minutes yet."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I can wait. But you're losing time. Wire in."

"Try the ices," said Monty Lowther. "I can recommend these ices. Dame Taggles is famous for ices."

"Thanks! I will."

"Let me help you," said Lowther. "Don't move off that stool. I don't suppose you find it very easy to move," he added, under his breath. "I'll get you the ice."

"Oh, really; you're very good!"

Dame Taggles passed over the ice, and Monty Lowther took it. It was a little oblong ice on a plate. Bunter was leaning over the counter, busy with knife and fork upon a chunk of pineapple. Lowther passed him the ice, carelessly holding the plate near the back of his head.

"Here you are, Bunter."

Bunter raised his head. It knocked against the plate, of course, and the ice slid off, and slid freezingly down between Bunter's collar and his neck.

Whether Monty Lowther had intended it or not, that was how it happened. Bunter gave a wild yell and a squirm.

"Ow, wow, yow!"

"Dear me!" said Lowther. "I'm awfully sorry!"

"Ow, ow, ow!"

"What's the matter?" exclaimed Tom Merry, looking round.

"Ow! The ice is down my back! Ow!"

"Bai Jove!"

Bunter was off the stool in a second. He folded himself up, trying to shake the ice out, but it was fairly down his back.

"Here, lay hold!" exclaimed Lowther. "If we grip him by the ankles, and hold him upside down and shake him, it's bound to drop out."

"Ow! Stop! Don't you do anything of the sort! Look here, if you make my glasses fall off, and they break, you'll have to pay for them; so there! Lemme alone!"

"But I want to help you—"

"Lowthah, I wegard you as a beast! You have played a wotten twick on my guest—"

"Rats! Accidents will happen."

"I wefuse to cwedit that that was an accident. I—"

"Let me help you, Bunter."

"O-ow!"

Billy Bunter was helping himself. He tore off his jacket, and then his waistcoat. He had to get that clammy ice out somehow. It was melting fast from contact with his skin, and little tricklets of it were running all over him.

He tore off his collar and tie, and then started on his shirt.

"Bai Jove, deah boy!" gasped D'Arcy. "Wemembah there's a lady pwesent!"

"Ow! I've got to get that ice out! Ow! It's melting! I shall catch pneumonia from this; I can feel it coming on! Ow!"

And the shirt came whisking off over Bunter's head.

Dame Taggles discreetly retired to her little parlour.

"Fish it out, can't you?" roared Bunter. "What do you want to stand there like an ass for? Fish it out!"

"I will," said Lowther.

"Buck up, then!"

What was left of the ice was jammed between Bunter's undervest and the skin. Monty Lowther gave it a squeeze that finished the melting process suddenly.

Bunter gasped.

"Why, it's all gone!" said Lowther, in surprise.

"Ow-wow!"

"Never mind; have another."

"Oh, really, Lowther—"

"There are plenty more," said Lowther innocently. "I'll hand you another—"

"No, you won't!" roared Bunter, backing away from the obliging humorist of the Shell. "You keep off! Ow! I shall have to change my clothes. G-r-r-r!"

"Come with me, deah boy," said D'Arcy; "I can lend you a change of undah-garments. Lowthah, I shall give you a feahful thwashin' pwesently."

"Why, what's the matter?"

"I wegard this as a wotten twick."

And Arthur Augustus helped Bunter on with his jacket, and marched him out of the school shop. The Terrible Three chuckled hysterically when he was gone.

"All the same, it was too thick," said Tom Merry. "You ought to remember he's a giddy visitor, Monty."

"He's not my visitor," said Lowther. "I wouldn't be found dead with him."

"Honour the guest that is within thy doors," said Manners, shaking his finger at Lowther. "I'm ashamed of you!"

"Oh, rot!" said Lowther uneasily. "Never mind. We'll stand him another feed about half an hour after dinner, when he's hungry again, and make it up."

CHAPTER 9.

Bunter the Ventriloquist.

THERE were many glances turned towards William George Bunter when he entered the dining-room of the School House with the Fourth-Formers. His fame had spread, and the juniors were curious to see him. His fat figure, his fat face, his spectacles, and his smirk of self-satisfaction were easily remembered; people who had seen him once generally knew him again. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was taking every care of his guest. He had arranged for Bunter to have a place beside him, and he looked after him well.

The diet at St. Jim's was liberal, which was fortunate, for Bunter's two snacks did not seem to have made much difference to his appetite. He had two helpings of everything, and was hardly finished when the fellows had to rise to leave the table. Still, he was looking very contented as he trotted out by the side of the slim, elegant swell of the School House.

"They feed you well here," he remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What a ripping afternoon!" said Bunter, looking out into the sunny quadrangle, where a crowd of fellows could be seen, most of them looking very cheery. "Nice and warm! Just the afternoon to lie in the stern of a boat on the cushions and drift down a stream, and—"

"And wead poetry?"

"Oh, no! And eat jam tarts!"

"Hem!" said D'Arcy. "Exactly! I— Weally, Gore, I wish you would not push against me so wuffly."

Gore, the cad of the Shell, stopped. He had nearly

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knocked D'Arcy over by shoving rudely against him. Arthur Augustus smoothed his ruffled jacket, and Gore stared at Bunter.

"My hat! Where did you pick that up?"

"Weally, Goah—"

"Is it a new kid?"

"Buntah is my guest," said D'Arcy with dignity. "I will thank you to treat him with pwopah wespect, Goah, and give him none of your wotten caddishness."

Gore chuckled.

"What I want to know is, what's he doing outside the Zoo?" said Gore, who never was troubled with considerations of courtesy. "I—"

Smack!

Arthur Augustus was not quarrelsome—quite the reverse—but he could not allow his guest to be treated with discourtesy.

His open hand smote Gore across the mouth with a crack like a whip, and the surprised Shell fellow staggered back. He sprang forward the next moment with clenched fists.

Arthur Augustus squared up to meet him, but at the same moment a strong grip was laid on Gore's collar from behind, and he was jerked back.

He squirmed round savagely, but his rage changed to terror when he saw that he was in the grip of Kildare, of the Sixth.

The captain of St. Jim's gave him a stern look.

"This is not the place for fighting, Gore."

"He hit me first!" snarled Gore. "I—"

"I heard it all," said Kildare cuttingly. "You were going like a cad, as you usually are. You will do a hundred lines, and bring them to me before tea. That will keep you out of mischief for part of the afternoon, at all events. Get away!"

And Gore slunk off.

"Thank you, vewy much, Kildare," said Arthur Augustus graciously. "It would have been a feahful fag to thwash that wottah on a warm aftahnoon."

Kildare smiled, and walked away. Billy Bunter blinked after him.

"Who's that?" he asked.

"Kildare, our captain—one of the vewy best!" said D'Arcy. "I always back up Kildare! He's a wippin' sort."

"H'm! I think I could imitate his voice a treat," murmured Billy Bunter thoughtfully.

D'Arcy stared at him.

"Why, pway?"

Bunter grinned.

"There's a lot of fun in it—I'm a ventriloquist, you know. My abilities in that line are simply marvellous," he said modestly. "There's a lot of fun in it, if you keep it dark, you know."

"Bai Jove!"

"Do you remember when I was here before?" grinned Bunter. "Blake thought you were asking him for tarts, or something, and he jammed the lot in your chivvy at last."

"I wemembah! It was howwidly wude of Blake, and I wasn't weally askin' for the things at all, you know."

"But I was doing it for you," chuckled Bunter.

"Eh?"

"You see, it was my ventriloquism! My abilities are mar—"

"Bai Jove!"

"I catch the trick of a voice awfully quickly," said Bunter. "Any voice a bit out of the common is easy to catch, and anybody who knows the voice thinks it's that chap speaking when he hears the imitation. See? That's half the game."

"I see. Bai Jove, this is awfully intwestin'," said D'Arcy. "It was wathah a wotten twick you played upon me, but it was vewy clevah."

"Yes, I'm considered a rather clever chap," said Bunter. "I'm a jolly good amateur photographer, you know, and a hypnotist, too."

"Bai Jove! There's a chap here named Dane who can hypnotise, you know, and—"

"Er—I—I've rather given up hypnotism lately," said Bunter hastily. "I'm sticking to ventriloquism. I find that's my—what do you call it—it's a French word, you know, something like meat-axe!"

"Metier?"

"That's it!" said Bunter. "Ventriloquism is where I come out strong. I've often thought of giving an entertainment and charging for admission, but the fellows at Greyfriars won't back me up. Skinner says that the audience ought to be paid for coming to hear me, you know, and that's rot."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Shall I give you a specimen? I've played all sorts of japes at Greyfriars. I made Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent

start fighting once because they thought they had insulted one another, you know."

"Bai Jove, what a wotten twick! I—I mean, how awfully clevah," said D'Arcy, remembering that the amateur ventriloquist was his guest. "Pway don't do anythin' of that sort now, though."

"Here's that chap again—what's his name? Blood, or something—"

"Gore," said D'Arcy.

"That's it. He's looking annoyed about something—"

"Ha, ha! It's the hundred lines, I expect."

"Serve him jolly well right he's got 'em! I'll make him jump!"

Gore scowled savagely at the juniors as he came by. He was in a towering rage at having to stay in during the half-holiday and do the lines, and he would probably have "gone for" both Gussy and Gussy's guest on the spot had he not been restrained by fear of Kildare.

"You rotters!" he snarled. "I suppose you think you've done something jolly clever in getting me detained—"

"Weally, Goah!"

"I'll make you sit up for it! I—"

"Gore!"

The name was rapped out sharply, and it was Kildare's voice to the life. The cad of the Shell fairly jumped.

"Yes, Kildare. I—I—I—"

He stared round blankly. Kildare was not there.

Gore looked round about, and up and down, with a dazed look on his face. He blinked at D'Arcy and Bunter, and rubbed his chin.

"There's something wrong with my nerves," he muttered. "I—I'd swear I heard Kildare speak."

And Gore went away, looking very puzzled and uneasy. Arthur Augustus burst into a chuckle.

"Bai Jove! Ha, ha, ha!"

"All right, eh?" grinned Billy Bunter.

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove," said D'Arcy, "it's a weally wippin' gift! Suppose you come ovah to the New House with me and play some tricks on Figgins & Co."

"Certainly," said Bunter.

And they went.

CHAPTER 10.

Up the Chimney.

"W HERE'S Wynn?"

Figgins asked the question of Kerr. Kerr shook his head.

"I don't know. He went up to the study for his bat."

Figgins growled.

"I suppose he's found something in the cupboard. Let's go and have him out."

And Figgins and Kerr, who were in their cricketing flannels ready to go out, went upstairs instead, and looked into their study.

Fatty Wynn was there.

But, for once in a way, he was not eating. Perhaps it was because there was nothing in the cupboard. The cupboard door was open, as if he had looked in there. Figgins' study had run out of provisions.

Fatty Wynn was standing before the open window, his hands in his pockets, looking out into the sunny quad. He wasn't looking at the cricket field or at the pigeons. There was a thoughtful expression upon his face, and his eyes rested upon the School House.

He was so preoccupied that he did not hear Figgins and Kerr come in, and did not know they were present till he received a sounding slap on the shoulder, which made him stagger forward.

"Eh—what—hallo! You ass!"

"We've come to look for you," growled Figgins. "I suppose you know that we're playing cricket this afternoon, Fatty, or have you forgotten?"

"Bless me, I'd forgotten all about it!"

"You—you—you'd forgotten all about it!" said Figgins, hardly able to believe his ears. "You'd forgotten all about the cricket!"

"Yes, it's only a scratch match, isn't it?" said Fatty Wynn. "It isn't as if it were a House match, you know. I was thinking of something else."

"Grub, I suppose," said Figgins unpleasantly.

"Oh, come, Figgins!" said Fatty Wynn warmly. "Any stranger hearing you talk would think I was a greedy chap."

"He wouldn't need to hear me talk to find that out! He would only have to look at you!"

ANSWERS

"Look here, Figgins—"

"I'm looking. We're going to play cricket—so are you. Come on! If this isn't a House match there will be one on shortly, and you're going to be in form, or I'll know the reason why. Come on!"

"Wait a minute! I was thinking— Look here, I suppose we want to do the decent thing, don't we?"

"I suppose so. What are you getting at?"

"Why, Gussy has a visitor over in the School House—a chap that treated me very well when I visited Greyfriars. I really think I ought to be doing something to help Gussy entertain him, you know."

"To help bolt the feed in Study No. 6, you mean?"

"I don't mean anything of the sort. Of course, if they asked me to a feed, I couldn't refuse. It wouldn't be civil. But what I'm thinking about is being decently civil to a chap who has treated me well. It's up to us to look after him."

"You come along to the cricket, my fat youth. Gussy can look after his guest all right, without your assistance, and he can find fellows enough in the School House to negotiate the feed. Come on!"

"But think a minute, Figgins. Hallo, here they are!"

Gussy and Gussy's guest looked into the study. The swell of St. Jim's surveyed the chums of the New House through his eyeglass, and Billy Bunter blinked genially at them through his big spectacles.

"Hallo!" said Figgins. "Is Blake gone down to the ground? We're just getting along there ourselves."

"Bai Jove, I'd forgotten the ewicket!"

"My hat! It seems to be catching this afternoon," said Figgins, in disgust. "The Fourth Form at St. Jim's was always supposed to be a playing Form. You chaps had better take to playing marbles."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Come on, Wynn! Are you coming?"

"I was thinking—"

"You've done enough thinking this afternoon," said Figgins, seizing his plump chum by the back of the neck, and running him to the door. "Sorry to biff you, Gussy! You should move quicker!"

"You uttah ass—"

"Come on, Wynn! This way to the grand stand!"

"Ow—leggo—yah!"

Fatty Wynn was rushed out of the study. Kerr followed laughing. Arthur Augustus had been shoved violently against the door, and he leaned there, gasping.

"Here, Figgins, stop that!"

Figgins gave a jump.

It was Tom Merry's voice, apparently, and it proceeded from the study he had just quitted.

The idea of receiving orders from a School House fellow, in his own quarters, made the blood of all the Figginses boil in the veins of the New House junior.

"What's that?" he roared, stopping in his headlong career, and releasing the gasping and breathless Fatty.

"Oh, go and eat coke."

Figgins stared—as well he might. He had not seen Tom Merry in the study. But Tom Merry was there, or else his ghost—or else Figgins was dreaming. Even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was deceived.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped. "Tom Mewwy! I'd almost swear that I saw him goin' down to the ewicket as we came ova."

Billy Bunter dug him in the ribs.

"Don't you catch on?" he whispered.

"Bai Jove! Is it—"

"Keep it dark!"

"Bai Jove! Pway don't dig me in the wibs, though, Buntah! I am afraid you will wumple my waistcoat."

Figgins had rushed into the study.

He was staring blankly round it now, looking for Tom Merry, without finding him. Round and round went Figgins, as if on a pivot, looking in all directions—in vain!

He looked under the table, into the cupboard, and even in the coal-locker.

The result was the same.

There was no sign of Tom Merry.

"M-m-my only panama hat!" gasped Figgins. "Where is the rotter? Where are you hiding yourself, you School House monkey?"

There was no reply.

Figgins came out of the study again, a puzzled and almost alarmed expression upon his face. It seemed to him that his ears were playing him tricks.

Kerr looked equally surprised. Fatty Wynn was too breathless to think of anything but getting his wind again.

"Blessed if I didn't think it was Tom Merry in the study," said Figgins. "I heard his voice as plain as anything. Hark!"

"New House ass!"

"There it is again!" roared Figgins; and he rushed the study, followed by Kerr.

They glared round in search of the School House junior.

"He's—he's not here!" gasped Kerr.

"There's nowhere he could hide!" panted Figgins. "Unless he's up the chimney—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He is in the chimney!" roared Figgins, for it was from that direction that the mocking laugh seemed to come, and he rushed to the grate.

But there he had to pause.

The opening of the chimney was wide enough to admit a human form, certainly, but it was almost unimaginable that anybody could have thrust himself up through the narrow space into the soot and dust.

"He—he can't be there! But—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hark! He is there!" exclaimed Kerr.

Figgins put his head under the chimney, turned his face upward, and blinked there. It was too dark for him to see anything.

"Come down, you School House cad!" he roared. "Gr-r-r-r-r!"

That chimney wanted sweeping. The shout upward dislodged a considerable quantity of soot, and it descended upon Figgins.

He withdrew a face as black as a Hottentot's from the chimney, gasping and spluttering frantically.

"Ow—groo—I'm cho-cho-choked! Groo—ug-g-g-gh!"

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy. "Look at his clothes! This is weally too wuff!"

Figgins's nice white flannels were in a parlous state; but he wasn't thinking of that just then. He was choked and blinded by the shower of soot. He knuckled it out of his eyes, and spat it out of his mouth.

"Ow! Groo! The beast! We'll smash him when he comes down! He must have kicked all that soot down on me on purpose."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Billy Bunter.

"Hallo, you cackling ass! You cackling, too, D'Arcy? I'll teach you to cackle? What are you doing in this house at all? Get out!"

"Weally, Figgins! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Out you go!" roared the exasperated Figgins. "Here, New House kids! Rally up!"

D'Arcy caught Bunter by the arm.

"Bottah out, deah boy!"

They dashed downstairs, barely in time to escape a rush of New House juniors, who came crowding to the spot in reply to Figgins's alarm. The newcomers stared blankly at Figgins, as he looked out of his study.

"My word!" gasped Pratt. "What's the matter? You can't make up as a nigger minstrel now, Figgins. We've got to play cricket."

"I'm not making up as a nigger minstrel, you ass!" roared Figgins. "Tom Merry's up my chimney, and he's shoved this soot down on my chivvy."

"What?"

"Tom Merry!"

"Up the chimney!"

"He jolly well isn't," said French, pointing to the window. "There he is on the cricket-ground, talking to Noble."

Figgins looked out of the window, and was almost stupefied by what he saw. There was Tom Merry, in spotless flannels, talking to the Cornstalk chum.

"You're off your rocker," said Giles comfortingly. "Tom Merry hasn't been here."

"He has, I tell you!"

"He doesn't look as if he'd been up a chimney!" chuckled French.

"N-n-no, but—"

"But you do," said Pratt, grinning. "You'd better get a wash before you come out, Figgins, and buck up about it."

Figgins went out of the study with a dazed expression. Unless, as one of the juniors had expressed it, he was "off his rocker," he did not know how to account for the strange occurrence. He was still looking mentally disturbed when he joined the juniors on the cricket-field.

CHAPTER 11.

On the Cricket Field.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY chuckled gleefully as he walked away from the New House with his friend from Greyfriars. There was no doubt that William George Bunter was a ventriloquist, and an exceptionally good one, and D'Arcy began to feel more respect for the fat junior. He had not liked him much, and he had not admired him; still, the chap could do something, there was no doubt about that. And so Gussy's opinion of him began to rise. A chap who can "do things" as well as talk is always entitled to a certain amount of respect.

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An Extra-long Complete Tale of
Tom Merry & Co.

the spectacle of Figgins with the soot on his astounded face was almost too much for Arthur Augustus. He was actually inclined to roar with laughter, and even the knowledge that that would be "dooicid-bad form" hardly restrained him. However, he had satisfied himself with a series of irrepressible chuckles and cachinnations. He was still cachinnating when Blake bore down upon him, and gave him a slap on the shoulder, which made him break off suddenly, like an alarm clock that is suddenly stopped.

"Oh!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "Weally, Blake, I wish you would not be so wuff! You have thwown me into quite a fluttah!"

"What are you cackling about?" said Blake; and, without waiting for an answer to his question, he went on: "Why aren't you in flannels? Have you forgotten the cricket? I suppose your friend plays cricket?"

"Oh, yes, rather," said Bunter, in his usual style. "I'm considered rather a terror at cricket at Greyfriars."

"Bai Jove, are you weally?" said D'Arcy, in surprise. "Why didn't they put you into the team that played us last time?"

Bunter shook his head.

"There's a lot of jealousy in these matters," he said. "Of course, I wouldn't say anything against the cricket captain at our show. Wharton's all right. But he's unconsciously led away, you know, by wanting to make the best show on the field. If I showed the chaps what I could really do, they'd want me to be cricket captain. That's how the matter stands."

"I see," said Jack Blake; and he murmured to himself: "I don't think!"

"When I do play," went on Bunter, "I rather make the fur fly. Batting, bowling, and fielding all come the same to me. I've been told that I look a great deal like Lionel Palairet at the wicket."

"You—you have!" gasped Blake, too astounded to be polite. There was certainly no point of resemblance to be discovered between Billy Bunter and the handsome Somersetshire cricketer.

"Oh, yes! They say I hit like Jessop, too, and I've been told that Knox of Surrey has a delivery very like mine."

"Oh!"

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy, beginning to understand that his guest was a merchant in fairy tales. "Bai Jove!"

"Yes, I'm sorry I haven't my cricketing things with me," said Bunter. "I'd show you something."

"That's all right," said Blake grimly. "I can lend you a bat."

"Oh, I—I don't know that you'd have a bat to suit me, and—"

"We've got dozens, all sizes, and you can take your choice."

"I haven't any pads—"

"We can lend you some."

"My gloves—"

"Fatty Wynn's will fit you to a hair."

Billy Bunter was fairly caught. Blake spoke in a low tone to Tom Merry.

"We shall be awfully pleased if you'll play, Bunter," said Tom Merry, coming over to the fat junior. Blake had simply told him that Gussy's guest would like to play, and Tom Merry, though he was not much impressed by Bunter's appearance, was willing to do the polite thing. "We can lend you the outfit."

"I—I haven't any flannels here—though—"

"That's all right," said Blake. "Fatty Wynn's will fit you. Wynn, old man, will you lend Bunter some flannels?"

"With pleasure," said Fatty Wynn, coming over and shaking hands with Bunter. "I'm awfully pleased to see you here, Bunter. I haven't forgotten how well you treated me at Greyfriars. Only too happy to do anything for you. I'll have the flannels here in a jiffy, and you can change in the pav."

And the fat Fourth-Former cut off towards the New House.

"This way," said Blake, taking the Greyfriars Removite into the pavilion. "Choose a bat among this lot, will you? Some of these pads will fit you."

"Bai Jove," said D'Arcy, catching Blake by the arm as he came out; "this is weally too wotten, you know!"

"Eh! What's the matter?"

"Makin' that young ass play cwicket, I mean. You can see he doesn't want—"

"You're dreaming, Gussy! He said he'd like to!"

"Yaas, but he can't play, and—"

"He says he can play."

"Yaas, wathah! But you know vewy well—"

"My dear chap, I couldn't possibly doubt the word of a friend of yours," said Blake blandly. "Didn't you say plainly to a chap once that you'd never speak to a fellow who doubted the word of a friend of yours?"

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"Yaas, wathah, but—"

"We must do the polite thing by Bunter. He says he would like to play, and that he can play, and he's entitled to be believed until he's proved to be a buster," said Blake. "That's all right."

And he jerked himself away, leaving Arthur Augustus feeling very dubious. Tom Merry and Figgins were tossing for innings. It was not a regular match—just a scratch affair that had been arranged that morning to fill up the afternoon because a fixture had fallen through. Half of the regular junior House elevens were out on the river, or in the woods, and the ranks had been filled up with other fellows—hence it was possible for Tom Merry to put Bunter into his side without anybody stepping out.

Tom Merry won the toss, and elected to bat.

"Shove Bunter in to open the innings," said Blake. "I hear that he's a terror at cricket where he comes from."

Tom Merry looked dubious.

"Blessed if he looks it, then!"

"Oh, you can't judge by appearances! Shove him in."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy!"

"I wufuse to wing off! Tom Mewwy—"

"Shut up, ass."

"Wats!" Tom Mewwy, I do not think that Buntah is weally—"

"I can't allow you to run a guest down in that way," said Blake. "It's all right, Merry—this is only Gussy's suspiciousness!"

"Blake, you uttah wottah—"

"You know, he's always suspecting things—"

"I wufuse to allow that wotten statement to pass, Blake! It is the extweme of vulgawity to be suspicious! I wufuse—"

"Then let Bunter alone! Shove him in, Tom Merry."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Not much! Lowther, you go in first, with Noble."

"Right-ho!" said Monty Lowther.

And the School House innings opened with Lowther and the Cornstalk. Fatty Wynn had come puffing up to the pavilion, and thrown a bundle of clothes in to Bunter.

"Here you are, old chap!" he called out.

"Thanks, awfully," mumbled Bunter. "I say—"

But Fatty Wynn was gone.

He was wanted to bowl the first over, and Figgins was bawling for him. Fatty Wynn was the champion junior bowler of St. Jim's, and he always had plenty to do in the House matches, and Figgins gave him plenty of practice at all times.

"I'm coming, Figgy!"

"Come on, then, ass! Take the ball!"

Fatty Wynn took it—on his chest. He gave a gasp.

"Yow!"

"Oh, stop yowing, and begin bowling!" said Figgins crossly. "You stopped in the House to gorge, I know!"

"Only just a jam-tart, Figgy—"

"Br-r-r! Go on and bowl."

And Fatty Wynn went on and bowled. The jam-tart and the run down to the ground had not robbed him of his skill, for the first ball of the over sent Monty Lowther's baile flying.

"My hat!" said Lowther.

"Here, Bunter!" called out Blake. "Buck up—you're wanted!"

"I'm n-n-n-not ready yet."

"I'll come and help you."

Manners went on in Lowther's place, and kept his end up for a time. Several overs came along, and when Noble had the bowling he knocked up runs in a style his comrades had learned to expect of him. There was no doubt that the Australian junior was a born cricketer.

"Good old Wallaby!"

Kangaroo grinned. The variety of names the St. Jim's juniors found for him was amazing, but he answered to them all.

Manners's wicket fell at last, and at the same moment Billy Bunter came out of the pavilion in flannels and pads and batting gloves, and with a bat belonging to Reilly under his arm.

"I'm ready," he announced.

"Right-ho," said Blake. "Here's your place. I suppose Bunter's going in next, Merry?"

Tom Merry grinned.

"Oh, yes! There's your wicket, Bunter! Look out for Fatty Wynn—he's a demon!"

"Certainly. I'm not in my best form to-day—long railway journey, you know," said Bunter, blinking at the junior cricket captain.

"Oh, of course!" said Tom Merry politely. "We sha'n't expect too much."

And Bunter went to the wicket.



"Good-bye, Bunter!" The train moved off. The St. Jim's Juniors waved their hats to Billy, who waved a fat hand—with a lump of butterscotch in the fingers—in return.

CHAPTER 12.

Bunter Plays Cricket.

BILLY BUNTER took up his position at the wicket, and planted his bat firmly on the crease, and blinked towards the bowler. Fatty Wynn had tossed the ball to Kerr, who, not being prepared for it, caught it with his chin and gave a roar.

"What the dickens are you up to, Wynn?" roared Figgins.

"Kerr's going to bowl this over."

"Eh! Why?"

"I'm not going to bowl Bunter down," said Fatty obstinately. "The young ass can't bat for toffee! Look how he's holding the bat—as if it were a scythe, or a policeman's staff! He can't bat! Kerr can knock his wicket over."

Figgins grinned.

He had observed that Bunter, whether he could play cricket or not—and the "not" was the more probable—was blessed with plenty of self-love, and very likely would not be pleased by having his wicket knocked to pieces first ball. And Fatty Wynn didn't want to get on the wrong side of Bunter. He was thinking of the loaves and fishes.

"Go it, Kerr!" he said.

Kerr rubbed his chin, and picked up the ball. He went on to bowl, and met the expectant blink of Billy Bunter.

Bunter was quite ready for the ball, and when it came down he made a mighty swipe. His bat swept the air in a circle, without hitting anything, and the impetus of it made him swing right round, and, losing his balance, he sat on the turf.

"Ow!" he gasped.

The ball knocked his wicket to pieces, of course.

"How's that?" yelled Figgins.

"Out!"

Bunter blinked round.

"Oh, really, you fellows! My foot slipped!"

And he clambered to his feet, and took up his position at the wicket again. The St. Jim's juniors looked at him.

"You're out," remarked Tom Merry.

"Eh?"

"You're out."

"Oh, really, Merry——"

"Look at your wicket!" shrieked Blake.

"Well, that was a trial ball, wasn't it?"

"Oh—er—ahem! Was that a trial ball, Figgins?" gasped Tom Merry.

Figgins chuckled. He was willing to be polite to a visitor,
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and, as it was pretty certain that Bunter wouldn't take any runs, there was no harm in letting him go on batting a little longer.

"Oh, that's all right!" said Figgins. "Give him another, Kerr."

"Right you are!" grinned Kerr.

The ball was sent back by the wicket-keeper, and Kerr bowled again. This time Billy Bunter was more fortunate. The swipe of the bat actually did smite the ball—and smote it directly into the hand of Figgins at point.

Figgins caught the ball with perfect ease, and held it up, but the shortsighted junior from Greyfriars did not see that. He knew he had hit the ball, and he started running. Right down the pitch he bore, Noble staring at him in astonishment from the other end, and taking care not to stir.

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

"Go it!" shrieked Blake, in huge delight. "Make the fur fly, Bunter! Put the pace on! Go it!"

The crowd simply shrieked.

But Bunter did not see what they were shrieking at. The howls of encouragement he took quite seriously, and he charged down the pitch at a spanking rate, and ran right into Noble at his wicket.

"M-m-my hat!" gasped Figgins, still holding the ball in his hand. "Is the chap off his giddy rocker?"

"I—I say, Noble, why don't you run?" gasped Bunter. "Do you want to run me out, you ass?"

Kangaroo was simply doubled up with laughter.

"Oh, my only Aunt Maria!" he gasped. "Carry me home to die! Bunter, you'll be the death of me! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Run, you ass," shrieked Bunter, "before the ball comes in!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here——"

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

"I say, you fellows——"

"Can't you see Figgy's got the ball?" yelled Noble.

"You're caught out."

"Oh, really, Noble——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How's that?" shrieked Figgins, tossing up the ball and catching it again with a smack in the palm of his hand.

"Out!" gasped the umpire.

"Well, I should have thought that an Australian would know how to play cricket," said Bunter. "Fancy running me out like that."

"I haven't run you out, you duffer—you're caught out."

"It's no good trying to get out of it——"

"Eh?"

"I'm accustomed to cricket of a bit higher quality than this," said Bunter. "You should hear what we say at Greyfriars to a chap who runs you out."

"You silly ass—I—I mean, excuse me," said Noble, remembering rather late that Bunter was a visitor. "You see——"

"I say, you fellows, if you really think I ought to go out, I'll go, but if you call this cricket——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Some of the juniors had thrown themselves on the grass, and were kicking up their heels in hysterical laughter. Tom Merry clung to the pavilion, and Figgins clung to Fatty Wynn, bubbling helplessly.

Billy Bunter blinked round with considerable indignation.

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at," he remarked, peevishly. "I think I'd better get off this, D'Arcy."

"Oh, no, deah boy," said D'Arcy, controlling his merri-ment. "It's all wight. It's a—a misanderstandin'. Figgins, deah boy, my friend Buntah isn't weally out, is he?"

"Eh! Not out?"

"Give him another chance, deah boy."

"Oh, certainly," said Figgins, tossing the ball over to Kerr. "It's a jolly good entertainment, anyway. People pay money to see things less funny than this. Get back to your wicket, Bunter."

And the fat junior trotted down the pitch.

He took up his position again, blinking rather indignantly towards Kerr, who sent down a smart ball. There was a yell from Bunter. Instead of batting, he suddenly dropped the willow, and hopped on one leg, clasping the other with his hands.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "What's the matter now?"

"Ow! I'm hurt!"

"How's that?" yelled Kerr.

"Out! Leg before."

"Ow! wow! wow!"

"You can't be hurt, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "The ball struck your pads, you know."

"Ow! I am hurt!"

"Weally, Buntah——"

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"Ow! wow! I'm hurt! Yow!"

"But you can't be, deah boy——"

"Ha, ha, ha! He looks as if he felt hurt," shrieked Tom Merry. "I'm afraid you're out this time, Bunter, leg before wicket, you know."

"Oh, really, Merry—upon the whole, I think I'd better go out," said Bunter, still clasping his leg. "I suppose you call this cricket! You ought to see us play cricket at Greyfriars."

"Well, I should like to see you, and bring a camera, if it's anything like the cricket you play here."

Billy Bunter hopped off without replying. He was glad enough to be out—in spite of D'Arcy's assurances that he wasn't hurt, he certainly felt as if he were hurt.

Arthur Augustus followed him into the pavilion, and helped him off with his pads. The swell of St. Jim's was very sympathetic.

"It's wotten," he said. "Nevah mind—pewwaps you would like to come for a stwoll instead of playin' ewicket."

"I'm feeling a bit peckish," remarked Bunter. "Cricket always makes me hungry. We might go and get a snack, and be back in time to bowl in the next innings."

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus, wondering what Bunter's bowling would be like. "That's a weally wippin' ideah."

And they adjourned to Dame Taggles' tuckshop.

CHAPTER 13.

Fagging for Knox.

"D'ARCY!"

It was a disagreeable voice that rapped out the name as the two juniors entered the tuckshop.

Knox, of the Sixth—prefect of the School House, and the most unpopular prefect in the school—was standing by the counter, and had evidently just been making purchases. There was a pile on the counter before him, the mere sight of which made Billy Bunter's mouth water.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy adjusted his eyeglass in a leisurely way, and looked at Knox. The juniors generally gave Knox a wide berth, when it was possible, and when they had to come near him, they were usually nervous. But there was nothing of that sort about Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He turned his eyeglass upon the Sixth-Form bully with perfect composure.

"Yaas, Knox. Did you address me?"

"Yes, I did," growled Knox. "I want these things taken up to my study."

"Weally, Knox, I am othahwise engaged at the pwsent moment——"

"Are you going to take them up, D'Arcy?"

Arthur Augustus eyed him warily.

"If you make a point of it, Knox, I shall certainly take them up with pleasure," he said gracefully.

"Not so much jaw—take them up," grunted Knox.

As a Sixth-Form prefect, he had every right to fag the juniors if he liked, and D'Arcy knew that he had to carry the things up. At the same time, it was inconsiderate of Knox, and there was no earthly reason why he shouldn't have carried them himself, as he was going to his study. But Knox was always willing to make deep inroads upon the comfort of others in order to save himself a very little trouble.

"Pway excuse me for a few minutes, Buntah——"

"I'll help you carry them," said Billy Bunter.

"Thank you vewy much, deah boy?"

The two juniors took up the pile of purchases, and left the tuckshop, Knox following. Knox was going to give a little feed in his study, and he had laid out quite a liberal supply of money. There was a glass jar of jam, and another of marmalade, and another of preserved fruits, besides ham and eggs. Unfortunately it was the jam and eggs that Arthur Augustus confided to Bunter. The fat junior took them cheerfully enough, and trotted on beside the swell of St. Jim's.

They entered the School House, and proceeded up the stairs. Gore was coming down, and Billy Bunter, who was extremely short-sighted, walked right into him. Gore knew there was going to be a collision, and he could easily have avoided it—but that was not his way. He stopped, with a grin, and let Bunter biff upon him, and Bunter's packages went flying.

"Oh!" ejaculated Bunter.

Crash! crash! smash!

The jam jar smashed into fifty pieces on the stairs as it rolled down, and the eggs were reduced to pulp.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Gore, "where are you running to!"

"Ow! You beast! You did that on purpose."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gore had been writing out the lines Kildare had imposed upon him, and he was coming downstairs with them under

his arm. He felt that he owed them to Bunter, and he felt too, that he had paid his debt now.

Knox's look meant mischief as he strode towards Bunter.

"You young sweep! You've smashed my eggs."

"Oh, really, you know! It was the fault of that beast, running into me—"

"Why, you ran into me!"

"I didn't see you! Oh, really, Knox—"

Knox seized the fat junior by the ear.

In an instant Arthur Augustus D'Arcy dropped the things he was carrying, and sprang between them.

Crash! crash! crash!

Bottles and jars and packages rolled and crashed merrily down the stairs; but D'Arcy did not heed them. He wasn't going to have his guest ill-treated. What would the Greyfriars chap think of the hospitality of St. Jim's?

"Knox! I insist upon your lettin' Buntah alone—"

"Get aside, you young ass!" roared Knox.

"I wefuse to do anything of the sort. If you touch Buntah I shall have no resource but to stwike you."

Knox stared at the angry Fourth-Former blankly for a moment, and then gave him a savage shove that sent him staggering down the stairs. D'Arcy might have had a bad fall, but he grasped the banisters in time and saved himself.

Bunter squealed like a pig as the senior's finger and thumb closed like a vice upon his ear.

"Ow! really, you know—ow!"

D'Arcy recovered himself in a moment, and charged up the stairs recklessly. His fists came crashing upon Knox, and surprised the prefect so much that he released Bunter, and nearly fell down the stairs himself.

"Why, you young hound," roared the enraged senior, "I'll—I'll smash you!"

"I wefuse to have my guest tweated with diswespect—"

"Take that—and that—"

"Oh! Ow! Bai Jove! You wottah!"

"What does this mean?" exclaimed Mr. Railton, the House-master of the School House angrily, coming out of his study. "Knox! D'Arcy!"

"Bai Jove, sir! I—"

Knox released the swell of the Fourth.

He was panting with rage, but he tried to control his temper as he met the searching glance of the House-master.

"This young cad has struck me, sir—struck a prefect," he gasped. "He's upset all my things on the stairs, and then—"

"D'Arcy! Is it possible—?"

"He was being wude to my guest, sir," said D'Arcy, sturdily. "I am sowwy to have to administah corporal punishment to a pwefect, sir, but I could not stand by and see him tweat my guest wudely, sir. I put it to you, sir, as one gentleman to another."

Mr. Railton suppressed a smile.

"Indeed! Knox—"

"Look at all my things he's mucked up," howled Knox.

"It was Goah's fault. Buntah wan into Goah—where are you Goah?" But Gore had promptly vanished at the sight of the House-master. "It was quite an accident, sir, as Goah would explain if he were here. Buntah was cawwin' the things up in the most careful way."

"It's a lie—"

"Knox!" said Mr. Railton, warningly. "That is not the way to speak. I have no doubt at all that it was an accident."

"It was a trick of the young scoundrels, sir—"

"I wefuse to be called a scoundwel," said D'Arcy, "and I uttably decline to have any of my remarks chawctewised as untwue. To accuse a chap of tellin' a whoppah is the extreme of ill-bweedin'. I weward you as a cad, Knox."

"You must not speak to a prefect that way, D'Arcy."

"Pway excuse me, sir; but a fellow must be a wotten cad to suspect a chap of tellin' a whoppah. That's why decent chaps are often taken in, sir; because it's caddish to be suspicious. Knox is a cad, sir."

"D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, sir; with all wespect, sir, Knox is a cad."

"I am afraid, D'Arcy, that I shall have to—" began Mr. Railton severely, when he was interrupted by Knox's voice—or a voice that was so like Knox's that Knox himself couldn't have told the difference.

"Not so much cackle. Why don't you lick him, sir?"

Mr. Railton fairly jumped.

"What! What! What did you say, Knox?"

"Eh? Sir! I?"

"Yes. You—you insolent boy!" gasped Mr. Railton.

"Are you mad? How dare you! I say, sir, how dare you?"

"I—I—I—"

"Go!" thundered Mr. Railton. "Go at once! Leave the place! No, sir; I will not listen to another word! You may come to me later, sir, with an apology, or I shall

strike your name from the list of School House prefects. Go! Not a word, sir!"

And Knox, completely astounded, went.

Mr. Railton, very much ruffled, went back into his study. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stared at Bunter, who was chuckling.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped. "Fancy Knox talkin' to Mr. Wailton like that! He must be wight off his giddy weekah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you—" A light dawned upon D'Arcy. "Bai Jove! Was that you?"

"Ha, ha! Of course it was!" grinned the Greyfriars ventriloquist. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! I say, it was playin' it wathah low down on Knox, you know," said D'Arcy hesitatingly.

Billy Bunter caressed his ear, which was as crimson as the savage pressure of a finger and thumb could make it.

"Serve the beast right. He's hurt me."

"Yaas, but—"

"Who's going to clean up all this muck?" grinned Billy Bunter.

"Bai Jove! I suppose Knox will have to tip one of the maids to do it, or there will be a wow."

"Let's get off, then; it's nothing to do with us."

And they got off!

CHAPTER 14.

Bunter Bowls.

"Gussy! Where's that ass, Gussy?"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"You're wanted!" shouted Herries, putting his head in at the tuckshop. "You're last man in, and they're waiting for you."

"Bai Jove!"

Billy Bunter looked round from his seventh ice.

"It's all right," he said. "Don't mind me. I'll be along in a minute."

"You'll excuse me, deah boy—"

"Yes, rather! I'll have another ice, please, Mrs. Taggles. These are ripping ices."

And Billy Bunter continued to eat ices while Arthur Augustus D'Arcy hurried off with Herries to the cricket-field. He was greeted with a howl from the impatient cricketers.

"Where have you been?" roared Tom Merry. "What sort of a cricketer do you call yourself, eh?"

"I have been lookin' aftah my guest, Tom Merry—"

"Blow your guest!"

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

"Take your bat out, ass!"

"I decline to be called an ass. I—"

"Last man in!"

"Vewy well, I will go in, Tom Merry; but pway undah-stand that—"

"Play!"

Arthur Augustus, with an indignant sniff, went to the wicket. He did not stay there long. Fatty Wynn was in fine form, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's bails went down in the first over.

"Bai Jove! Is that out?" asked D'Arcy, turning his eye-glass upon the wrecked wicket.

"Ha, ha! Yes!"

"Good! Sowwy, Tom Mewwy, I was just gettin' into wippin' form, and if the innings had lasted longah, I think I should have made a good show."

"Yes," grinned Lowther. "You're like the chap who could always score a century if they'd only let him take a hundred runs."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"All down," said Tom Merry. "All down for sixty-five. Measly score! If you did that in a House-match, my sons, I'd sack the lot of you, and get a new eleven out of the Third Form."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Well, we've got such jolly good backing," said Blake. "Here's D'Arcy, dealer in duck's eggs, and Bunter, who's never out."

"Weally, Blake—"

"I say, you fellows," said Bunter, coming up. "Innings over! I say, they're ripping ices over there, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, wathah."

"Are you going to bowl for us, Bunter?" asked Jack Blake. "After the way you batted, we're looking forward to your bowling."

"Buntah does not feel inclined to bowl—"

"Oh, yes; that's all right!" said Bunter. "I'll bowl. I'm a bit off my form at batting, but my bowling is really my strong point. It you like to put me on to bowl first over, I'll show you some things."

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"SKIMPOLE'S DISCOVERY."

"You'll show us a conceited little fat rotter," mumbled Digby.

"Eh? Did you speak?"

"Nice afternoon for cricket," said Dig blandly. "After the match we're going to feed in Study No. 6."

"Jolly good! I've had a snack, and I feel up to doing something really decent at bowling," said Billy Bunter. "Wynn bowls well. You always notice a stout chap can bowl well. I'm a demon at it myself."

"Oh, give him the first over, Merry!" gasped Blake.

Tom Merry grinned at the idea.

"May as well," he assented. "I expect one over will be enough."

And when the New House cricketers opened their innings, Billy Bunter was put on to bowl from the pavilion end against the great Figgins.

There was a droll expression upon Figgins's face as he took middle at the wicket. After Bunter's batting, he could guess what his bowling would be like. He didn't expect to see much of the ball.

But Billy Bunter made great preparations. He retreated a considerable distance behind the bowler's wicket, and took a loping run.

Then he turned himself into a sort of stout catherine-wheel, and the ball flew from his hand.

Nobody—Bunter least of all—knew where it had gone, till there was a roar from Monty Lowther, who was fielding at cover-point.

"Ow! Yow! Grooh!"

Lowther was seen to clap his hand to the side of his head, and suddenly start a breakdown at cover-point.

"What's the matter?" roared Figgins.

"Matter! Ow! That young demon's trying to brain me! Yow! Wow!"

"You don't mean to say— Ha, ha, ha!"

The St. Jim's juniors roared.

Tom Merry clasped Blake and almost sobbed on his breast. Figgins wept over his bat. They had seen all sorts and conditions of bowling; but they had never seen a bowler mistake cover-point's head for the wicket before.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't let him bowl again!" yelled Lowther. "If he does, I'm going to field deep—jolly deep."

"Oh, I say, you fellows, my hand slipped, you know! Chuck that ball back!"

Monty Lowther, rubbing his head with one hand, picked up the ball with the other. He threw it back as requested, but not as desired. Instead of giving Bunter a catch, he let the ball rap sharply on the fat junior's chest.

"Oh!" roared Bunter.

He sat down on the grass.

"Butter-fingers!" growled Manners. "Why didn't you catch?"

"Oh, really, you fellows—"

Blake jerked the fat junior to his feet again, and thrust the ball into his hand. He was weeping with merriment.

"There you are, kid! Bowl!"

"Right-ho! Blessed if I know what they're all cackling at! Accidents will happen."

"Ha, ha, yes; especially when you're bowling," said Tom Merry, retreating to his place in the field again.

Bunter gripped the ball and took a run. The fieldsmen fielded deep—very deep, indeed. Indeed, some of them seemed to be hurrying right off the ground. Bunter, as a bowler, might not be dangerous in the ordinary sense of the word. But he was dangerous to the field.

"Go it, Porpoise!" sang out a dozen voices.

Whiz! went the ball.

There was a roar from Figgins.

The ball had gone nearer the wicket this time—just near enough to crash on Figgins's shoulder. Figgins jumped clear of the ground, and dropped his bat. He clasped his shoulder and yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the crowd. "Shoulder before wicket! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, oh, oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Take that lunatic off, Tom Merry!" yelled Figgins. "What the dickens do you mean by playing a dangerous maniac?"

"Oh, really, Figgins—"

"He's nearly busted my shoulder! I shall have an ache there for a dog's age. Take him off, or I'll brain him with the bat."

"I think I'll change the bowling now," gasped Tom Merry. "You can take a rest, Bunter. We'll play a man short for a bit."

"Oh, really, Merry! I'm a bit off my form at bowling, but my fielding is a proverb at Greyfriars. I'll field if you like."

"Right-ho! Give Noble the ball!"

"Where shall I field, then?"

"Oh, anywhere you like! Ahem! Go into the long field."

And Bunter trotted away to long-on. He blinked round actively, watching for the ball. Figgins sent it his way presently, but the fat junior did not see it coming. He could have stopped it easily with his foot if he had seen it—but he didn't—but he stopped it all the same. The ball gave him a crack on the ankle, and he yelled.

"Ow! Wh-wh-what was that?"

"Field that ball!" roared Tom Merry.

The batsmen were running.

"Send that ball in!"

"Ow—wow—yow!"

Noble came tearing up for the ball. He recovered it and sent it in, with a shot at the wicket straight as a die. There was no need for the wicket-keeper's aid. Crash went the middle stump of Figgins's wicket, and a second later his bat bumped on the crease. But the umpire shook his head.

"Out!"

Figgins carried out his bat. There was a roar from the School House.

"Well fielded!"

"Good old Cornstalk!"

Billy Bunter hopped away towards the pavilion.

"I say, Merry, if you don't mind, I'll go off for a bit," he said. "I'm feeling a bit done-up."

"Right you are!" said Tom Merry sympathetically. "Go and have a rest."

And Billy Bunter went into the pavilion and changed his things. He had had enough cricket that afternoon.

CHAPTER 15.

So Near and Yet so Far.

BUNTER came out of the pavilion a little later. The juniors were still busy on the cricket-field. The New House innings was not half through yet, and the School House juniors were all in the field. Figgins had insisted upon Tom Merry playing another fellow in Bunter's place, so the side was up to its full number.

Arthur Augustus was fielding, and so he had no chance of looking after his guest just then. The ices Billy Bunter had consumed in the tuckshop were very nice, but they had not made much difference to his appetite. It was close upon teatime, and the junior from Greyfriars was hungry.

"Blessed if I can see what they see in that game to stick

Just Out!

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at it like that!" he muttered. "I'd rather have a feed any time. I say, you fellows!"

He spoke to Digby and Herries. Dig and Herries were not playing, but they were looking on with keen interest.

"I say, you fellows——"

Dig looked round. He would have told any St. Jim's fellow to go and eat coke, or something equally polite. But he felt that more courtesy was required for Gussy's guest from Greyfriars.

"Hallo!" he said. "Ripping game, isn't it?"

"Ye-e-es. I was thinking it would be a good idea to have the feed ready for when the match is over," said Bunter. "I'm a jolly good cook, you know. I want to help. Could I lend a hand?"

"Certainly!" said Dig, resigning himself to his fate. "Come along to No. 6. Come on, Herries, old man."

"Right-ho!" said Herries.

Some preparations for a really imposing feed had been made in No. 6. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not the fellow to spare expense in entertaining a visitor. Billy Bunter's round eyes twinkled as Dig opened the cupboard and disclosed the pile of excellent things there.

"I say, you fellows, this is spiffing!"

"It's decent, isn't it?" said Dig. "Light the fire, Herries, old man, and I'll fill the kettle."

"Right-ho!"

Billy Bunter brought the things out of the cupboard. They made a respectable pile on the table, and Bunter read over the labels on bottles, jars, and glasses with intense satisfaction.

"I say, you chaps, we might have a snack now to begin with, in case they're a long time finishing the match," he remarked. "I'll fry a dozen sausages or so—eh?"

"Good idea!" said Digby, who was rather hungry himself, now he came to think of it. "How's that fire going, Herries?"

"It's coming up," said Herries, rising from the grate with a face like a peony. "It's going all right. Here's the frying-pan, Bunter."

"Good! This is like home, and no mistake."

Billy Bunter joyfully seized the frying-pan. He greased it out with the hand of experience, and cut the sausages apart. The fire was burning bright now, and it gave the study a very cosy look.

"Hallo!" said Herries suddenly.

The door was pushed open, and Knox the prefect looked in. He was scowling, but his face lighted up as he saw the array of eatables on the study table. He gave a whistle.

"Phew! What a spread! You gorging young-wasters, you'll make yourselves ill! I can't allow this!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Digby hotly. "I suppose we can have a feed in our own study if we like."

"None of your cheek, Digby. There's a lot too much gorging goes on in this study," said Knox. "I'm going to keep an eye on you. You'll make yourselves ill. I'm going to confiscate this grub."

"What!" ejaculated Digby.

"What!" roared Herries.

"Whw-wh-wh-what!" stammered Billy Bunter.

The prefect grinned.

"You can have it back a little at a time, as it's good for you," he explained. "I can't see youngsters ruining their digestions in this way."

The juniors watched him speechlessly as he took a cloth and wrapped the pile of good things up in it.

Then he turned to the door, carrying away the feed, while the juniors stood petrified. Herries rushed forward.

"Knox! You cad! You're not going to collar our grub!"

The senior reached out, and gave Herries a smack beside the head that sent him reeling into the armchair. Then he coolly left the study.

Herries sat up, rubbing his ear.

"The cad! The rotter!"

"The cowardly beast!" howled Digby. "We're not going to stand it! Fancy confiscating a fellow's grub—for nothing!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"The beast! We'll have it back, somehow!"

"He says we can have it a little at a time."

Digby sniffed scornfully.

"That's only his jaw! He doesn't mean to let us have any. He's going to scoff it. I believe he followed us up to the study on purpose because he thought there was a feed on."

"Can't you complain to somebody?" exclaimed Billy Bunter. "Mr. Railton—or the Head."

"No good complaining about a prefect. Besides, he's within his rights; we've had grub confiscated before," said Dig ruefully. "Only this cad is simply doing it to get a feed on the cheap—that's the difference."

"We—we won't stand it," said Herries wildly. "A chap might as well be living in Russia or Turkey!"

"Let's tell the fellows."

Herries and Digby rushed out of the study, and out of the School House. Billy Bunter followed them slowly out of the study. There was a cloud upon the fat junior's face. The feed had been so close, and now it was gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream.

It was too bad for anything. No doubt the feed would be replaced somehow, later, but meanwhile—meanwhile, Bunter was hungry.

"The cad!" he muttered. "This is just because of that accident on the stairs. He's getting his own back. He's no right to take the grub. I'm getting into a low state already for want of nourishment. Hallo, Wynn!"

Fatty Wynn was coming upstairs. There was an expectant look upon his plump face.

"I'm out," he said. "Noble bowled me first ball, and I thought I'd give you a look in. It's only a single innings match, you know. What about the feed? Dig and Herries have just passed me, but they didn't answer when I called to them."

Billy Bunter's face was lugubrious.

"Knox the prefect's collared it."

"What!" howled Fatty Wynn.

Bunter explained. Fatty Wynn's face grew longer and longer as he listened. Dismay and wrath were mingled in his plump countenance.

"The rotter!" he muttered. "I say, as I came up I saw Knox going to Crewe's study. Crewe's his chum, you know. We might nip in while he's gone——"

Bunter brightened up wonderfully.

"Good! I suppose he's gone to ask Crewe to the feed; we might get the grub back while he's gone. Come on! Do you know his study?"

"Yes, rather! This way."

They ran off quickly, Fatty Wynn leading the way. They passed Crewe's study, and heard Knox's voice within, and knew that the coast was still clear. Fatty Wynn grinned gleefully.

"It's all right," he whispered. "Knox is in there. We can get the things, and go back a different way, without passing this study. Buzz on!"

They reached Knox's study, and ran in without ceremony. The raided provisions were not to be seen, but Fatty Wynn ran across to the cupboard and dragged the door open. There lay the cloth they had been wrapped in—and there were the things themselves, an imposing pile.

"Here they are! Quick!"

"Hold on!" gasped Bunter. "They're coming!"

Footsteps were coming quickly along the passage towards the half-open door. There was no time to get clear with the plunder—or without it, for that matter. Billy Bunter made a plunge for a screen that stood in a corner of the room, and hid behind it, palpitating. Fatty Wynn, knowing what he had to expect if Knox and Crewe caught him there, squirmed under the table. There was a long cover on the table, reaching nearly to the floor, and the Falstaff of the New House was almost hidden from sight.

A second or two later the two seniors entered the study.

"It's a ripping spread," said Knox. "Better than the one that was mucked up by those young rotters. Poetical justice, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Crewe.

"Hallo! Blessed if I knew I left the cupboard door open," said Knox suspiciously. "H'm! The things are all right. Look at that little lot!"

"Ripping!" said Crewe.

"They've been disturbed, though," said Knox, puzzled. "Somebody's been in the study. Look here!"

"Hallo! What's that?"

"What's what?"

"I heard somebody breathing, or gasping, I think."

Knox snapped his teeth.

"Ah! We've caught 'em in the act, then," he said venomously. "They're in the study, whoever they are. Come out, you young whelp; I can see you!"

There was no reply. The two hidden juniors were palpitating, but they knew very well that Knox could not see them, and they did not mean to show themselves until they were forced to.

"Lock the door, Crewe," said Knox, selecting a cane. "I'll have him out and give him a tanning. These juniors have been too cheeky lately."

"What-ho!" said Crewe, and he crossed to the door and locked it.

"Now come, you—you whelp!" roared Knox.

There was no reply.

But just as Knox was starting to look for the hidden raider or raiders, there was the sound of a sharp and angry voice at the door.

"Let me come in, Knox!"

Knox gave a jump.

It was the voice of Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's.

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CHAPTER 16.

Knox Hears Voices.

KNOX gritted his teeth savagely. He hurriedly put away the cane, and unlocked the door. He disliked the captain of St. Jim's intensely, but he did not dare to refuse him entrance to the study.

He threw the door open with a savage slam.

"There you are!" he growled. "What do you want?"

Then he jumped.

There was no one there.

Knox stared at the open doorway, and then stepped out into the passage; and he looked up the passage, and he looked down the passage.

Kildare was not in sight.

Knox re-entered the study, and looked at Crewe, who was equally astonished.

"Isn't he there?" asked Crewe.

"No. Blessed if I can understand it!"

"I suppose he just called out in passing," said Crewe, in wonder. "That's not like Kildare. I should never have thought he'd play such a trick."

"Well, he's gone," said Knox, slamming the door. "Now we'll look for that young beggar. I'll give him the tanning of his life."

"Open this door!"

Knox almost staggered. It was Kildare's voice again in the passage.

He tore open the door.

The passage was empty.

"M-m-my hat!" gasped Knox, in perfect bewilderment.

"It's somebody playing a trick."

"Yes—but how—how?"

"Blessed if I know! Kildare wouldn't do it; it's somebody imitating his voice," said Crewe. "He's dodged into the study opposite, I should say."

"That's Darrel's study," said Knox, closing the door. "I—My hat!"

"Open this door!"

Knox still had his hand upon the door. He tore it open instantly—but the passage was empty. There was only one possible conclusion to come to—the joker, whether Kildare or somebody else, had dodged into the study directly opposite the prefect's.

"Come on, Crewe," said Knox savagely.

He strode across to Darrel's door, and thrust it open. He knew that Darrel was there, having seen him come in from cricket practice a quarter of an hour before. Darrel was seated at his table, reading a letter. He looked up in surprise when the two seniors burst rudely into his room.

"What the dickens do you want?" he demanded. "Haven't you ever heard of knocking at a door before you enter?"

"Is Kildare here?" demanded Knox.

"Kildare! No. I believe he's still at the cricket."

"He was at my door a minute ago—or somebody was imitating his voice," said Knox. "Whoever it was must have dodged into this study."

"What do you mean? Nobody has dodged into this study," said Darrel testily. "Shut the door after you!"

"Do you mean to say that nobody has entered this room just now?"

"Of course not! Shut the door!"

Knox and Crewe retired, in complete bewilderment, and closed the door. They knew that Darrel would not tell an untruth, and they were utterly puzzled.

"Blessed if I can make it out!" said Knox, as he went into his own study. "They say that the School House is haunted, and I'm blessed if I'm not beginning to believe it! Now to settle that young rotter—"

"Knox!"

It was Mr. Railton's voice.

"Yes, sir?" said Knox, turning round in the passage.

Then he went quite pale.

"He's not here!"

"The place is haunted!" gasped Crewe.

"It's a trick of some kind!" said Knox, grinding his teeth.

"Shut the door, and take no notice of it! Now then, you, stand at the door, while I hunt round the study!"

Crewe went to the door, and as he did so his voice—or a voice very like it—made an unexpected remark.

"Don't be a beastly bully, Knox!"

Knox swung round on him in a fury.

"What's that?" he exclaimed. "Mind what you're saying, Crewe!"

"Eh? I! What do you mean?"

"I don't want any jaw from you!"

"Oh, you're a silly dummy!"

Now, Crewe knew that he never said that, but the voice was so like his own that he stood gasping, with his mouth open, in sheer astonishment. But Knox had no doubts. He was already exasperated, and to be insulted like this without cause by his own chum was too much.

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"SKIMPOL'S DISCOVERY."

He rushed right at Crewe, and gave him a right-hander on the nose which sent the unprepared senior staggering against the wall.

"Take that!" roared Knox. "And now you can get out!"

"Oh! Ow! Grooh! You mad idiot!" gasped Crewe.

"I tell you I never—"

"Get out of my study, you cad!"

"I'll jolly well give you something for yourself before I go, then!" exclaimed Crewe, quite losing his temper.

"Take that, you cad!"

Knox took it—on the chin—and he hit out in return savagely. The two seniors, losing utterly the control of their tempers, were fighting like tigers the next minute.

Fatty Wynn, under the table, listened with great surprise and very great satisfaction. He had been expecting to be dragged out every moment. Billy Bunter chuckled softly behind the screen in the corner. His ventriloquism had sometimes stood him in good stead, but never so much so as at the present moment.

Knox and Crewe, after exchanging savage blows, grappled with one another, and went reeling and staggering about the apartment.

They passed close by the table, and the temptation was too strong for Fatty Wynn to resist. He put out his hands, and caught an ankle of each of them, and sent them reeling to the floor.

They went down with a crash that shook the study, and jolted things off the mantelpiece. Knox was uppermost, and he was pummelling his whilom chum.

Fatty Wynn nipped out from under the table.

"Quick, Bunter!" he shouted.

Billy Bunter nipped out from behind the screen, and darted to the door. Together they rushed into the passage. The two seniors saw them go, and a sudden suspicion flashed through Knox's mind.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed. "Pax!"

He jumped up, and Crewe staggered to his feet. He mopped a bleeding nose, and looked inclined to renew the combat.

"You rotter!" he snarled. "I've had enough of you! You won't see me inside your study again in a hurry!"

"Hold on, Crewe, old boy! I—I think I was hasty! D'you call me—"

"Of course, I didn't!"

"You heard the voice?"

"Yes; but—"

"It was one of those rats, then!" exclaimed Knox. "Same chap who was imitating Kildare's voice, of course. Let's collar them! By George, I'll make an example of the young whelps!"

And they dashed from the study. Fatty Wynn and Billy Bunter had a good start, but the seniors were faster afoot. They gained swiftly on the juniors. The fugitives had intended to make a break for the cricket-field, where there would be safety in numbers. But there was no time, and they scuttled swiftly up the second staircase, and darted into Study No. 6, and just had time to lock the door before Knox was hammering upon it.

"Open this door!" roared Knox.

"Yes, that's likely—I don't think!" said Fatty Wynn.

And he sat down to rest in the armchair, and Bunter sat on the table, while Knox and Crewe kicked furiously at the door.

CHAPTER 17.

Recaptured.

"LAY up!"

"I say, Tom Merry—"

"Don't say anything, old chap; I'm playing

cricket!"

"But I say—"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Never mind!"

"The feed's gone!"

"Good!"

Dig and Herries gave it up. It was evident that it wasn't of much use talking to Tom Merry about the raided feed while he was on the cricket-field.

But the scratch match was very near its close.

Kerr had just scored the sixty-fifth run for the New House, and the scores had tied, when Noble went on to bowl. The New House had three more wickets to fall, and they were naturally expecting a victory with wickets to spare, but the Australian's bowling soon banished that expectation.

The juniors shouted with glee over the "hat trick" in the next over, and the New House were all down for sixty-five, and the scratch match was a draw.

Tom Merry gave Kangaroo a mighty thump on the back.

"Well done!" he exclaimed. "You've saved our bacon!"

An Extra-long Complete Tale of
Tom Merry & Co.

"You needn't bust my backbone, if I have!" said Noble. "Still, I'm glad I was lucky!"

"Rats! It was good bowling! Now, what's that about the feed, Dig?" asked Tom Merry, as they crowded into the pavilion.

"Knox has raided it!"

"What! Knox! Our feed!"

There were general exclamations of indignation. Figgins & Co. had been invited to the feed, and they were as indignant as the School House juniors.

"Bai Jove! I wegard that as vewy bad form of Knox, you know!"

"We'll jolly soon have it back!" exclaimed Jack Blake.

"If there's any left of it."

"How long ago was it, Dig?"

"About twenty minutes."

"Well, it can't be all gone in that time," said Tom Merry. "Come on! Let's go in a body and see Knox about it!"

"Right-ho!"

"And bring the bats and the stumps, in case there's an argument!" said Kangaroo.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the indignant cricketers made their way into the School House in imposing array. Prefect or no prefect, Knox wasn't going to raid a big feed in so barefaced a way, without an argument on the subject.

They marched up to Knox's study, and found the door wide open, and the study unoccupied. Tom Merry looked into it.

"Nobody here!" he remarked.

"There's a row going on upstairs," said Kangaroo. "Hallo, Dane!" he added, as Clifton Dane, of the Shell, came down. "What's that row up there?"

Clifton Dane laughed.

"Knox and Crewe hammering at Study No. 6," he said. "I saw Fatty Wynn and Bunter cut in there. The Sixth Form rotters are after them!"

"Oh, they've been trying to get the grub back, then!" said Blake. "We'll jolly soon see if they've got it!"

The juniors did not stand on ceremony. They swarmed into the Sixth Form study, and Blake tore the cupboard door open. The juniors knew their property at a glance.

"Here it is!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Wrap it up!" said Tom Merry. "Bring every blessed morsel! Then we'll go up and argue it out with Knox and Crewe!"

And the raided provisions were wrapped up in the cloth, and Blake and Figgins carried the precious burden between them as they left the study.

They ascended the stairs towards the Fourth Form passage, and the hammering on the door of Study No. 6 grew louder as they advanced upon the scene.

Knox and Crewe were growing perfectly furious. They hammered and thumped, but the two juniors in the study did not even reply to them, maintaining a silence that exasperated the two seniors beyond all bounds.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What's the row about?"

"That's our study door you're banging at!" remarked Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! Pway wetire, deah boys, and don't make such a dweadful wov!"

The seniors glared at them.

"You young whelps—"

"Oh, better language!" said Tom Merry. "Don't you know that it's the duty of a prefect to set a good example to juniors by well-chosen language and restrained manners? Don't you know that the Sixth Form is the giddy Palladium of a school? You could learn it from any goody-goody story-book!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Knox's mark is the 'Sporting Leader'!" grinned Blake.

The prefect and his comrade glared at the juniors. They would gladly have licked them all on the spot; but nearly a dozen juniors, armed with bats and stumps, were not to be easily licked.

Jack Blake tapped on the door.

"Open the door, you kids! It's all right; we're all here!"

Fatty Wynn opened the door.

Knox and Crewe rushed into the study, but the crowd of juniors rushed in, too, and the two bullies paused.

"Now, look here!" said Tom Merry decisively. "None of your rot! If you lay a finger on anybody in this study, you'll get hurt!"

"You cheeky whelp—"

"We've got the grub you boned from us," went on Tom Merry calmly. "We're going to keep it. You're going out of this study. I don't care whether you're a prefect. You're a cad! Now, if you want trouble, we're ready!"

"Ready—aye, ready!" grinned Kerr.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Knox and Crewe looked at one another. It was useless to exert their authority as members of the Sixth. The cricket stumps looked dangerous, and, as a matter of fact, the juniors were anxious to begin. Without a word, but with a black scowl on his face, Knox stalked out of the study, and Crewe followed him.

"Good riddance!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard it as a vewy good widdance."

"I'm jolly glad they're gone," said Billy Bunter, drawing a deep breath. "Hallo! You've got the grub! My word, this is ripping!"

"And we're ready for tea," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas wathah, quite weady."

"Let's leave those two Falstaffs to cook, while we go and change," said Blake. "Keep the door locked while we're gone."

"Right-ho!"

The proposal just suited Fatty Wynn and Billy Bunter.

They were left to themselves in Study No. 6, and they lost no time in setting to work. Billy Bunter's fat face was beaming. He had had a pretty good time during his visit to St. Jim's, but this was the most enjoyable part of it.

To have a good fire, nice bright cooking utensils, and unlimited "tuck"—that was Billy Bunter's idea of happiness.

And he had it now.

There was soon a delicious smell of cooking in the study.

Although in some points Fatty Wynn and Billy Bunter were not like one another, there was one point upon which they were in cordial agreement—a love of cooking, and of consuming the articles cooked.

"This is ripping!" said Billy Bunter, for about the tenth time, as he looked up from a fizzling frying-pan. "I shall pay you another visit here, Wynn."

"Do, old chap!" said Fatty Wynn cordially. "Visit me in the New House next time, and I'll look after you all right."

"Good! I think that's about the lot."

"Yes; it's all ready."

"Time the fellows were back—"

"There they are!" said Fatty Wynn, as a tap came at the door, and Billy Bunter crossed to it and unlocked it.

The door flew open—but it was not the chums. Knox strode in. The tap had been a trick, and it had succeeded.

"Now, you whelps," he muttered, "I'll—"

"Rescue!" yelled Fatty Wynn. "Help! Rescue!"

There was a patter of feet in the passage. Knox had seized Billy Bunter by the ear—the same ear—and Bunter was squealing. Fatty Wynn rushed to the rescue, and was knocked flying across the study. It would have gone hard with Gussy's guest, but Gussy was at hand! He had changed out of his flannels, and was coming back to the study in the most gorgeous of fancy waistcoats, but he did not stop to think of his waistcoat then. He rushed right at Knox, and collared him, and waltzed him away from Billy Bunter.

"Wescue, deah boys!" he yelled. "Wescue!"

Knox hurled him down, but the swell of St. Jim's clung to the Sixth-Former, and dragged him down, too.

"Wescue, deah boys!"

"Hurray! Here we are!"

And Tom Merry and Blake and Harry Noble rushed into the study.

CHAPTER 18.

Bunter is Satisfied.

TOM MERRY wasted no time in words. He gripped the senior by the collar, and dragged him off Gussy, allowing the swell of St. Jim's to rise to his feet.

D'Arcy did so, considerably rumpled, and gasping for breath.

"Bai Jove! The uttah wottah!"

"Let me go!" roared Knox.

He struggled violently in the grasp of the juniors.

In the furious struggle, he bumped against the table, and there was a yell of dismay from Billy Bunter as a dish of sausages toppled over.

He sprang forward and caught the dish, but the sausages and the gravy were gone. Knox knew where they went! He received them in a flood upon his upturned face, and he choked and gasped like a landed fish.

"Grooh-ooo-hoooh!"

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

"Groo-ooo-hoooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha! He's got it now!"

"You can have the sossingers, my son," said Kangaroo, THE GEM LIBRARY—75.

picking them up with both hands and thrusting them into Knox's gasping mouth. "They're no good now!"

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

Knox wrenched himself free, and staggered to his feet. He looked a shocking sight, with his face covered with half-congealed gravy, and his collar and shirt and waistcoat dripping with it.

The juniors shrieked with laughter.

Knox muttered something furiously under his breath, which it was just as well for him a master did not hear, and rushed from the study. He did not feel inclined to finish the account with the juniors just then. He wasn't greedy; and he had had enough.

A yell of laughter followed him. Even Fatty Wynn was laughing, and Billy Bunter was the only one who was looking serious.

"The sausages!" he murmured. "They're wasted!"

"Nevah mind, deah boy; there are plenty more."

"Yes, that's true," said Bunter, brightening up.

It was indeed true. The array on the study table and on the fender and hobs was large enough to satisfy even Billy Bunter.

The juniors were soon all in the study. It was a close fit for so many; but the youngsters were accustomed to close quarters.

The feed was a great success.

Everybody agreed in praising the cooking, and in giving the most complete proof of appreciation, by consuming several helpings of everything.

Fatty Wynn distinguished himself, but even Fatty Wynn had to hide his diminished head, so to speak, before the performances of Billy Bunter.

When it came to gastronomic feats, William George Bunter was an easy first, and the rest were nowhere; as Kangaroo remarked, they weren't even "also rans."

When Fatty Wynn had finished—which was not till some time after everybody else but Bunter had finished—he sat watching Bunter in a sort of fascinated way.

Fatty usually looked very cheerful after a good feed, but on this occasion there was a slight expression of sadness on his plump face. Figgins nudged him in the ribs.

"Haven't you had enough, Fatty?"

"Oh, yes, rather!" said Fatty, with a sigh. "Quite enough. I don't think I've got room for another biscuit."

"Then what are you looking glum about?"

"I didn't mean to look glum. I was just thinking. What a lovely appetite that chap's got!" murmured Fatty Wynn. "I'd give anything to get one like that. He must have a splendid digestion—splendid!"

Figgins chuckled. Fatty Wynn, quite unable to make any further inroads upon the feast himself, helped Bunter, and Bunter gave him plenty to do.

"Another go at the rabbit-pie, Bunter?"

"I don't mind if I do."

"Some more ham?"

"Yes, a little."

"What about the sausages?"

"You might give me a couple more—well, say three."

"This is a ripping pudding."

"Right-ho! Pass it this way."

"Shall I help you to the tarts?"

"Please!"

And so it was kept up for some time, Billy Bunter never refusing anything, till at last even he had to cry halt.

"Some of the seed cake, Bunter?"

"N-n-no, thanks, I think not," said Bunter regretfully.

"Try the currant cake, then."

"N-n— Well, just a slice."

"Another cup of tea?"

"Oh, no, thanks! Well, just one cup."

Bunter finished the cake and the tea. He found some difficulty in rising from the table when he had finished. But there was a smile of beatific contentment upon his somewhat shiny visage.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Won't you have a little more, deah boy?"

"No, thanks! I'm quite satisfied. I say, you fellows, I must say that this has been a ripping feed. I must say I appreciate it. You've done me down in the most ripping way. It's—well, it's superb!"

"I am vewy glad we have succeeded in entahtainin' you," said D'Arcy, in his stately way. "It has been a gweat pleasure to all of us."

"Yes, rather!" murmured Monty Lowther. "I wouldn't have missed it for worlds!"

Bunter looked at the study clock.

"I suppose I must be moving," he said regretfully.

"Blessed if I want to move. But the trains have to be caught, blow 'em!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

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NEXT

THURSDAY:

"SKIMPOLE'S DISCOVERY."

An Extra-long Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

"I wish I wasn't so jolly fagged, and the walk down to the station wouldn't hurt me a bit," said Bunter.

D'Arcy coughed.

"Bai Jove! I will see if I can bowwow Taggles's twap, and dwive you down, deah boy."

"Oh, really, D'Arcy, you're too good!"

Arthur Augustus left the study, and some of the juniors went out with him. Monty Lowther, in the passage, advised Gussy to roll his guest along to the station like a barrel, if he was too tired to walk; a suggestion which was not adopted.

While Arthur Augustus was gone, Billy Bunter sat contentedly in the study. He entertained the chums of St. Jim's with an account of a splendid feed he had had at Greyfriars on the occasion of the opening of a new study in the Remove, and Fatty Wynn, at least, listened to the details with the keenest interest.

"It's all wight," announced D'Arcy, re-entering the study. "Taggles has kindly consented to let us have his twap. Are you weady, Bunter?"

"Yes, certainly. I'll get my hat on."

Most of the juniors marched down to the trap with Bunter to give him a send-off. Taggles held the horse's head at the gates. It had cost D'Arcy five shillings in the shape of a tip to borrow the trap; and even then Taggles would not have trusted a junior with it, only that he knew that D'Arcy could handle any kind of a horse with perfect safety.

There was easy room for four in the trap, and Tom Merry and Blake climbed in with D'Arcy and Bunter, to go to the station. They wanted to give the fellow from Greyfriars as good a send-off as possible.

"Let go, Taggles, deah boy!"

"Take care of that 'orse, you know," said Taggles, as he let go and stepped back.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good-bye, Bunter!"

"Good-bye, you fellows!" said Bunter, waving a fat hand. "I'll come and see you again soon."

And the trap rattled off.

"Well, this has been a ripping day," said Billy Bunter, with a sigh of content. "Why can't all the days be like this? It's weeks since I've had such a feed! I say, you fellows, I wish you'd come in a body and visit us at Greyfriars some time. It would be ripping!"

"Thanks awfully!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! We'll come—some day."

The trap dashed into the village street, and stopped at the station.

Billy Bunter climbed out with some difficulty. That wonderful feed was beginning to tell upon even the fat junior of Greyfriars, and he was very slow and heavy in his movements.

"This way," said Blake, taking Bunter kindly by the arm, and rushing him into the station.

Billy Bunter gasped.

"Oh—oh, really, Blake, don't—oh!"

"What's the matter?"

"I—I—I'm out of breath! Please don't hurry me! I'm sincerely sorry, but—oh—er—oh, I'd rather lose the train than hurry!"

And Blake grinned and slackened down, and Billy Bunter walked into the station with a pace that would have suited a funeral procession. He stopped at the automatic-machine in the vestibule, and felt in his pockets.

"Blessed if I've got any pennies," he remarked. "Anybody got a penny?"

"Yaas, wathah! Do you want anything out of the machine?"

"Yes, I was thinking I could do with a little butterscotch."

"Butterscotch?"

"Yes; I'm getting a little peckish."

"Peckish!" murmured the juniors of St. Jim's.

And they watched Billy Bunter extract the butterscotch from the machine, and begin to eat it with every sign of satisfaction, like youths in the mazes of a dream.

CHAPTER 19.

Good-Bye, Bunter.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, glancing at his watch. "The twain's nearly due!"

"Is it?" said Bunter. "H'm! Perhaps I'd better have a little more of this butterscotch. Could you change a sixpence into coppers for me, Blake?"

"Certainly!"

Blake handed over six pennies, making up the number by borrowing a couple from Tom Merry. Bunter clicked them all into the machine, one after another, and stowed the proceeds away in his pockets.

"I'll give you that sixpence when I see you again," he

remarked. "I came away from Greyfriars without any cash, like an ass, you know. I'm always forgetting things."

"Have you got your ticket?" asked Jack Blake, who had his own opinion about that.

"No, I came without one, and Tom Merry lent me the tin to pay. I will send you a postal-order for it from Greyfriars, Merry. Will that be all right?"

"Certainly!"

"But you can't go on the platform without a ticket," said Blake.

"I suppose you chaps are pretty well known here?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, you could rush me on, you know, and dodge 'em. Trust to me for changing trains all right. I can manage that. You see—"

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Of course, I should reimburse the railway company later," said Bunter. "I don't believe in robbing even a railway company. I should send them a postal-order, out of a cheque I'm expecting for some photographic work for the Press."

"I wathah think I had better take a ticket for you," said D'Arcy hurriedly. "You can book through from this station."

"Then I shall send you the cash—"

"Nevah mind that—"

"Oh, but I must mind, you know! You can't expect me to sponge on you like that," said Bunter. "I'll put it down carefully in my account book, and let you have it back out of—out of the first cheque I get for my newspaper work."

"Vewy well, that will be all wight."

And Arthur Augustus took the ticket, and gave it to Bunter, and they proceeded upon the platform.

The train was not in yet, but Bunter found plenty of occupation for the time. He borrowed six pennies from Tom Merry and D'Arcy, and extracted six packets of chocolate from an automatic machine on the platform. He disposed five of them about his person, and began to devour the sixth.

"Still peckish?" asked Blake, sympathetically.

"Yes, I'm feeling a bit that way. I expect I shall be pretty nearly famished when I get back to Greyfriars. It's a long journey."

"I suppose you'll get some supper when you get in?"

"That depends. The chaps may have finished up everything—grub gets finished up jolly soon in our study."

"I'm not surprised at that," murmured Blake.

"Eh?"

"I hope you'll get some supper. It's a shocking thing not to have enough to eat—gets a chap into a low state."

"Yes, that's what I'm always telling Wharton, but he only chuckles. He never will take it seriously. As a matter of fact, you know, I'm of a rather delicate constitution, and I require keeping up by constant nourishment. I've always considered it fortunate that I've got a good appetite. I wonder whether I could arrange about a lunch-basket in the train?"

"Yaas, wathah! You only have to telegraph along the line, and they will put it in at any station you like," said

Arthur Augustus. "It's vewy simple. Of course, it would have to be paid for at this station, when you send the wire."

"Yes, that's the difficulty. You see—"

"Ahem!" said Tom Merry. "I'll stand the lunch-basket. I'll go and see the stationmaster about it now."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Leave it to me, Gussy!"

And Tom Merry went. It did not take him long to make the arrangement. He returned in a few minutes, and found Bunter looking rather anxious.

"I say, Merry, what have you ordered?" he asked. "If I am going to the expense of a lunch-basket, I may as well have enough."

"Cold chicken, ham, and trimmings," said Tom Merry.

"Ah, that's right. How much?"

"I've settled with the stationmaster."

"Yes, that's all very well, but now I've got to settle with you," said Bunter firmly. "How much?"

"Eight and six."

"Good! I'll put it down to the account, and send you a postal-order. I expect I shall be ready for that lunch-basket by the time it's put in the train."

They chatted for a few more minutes, and then the local came puffing in. It stopped, and Arthur Augustus opened a carriage door for Bunter.

The fat junior clambered in.

They shook hands all round at the carriage door.

"I say, you fellows, you've given me a ripping time," said Bunter, as the guard waved his flag. "I shall come and see you again soon. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, Bunter!"

The train moved off.

The juniors waved their hats to Bunter, who waved a fat hand—with a lump of butterscotch in the fingers—in return.

That lump of butterscotch, and a fat hand was the last they saw of William George Bunter of the Greyfriars Remove.

The train disappeared, and the juniors of St. Jim's slowly left the station.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stole glances at the faces of Jack Blake and Tom Merry; but their faces were expressionless. The swell of St. Jim's coughed, but that failed to draw them.

D'Arcy tossed a sixpence to the lad who was holding the horse, and the juniors re-entered the trap.

"Well?" said D'Arcy, as he shook out the reins.

"Well?" said Tom Merry.

"Well?" said Blake.

"Well, it's been a wippin' aftahnoon, anyway," said Arthur Augustus. "I want you chaps to tell me exactly how much you've lent Buntah, as he's my guest, and I must settle for him. That will make it all wight!"

"Just as you like, Gussy."

"Oh, I insist upon it, deah boy! I am glad we succeeded in givin' him a good time!" D'Arcy's face was very thoughtful. "He says he's coming to visit us again soon. Gee-up!"

And the trap rattled back to the school.

THE END.

NEXT THURSDAY:

"SKIMPOLE'S DISCOVERY."

A Grand, Double-length School Tale of
Tom Merry & Co.,

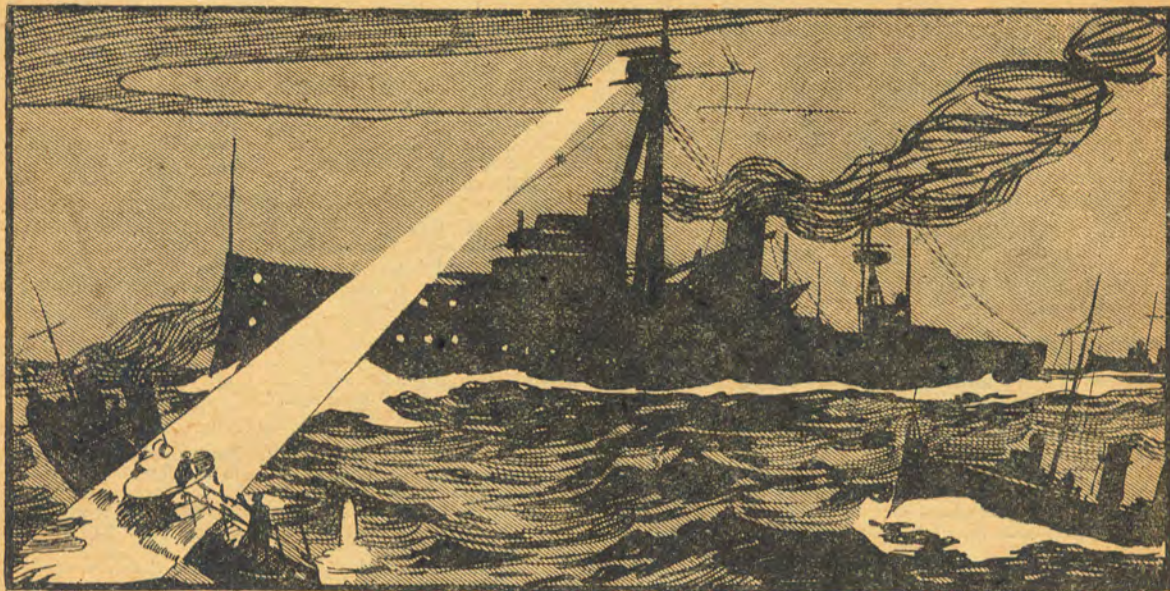
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THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

Sam and Stephen Villiers, two cadets of Greyfriars School, by a combination of luck and pluck render valuable service to the British Army during the great German invasion. They are appointed special scouts to the Army, which is forced back on London by Von Krantz, the German commander. At the time when this instalment opens, Sam and Stephen have just come up the Thames with important news for Lord Ripley. Hearing that the whole of North London is in German hands, they determine to go thither and investigate. Their friend Lieutenant Devine endeavours to dissuade them, urging that it is impossible to cross by any of the bridges.

(Now go on with the Story.)

The Mailed Fist at Work.

"There are boats," said Sam, "an' if I couldn't get across by night with four miles of water-front to choose from, I'd bury myself. Steve, we'll chance our luck in Von Krantz's own area."

"You'd better shake hands before you go," said Devine; "it'll be the last I shall see of you—an' you're useful kids, too. I've a good mind to let Ripley know; he'd stop you chucking yourselves away!"

"Ripley's gone," said Stephen, with a wink, "an' he gave us a free hand. I'm with you, Sam. We'd better see about makin' arrangements, an' steal a dinghy."

Nothing Devine could say made any difference. The boys had made up their minds, and that day, there being little to do that could be of any use, they spent with the Fusiliers on bridge-guard, messing with Devine and his subaltern. They made their preparations, and nine o'clock that night saw a small dinghy creeping out very quietly from a quay half a mile below the docks, and driving across the strong ebb-tide towards the Middlesex shore.

Sam and Stephen were its crew, both out of uniform, and dressed in plain serge. They had chosen their landing-place long before, and the dinghy wormed its way to the back of a rotting, deserted wharf where there was no guard or sentry. The boys landed over the mud, crept into an old warehouse-shed, and, curling themselves up on some old sacks behind a pile of straw, slept till the dawn broke.

Then, sallying forth as the new day brightened over

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

London, they made their way into the stricken city over which Von Krantz ruled with such an iron hand.

"Where to first?" said Stephen.

"Right into the City," answered his brother, "just as if we were goin' to business," he added, with a grim smile, "an' I shouldn't wonder but what we are. Once out of these alleys we'll go straight ahead."

Under the growing light they made their way through the small, mean streets near the water-side, and it was not long before they saw how German London fared under the invader's rule. In the broader highways, hungry mobs had collected here and there, and armed Germans in strong squads and companies were marching through the streets.

"They don't seem to be guarding the crowds much, or interferin' with 'em," said Stephen.

"No; but the soldiers look as if they were ready for trouble when it comes. I expect they've got orders not to take any notice of the Londoners if they can help it. Things are quieter in some ways than on the other side of the water. I suppose because the rule is stricter, an' there's a whole army to keep order. Look, there are even some shops open there!"

"They look like foreign-owned ones," said Stephen. "I wonder they haven't been looted by the crowd. Isn't that a factory over yonder, still working?"

"Yes. Looks rum, doesn't it?" said Sam. "I suppose there's still a little money an' food for those who know how to get it, an' the folk aren't so crowded here. Keep walkin' straight along—here comes a German squad."

A half-company of Wurtemberg Infantry, under the command of a lieutenant, came along. They took no notice of anybody as they passed, though some of the crowd growled, and others jeered. Stephen felt a curious thrill when he thought that these armed men, with whom he was so very much at war, and who had put a price on his head, were passing within a few feet of him, and not even glancing at him as they went.

"I think," said Sam, "we'd better get out of this an' go through the bystreets, which is quicker, because there's less crush. We don't want to stop an' gape at everything that passes down here—it's to the centre I want to get, an' there we'll have the less attention paid to us. We haven't come far yet, but enough to see the whole place is a powder-min that a spark or two will blow up. How gaunt an' sullen the people look!"

"SKIMPOLE'S DISCOVERY."

An Extra-long Complete Tale of
Tom Merry & Co.

"Poor beggars," said Stephen feelingly, "it isn't we that suffer most, fightin' ashore an' afloat, it's them. They've got to stick it all out day after day on an empty stomach, with all their belongin's swept away an' these spike-batted German swabs lordin' it over 'em. Look, you can catch a glimpse of the German standard flyin' above the Mansion House even from here. How'd you like to live under that rag for a month?"

"Dry up, an' don't start moralisin'," said Sam, as they turned down an alley towards the river; "it won't last for ever, though the blood that's been spilt is only a drop to what's got to flow before things mend. Shouldn't be surprised if it all happened in five or six days' space."

"If it ever does at all," said Stephen. "I'm no croaker, but I don't feel quite as sure about it as you seem to."

The back streets were strangely deserted, save for some German engineers who seemed to be laying a telephone-wire in one place, and everywhere near the river there were more Germans than Londoners. Even the former were not thick, however, and one or two of the streets might have been part of a city of the dead, for nobody was in sight. It was just as they neared the Albert Docks—some way short of them—that a Prussian infantryman, rifle in hand, came out of a warehouse door and nearly bumped into the boys. His jaw dropped in astonishment, and his fingers gripped the rifle convulsively.

"Blitzen! The scouts! The two cubs they call Villiers!" he exclaimed breathlessly in his own tongue, and jerked the rifle to his shoulder.

Quick as lightning, nothing taken aback by the surprise, Stephen grabbed the barrel before the weapon was fairly up, and Sam's revolver was out even as the man spoke. The butt of it came down with crushing force on the Prussian's temple, and the rifleman fell like a poleaxed bullock, without a sound, his weapon clattering on the flagstones. It was all done in the wink of an eyelid.

"Shall we bolt?" exclaimed Stephen.

"Drag him in through the gate first—quick!" said Sam, with one swift glance round. There seemed to be no one else in sight at the moment, and whether the house held any more, Sam did not know. But to leave the man there and bolt down the long, narrow street, would have been hopeless.

Sam grabbed the fallen Prussian, and hauled him swiftly through the gate into the warehouse-yard, and thence into a shed that had no door, while Stephen snatched up the rifle and followed, throwing it in after the body. They had hardly done so, when booted feet were heard clattering down the warehouse stairs, and two or three voices were shouting at the top of their voices in German:

"Karl! Karl! What's happened? Where are you, man?"

"Over the back wall, an' look alive!" muttered Sam.

No sooner said than done. A water-butt and some old casks against the wall gave them a road over, and they were barely on the other side before they heard the Prussians in the yard and street.

"Now it depends how long they are in finding him," said Sam, darting across the next yard and pulling open a rotten door that came off its hinges. "They haven't set eyes on us yet. Leg it for all you're worth, unless you see a German. Mustn't be seen runnin', or we'll be stopped."

The door opened on a narrow back alley, and the boys, knowing that swift and sudden death awaited them if they were caught, sprinted down it at full speed, for they heard the sound of the searchers blundering about behind them. Sam led the way into yet another yard, instead of going straight on, and finally they found themselves in a deserted slum house, in a court off the main street, and there they paused to draw breath.

"Gosh!" panted Stephen. "That was a near thing. If we'd been a second later in scragging him, it'd have been all up. They didn't see us, did they?"

"Don't think so."

"Then he'll let 'em know we're about, if he comes to."

"He won't," said Sam grimly. "I don't think he'll ever move again."

"Good thing for us. It was his life or ours. With a dead German to account for, we shouldn't stand much chance in this city."

"That don't make any difference. Just remember that our lives are forfeited anyway, an' if we're recognised, it's the end of us. Our hand's against every man's, an' if we do get into a mess, we may just make it as hot for the enemy as we can before they finish us. If we shot Von Krantz himself, they couldn't execute us any the more certainly than they would at present."

"That's a fact," said Stephen. "We knew it before we crossed the water. Lucky you didn't shoot at that Prussian—his mates would have been on us twice as quick."

"Not such a fool," growled Sam. "You've got your pistol, haven't you? Well, don't use it on any excuse

unless we're absolutely cornered, an' don't show it. Anybody found with a weapon at all is to be shot without trial, accordin' to the proclamations. Now, let's get on. Are you ready?"

"Well, if this is merely a beginnin', it strikes me as rather too thick," said Stephen. "If one of the first Germans we come across spots us before we can wink, what's our chance of gettin' through London among thousands of 'em. We shall be recognised in every blessed street, and another half-hour will see our finish."

"I don't believe it for a moment," retorted Sam. "That was just an unlucky chance; it mightn't happen again in a month. The fellow I slugged must have come across us before at close quarters—perhaps in that scuffle when we fired the warehouse on the quay an' set a lot of 'em adrift in a barge—you remember. It wasn't a couple of hundred yards from the very spot. No, I don't think we need worry that the blessed German Army's on the look-out for a couple of youngsters in blue serge, just because one man knew us by sight."

"All right. I'm ready if you are. Don't let's stew here all day. An' it seems to me the main streets are the best for us, after all. There's safety in crowds."

Sam nodded, and, striking northwards again, they finally reached the great main artery of the Commercial Road, and headed west.

For the next hour or two the boys set themselves to see as much as they could while walking through, and there was certainly plenty to see. The misery in South London had been bad enough, but here it turned their hearts sick. The iron heel of the conqueror, showing plainly everywhere, made things so much worse; as did the fact that the proudest city of the Empire was in the power of the drab-coated battalions who marched through the streets or walked here and there at ease while on leave, as if the place belonged to them.

One grim joke—though not intended for one—that stared at them from every wall was the proclamation, already quoted, that the citizens of North London were to consider themselves subjects of the Kaiser. The German commander-in-chief's printed words said that Londoners had only to behave themselves, and submit to German rule, and they would be more prosperous than ever they had been.

Not that any man of all London's millions acknowledged himself a German, of course. As for the prosperity, nothing but ruin and starvation was to be seen over most of the huge town; and the grim, dogged look in the eyes of the people showed what they thought about it.

"If only they all had rifles!" said Stephen more than once as they went along. "They could rise a million strong; and they'd be more than Von Krantz's army could deal with. What a massacre there'd be!"

"If they'd all rifles, an' could shoot, the Germans 'd never be here at all," said Sam sourly. "But nobody thought it worth his while when there was peace. They left it to the plucky handful of paid fightin'-men, an' the few who were keen enough to join rifle-clubs. Now they're payin' for it. They chose to grow fat an' refuse to trouble 'emself about rifles an' guns. I pity 'em the less when I remember that. But I think they've learned the lesson now. There's Cheap-side ahead at last, an' St. Paul's, with half its dome smashed in. Now we're in the thick of it."

In the wide space between the Royal Exchange and the Mansion House three full companies of the Prussian Guard were picketed; and the boys avoided these, turning down Thames Street and up by Cannon Street. There was hardly any wheel traffic about, save the German service motors and one or two transport waggons. As for the London horses, they had gone the way of all flesh—the starving populace had eaten them.

"How are things going?" said Stephen, stopping to speak to a hollow-eyed, unshaven man who was standing at a corner, talking to some others.

"Going?" echoed the man impatiently. "What d'you mean? You know as well as the rest, don't you?"

"No, we've only just come in," said Sam. "Are things very bad?"

"More fool you—better have stopped outside," said the stranger. "A strong man can just keep body an' soul together, if he's lucky—or starve to death if he isn't."

"We're waitin' our chance. We shall get a chance at 'em some time," muttered another. "If it's too long, I sha'n't wait till my strength's starved out. I shall get hold of one or two o' those drab-coated vermin by the neck, an' send 'em across the big Divide ahead of me, before I'm shot. See?"

"There was a row in Moorgate Street this morning," said a third, "an' several prisoners taken an' shot."

"They're ripe for another here soon," said the first speaker grimly. "Nobody cares a toss what happens to him. I'll take a hand myself. Thirty of us, without a crust in our bellies, joined in front o' St. Paul's steps

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yesterday, an' sang 'God Save the King,' to show 'em we didn't care—an' they shot us down for that. I was one of the few left with a whole skin. If we'd a weapon—as much as a pair of scissors in our fists—

"There's weapons going. It's bein' kept mighty secret, but some of 'em are dealing 'em out," said another.

"I wish I knew where," growled the first speaker. He fixed his eyes more closely on the boys. "Don't I know your faces, somehow?" he said suddenly.

"If you do, just forget 'em again," said Sam, with a warning nod, "and say nothin. You're mistaken, I think. Come on, Bob."

Stephen followed him, and a low murmur of talk went up behind the boys as they left. In a few moments the hollow-eyed man overtook them, and tapped Sam on the shoulder.

"I think we know who you are," he said, in a low voice, "and if you can do with a man or two to help you in any sort of job, we'd jump at it! You know the ropes," he said eagerly; "only give us a lead and we'll do anything for you. None of us cares a button what happens to us."

Sam shook his head.

"Can't we strike one useful blow, and exterminate some of those German brutes, hand-to-hand?" urged the man eagerly. "There's no move of the game you youngsters haven't seen—we'd be proud to take the tip from you."

"Then here it is," said Sam. "Lie low for a short spell till your chance comes. You're all throwing yourselves away by breaking out like this. I'll promise you something shall be tried, an' before we're all many days older. But don't talk any longer or attract attention to us just now, unless you want to see us nabbed and shot. There's a German sub-officer watchin' us as it is."

The man nodded and returned at once. The brothers walked on, rather glad to get away.

"That shows you what their temper is," said Sam; "an' by George, I don't wonder at it. If one of those street fights got up, I believe I'd take a hand in it myself, useless though it might be. Look at that striped rag floating from the Mansion House flagstaff! Look at that corporal's file yonder, in the Kaiser's uniform an' with their rifles ready to shoot down any Londoner who as much as gets in their way! We—"

A distant murmur some distance away, in the direction of Queen Victoria Street, suddenly grew to a hoarse roar. The sounds of stamping feet, shouts and hoarse orders, followed by gun-shots, were mixed up in wild confusion. Then came a spatter of more rifle-shots, and the cry of wounded men.

"It's another outbreak," said Stephen, halting; "hear the row? Some crowd or other has got into trouble with the Germans."

"Come on! I want to see what it means," said Sam, starting at a run.

They made their way as quickly as possible down the street and to the next turning, though they guessed well enough that nothing more unsafe for both of them could happen than to be embroiled in such an affair. But neither of them troubled about that. They were delayed by a mob of frightened citizens who came rushing down the turning, evidently fleeing from the German rifles, and it was some time before the brothers could get through.

By the time they reached Queen Victoria Street the fracas, whatever had been the cause of it, was over. The street was strewn with dead, mostly Londoners in everyday clothes, but with a few Germans among them, and a strong force of the Prussian Guard had hurried to the spot and riddled the crowd with bullets. Those who were not shot down were now pressed back by the troops, and the Germans were easily masters of the situation.

"What is it?" demanded Sam of the man next him.

"Another conflict between the German soldiers an' some of the people," said the man, "but I don't know how it began. They've shot down thirty or forty, an' taken eight prisoners. Look, they're goin' to execute them! We're lucky not to be among them, even though we'd no hand in it. The Guard likes to make us watch."

The Prussians had cleared a large space, the men with their rifles beating the people back, and now the soldiers held a good part of the street open, their weapons ready, and outnumbering the unarmed citizens easily. A horrid silence had fallen on those who remained, and into the open space a squad of Prussians brought the eight prisoners.

There were seven men, two of them old and one a mere boy, all pale, most of them severely wounded, and showing the marks of the grim conflict. The eighth was a girl, barely eighteen, with once comely features, now pinched by hunger, and terribly haggard and pale.

"Good heavens!" gasped Sam. "They're not going to shoot that woman?"

"They will," said the man next him, with trembling lips. "She won't be the first by many. She had a weapon, I

think, and was trying to save her brother, who was shot. I believe she fought as pluckily as any while it lasted."

"What waste and bloodshed it all is," murmured a hopeless voice behind. "They shouldn't have begun it at all; they should have let the Germans be."

The man next him turned savagely on the speaker, but the crowd, calling loudly on the Germans to let the prisoners go, drowned everything else. The German rifles cowed them into silence for the moment, and the mob seemed helpless and beaten enough. It was plain that the cruel sentence was to be carried out at once to impress them. A firing-party of ten Prussians, with an officer, stepped into the middle of the road.

"Set the prisoners against the wall!" ordered the officer harshly, and the eight captives were shouldered into their places by the riflemen, and left there. The prisoners faced the firing-party with despairing eyes, but not one of them shrank or showed any outward sign of fear. The girl, wild-eyed and with set mouth, looked at the black rifles without flinching. Stephen grasped his brother's arm.

"My heavens, Sam! I can't stand this!" he gasped.

"Nor I!" said Sam hoarsely. "If we can't save them we'll strike one blow at those brutes!" He raised his voice to its utmost power as the officer gave the order "Ready—present!"

"Go for them!" shouted Sam. "Are you going to stand and see women butchered? At them, you beggars, you can only die once!"

His revolver whipped from its place as he spoke—the crowd, which had only awaited a lead, broke its bounds and burst into the open space in a moment. Before the order to fire could leave the Prussian officer's lips, Sam's pistol cracked, and the man fell dead beside his firing-party, a bullet in his brain. The next instant a perfect storm of rifle-shots met the crowd, as it surged ahead with hoarse cries of vengeance.

"Stick close to me, Steve!" shouted Sam, knowing there was little chance of ever rejoining if they got separated.

So sudden was the rush that for the time being the Germans were overcome, and their lines broken.

But before the first charge of the crowd was stopped, there was a dull, hoarse roar from either hand, and down two of the side streets came eighty or a hundred Londoners in one mad rush, throwing themselves into the fray. They had evidently gathered there for the purpose, and now every one of them, caring nothing for life and thirsting for revenge, charged into the Germans on each flank.

Stephen found himself carried along clear off his feet, packed like a herring amid the surging mob. The rush had broken all the lines, and Germans and Londoners were mixed together in one fierce, striving scramble.

It was more like a bad crush at a railway-station on Bank Holiday time than a fight. For a minute neither friend nor foe could do each other much damage, so tightly were the combatants packed. But soon savage blows were struck, men killed each other with their naked hands, howling like wolves.

Sam hardly knew what was happening. He was carried back and forth as if on a stormy sea, his brother immediately behind him. Sam had managed to get his revolver out with much difficulty, but he could not raise his arm to use it, and when presently he found himself squashed breast to breast against a big, hairy Prussian who swore for over a minute without stopping, neither was able to do anything to the other, though both were willing enough. The Prussian, calling Sam a "cursed pig-dog," made wild efforts to get his rifle up.

"You beer-swilling lump of Berlin lard!" said Sam earnestly. "If I could get these fools to give us room I'd see there was one Prussian lout at least who'd never shoot a woman again! You were one of the firing-party—I know you. Steve, for goodness' sake shove back and give me half an inch of space."

"I can't; my ribs are givin' way," gasped Stephen.

All of a sudden the crowd ceased and opened out. Up went the Prussian's rifle in a moment, but Sam's ready pistol spoke first, blazing full in the man's face. Down he went, and the revolver cracked again at a second man behind him.

The crowd could use their hands now, and they ceased shouting and shoving. They acted instead. The German ranks had been scattered and mixed up, and the Londoners, now outnumbering them, pulled down man after man. The slaughter on both sides was heavy, but nothing could withstand the blind rage of the crowd. In five minutes they would have exhausted the Germans to the last man, and knives, lumps of metal, bare hands, and even teeth, were weapons enough for them. Already half the Prussian company were down.

Sam had been in fights enough not to be carried away by mob madness, and he knew it could not last. The eight prisoners were freed, and he had seen the girl slip away,

a path being forced for her through the crowd. But already the full force of the Prussian Guard from before the Mansion House were hurrying to the spot, and up the street on the other side a half battalion of Saxon infantry were rushing to the attack. Even now the shots were beginning to rattle viciously, and then both forces of the enemy ran in with the bayonet.

The riot was over; it was every man for himself, and the Londoners were hemmed in between two fences of stabbing steel. The groans of the dying as the cruel three-edged blades bit home, mingled with German curses, filled the air. There were four of the enemy to every man in the trapped crowd now, and even then the Londoners fought desperately and uselessly, knowing that execution awaited every prisoner taken. They went down like corn before the reaper, and the gutters ran with blood. Those who could, ran for it up the side streets.

"Come on!" said Sam grimly, making a dash after these, his pistol empty and the blood running over his eyes from a graze on the forehead from a stray bullet. "The rest is butchery, and we're no use here. Let's get to a doorway where we can make a stand an' do some good."

It was only those who were right against the turning who had any chance to make use of it, and the boys were barely in time. The Prussians had nearly driven a way to it already, and as the brothers dashed up the narrow street a qualm of reluctance came over them, even then, to think they were leaving the scene of the fight while so many had to remain. But it was no longer a battle, but a slaughter, and a flock of sheep would have had as much chance against the overwhelming Prussian bayonets.

Hardly had Sam and Stephen reached the next corner when a party of Saxons came rushing up from beyond to cut off the fugitives. Sam darted round to the right, followed by three or four bullets, that spattered on the walls around him. With harsh cries the man came after in full pursuit.

"Got any more cartridges?" panted Sam, as he ran, turning sharply up through a narrow alley.

"Not one," returned Stephen.

"Nor have I. We must trust to our legs, then."

"There isn't a cat's chance," muttered Stephen.

Their pursuers were evidently bent on capturing them. Stephen wondered if they had been recognised. Twice the Saxons came into view and fired as they ran, but Sam twisted and turned through the side streets till, losing sight of them for a moment, he saw a very large and tall corner house in front of him, and as he dodged round it, caught a glimpse of a side door just being closed.

"Come on!" he cried to his brother, and flung himself at the door with all his weight. Both the boys staggered through into the house, and instantly found themselves tripped and thrown, and a couple of rifles levelled at them as they lay.

"Fasten that door up, sharp!" said a voice. "Now then, you, who are you?"

With great relief Sam saw that their captors were not Germans. They were all armed, however, and the one who gave the order was a tall, pale-looking man of about twenty-five or less.

"We're British, of course," said Sam. "We were in a row down in Queen Victoria Street, and some Saxons were after us."

"All right, get up," said the tall youth. "Look sharp and fix that barricade, you fellows. Now you're here you'll have to stay," he added, looking at the boys; "and you won't get out alive, I'm afraid, as the lot of us are going to be mopped up, and the house as well. But you'll see some fun first—it'll be quite a little entertainment for you," he concluded grimly.

Sam took stock of the men around him. They were little more than boys, for that matter, though all looked tough enough, despite their pale, hunger-drawn faces. There were six of them, mostly dressed in black morning-coats of a City cut, and Sam put them down as clerks. He liked the look of them, though wondering what the speaker had meant. They were rapidly piling a barricade against the bolted door.

"Going to be mopped up, are you?" said Sam. "Well, I hope the entertainment 'll be a bit more cheerful than what I've just seen. I say, you won't mind my mentioning it, but your barricade won't hold long. You want to shove that packing-case against the under-side, and jam those two step-ladders end-on instead of crossways."

"Good egg," said the tall man. "That's right enough. You know your way about, I see. Shift those ladders, 'Gus'; they'll be better as he says. You two young'uns can bear a hand."

They worked at the barricade for some time, and Sam, who had seen many a one made, was able to give them some useful tips. Nobody attacked the outer side of the door as

yet. It seemed that the pursuing Saxons had not seen where the boys had taken refuge.

"Let's have a final look at the other door," said the tall man, whom the others addressed as "Marten"; and he led the way through to the main street door of the house, which was evidently a large bank or office. This door, a double one, had a perfect stack of heavy things jammed against it, forming a barricade about ten feet thick.

"How long d'you think that'll keep a squad of Germans out?" said Marten, glancing at Sam, for he noticed the boy's tough and bronzed look, and guessed he had been campaigning.

"A good twenty minutes or half an hour, I should say," replied Sam, "unless they blow it in with a bomb. You aren't going to defend it, then?"

"No; just let them hammer at it, that's all. Now then, you chaps, time's slipping along. Out with that straw and the paraffin!"

Somebody hauled out a couple of large packing-cases with straw in them, which was then scattered all about the ground floor and round the staircase. Martin produced three gallon cans of lamp-oil and poured it copiously all over the place, soaking the straw well.

"You'd better get to ground, Jerry," said Marten to one of the others. "Give a shake, old chap. Good luck. Don't forget to let 'em get well up first."

The man addressed nodded, and shook hands quickly but earnestly with each of his comrades, after which he retired into a little cupboard in the bank's ante-room, near the staircase, and shut himself in.

"What the dickens are they playing at?" murmured Stephen, and Sam was equally puzzled. Nobody had volunteered any information yet; but there was a grimness about the movements of the six that looked like business.

"Time to be getting aloft," said Marten briefly. "Which would you two young 'uns prefer—to be caught an' executed by the Germans, or to peg out scappin', with just a chance of bein' burnt alive? There aren't any other ways."

"You seem to be fixin' up a queer sort of picnic," said Sam. "However, we prefer to be shot scappin' than butchered by a firin' party, if that's what you mean. As this appears to be your show, an' we've come to it uninvited, we'll join you upstairs, whatever the game is. Are the Germans after you?"

"No, but they will be very soon," rejoined Marten, and he led the way upstairs, followed by the other five and the two brothers.

There were five storeys in the house, which was a very high one, with a lift that was out of use. On arriving at the third landing, the five men started to make another big barricade with a lot of furniture that had been placed handy, and they made it behind them, so to speak, thus cutting themselves off from the lower floors. There were two staircases, and both had to be blocked.

"Any more of this?" said Sam, rather sarcastically.

"No, we've done now," was the reply.

"You're providin' the Germans with a sort of giddy obstacle race, it seems," said Stephen. "They'll lose some skin off their shins scramblin' over all these stockades, if nothing else. Are you goin' to hold the head of the stairs against 'em? Is that the idea?"

"The idea's quite different," replied Marten drily. "You'll see it for yourself in a minute. And if you don't like it, you've only yourselves to blame for choosing an awkward refuge. We couldn't afford to let you be seen going out."

He showed the way right up to the lofts, and through a trap-door on to the leads of the roof. Sam was surprised to see, behind a chimney-stack, several rifles and packages of cartridges, evidently placed there in readiness.

The boys looked round, and saw they were on the top of one of the tallest buildings in the neighbourhood, and shut out from the view of the streets by fairly high roof walls. Across the roofs, not more than one hundred and fifty or two hundred yards away, in plain sight, was the Mansion House itself, and they were nearly on a level with it. The flagstaff, with the German standard flying boldly from it, was in full view.

"Now d'you tumble?" said Marten quietly. "We're going to lower that flag. One of us is making his way up through the Mansion House now, and it's a certainty that before long he'll haul those cursed colours down!"

"Will he, by gum!" exclaimed Stephen. "But what about afterwards?"

"He will be killed, of course. But there are five of us here, all picked shots, and we command that flagstaff from here, and from good cover, too. No German will reach it to hoist those colours while we're alive—we shall pick off each one that tries it."

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"They'll send a squad of soldiers to storm the house. When they're up the stairs and have reached the upper barricade, our chum below will fire the straw and oil and set the house alight. There'll be no way down for them then. We and the house and the Germans will go to blazes together. But till the lot are burnt up there'll be no German flag flying over the City. While we live we'll keep it down. When we're dead they may rehoist it—not before!"

Bank Clerks—Heroes!

Sam nodded cheerfully as the tall man finished speaking. "Very good egg," he said; "it seems we're dished, an' if that's so, I'd as soon go out usefully as not. I believe Von Krantz has boasted that that flag is never comin' off the Mansion House till Britain crawls up an' gives in. It'll be worth while showing him he's made one mistake, an' will make another."

"I'm with you there," put in Stephen, "especially if there's a spare rifle. Wish I'd my pet carbine here."

"You're a plucky couple of kids," said Marten, looking at them approvingly, "I was rather expecting our programme would put you off. Haven't I seen your faces somewhere?"

"I don't know," returned Sam, "but we may as well all know each other, as we're going out together. My name's Aubrey Villiers, an' my brother's here is Stephen."

"Hallo!" exclaimed Marten. "What, are you the Greyfriars Scouts?"

"That's us," said Sam. "Shake hands all round! You know my name. That's Gus, an' that's Gerald—Stanley, Herbert, and Basil. Our surnames don't matter, as nobody'll cut a tombstone for us, so we'll let it go at that."

"And I reckon we're honoured to have you two along with us," added Gerald, picking up a rifle; "we know your record—who doesn't? But it's a pity you should be wasted in a bust-up like this—you're too useful outside. I say, Marten, couldn't we let those youngsters out somehow?"

"Thanks, but I don't think it's much use," said Sam, "it'll upset your arrangements, too. They're lookin' for us down below, and being shot against a wall is a thing I've always had a prejudice against. This strikes me as a fine, useful place to do some damage from before we're finished off, an' that's more than we expected half an hour ago."

"Hear, hear!" added Stephen. "I'm not sure we should have come here at all if we'd realised what a hot shop the City is just now, but as we're here let's make the best of it. There's rippin' good cover behind these chimney-stacks!"

"Yes, an' we command the other roofs," said Marten; "they'll never be able to pick us off with rifle-fire, whereas we can do as we like with 'em till we're stormed. Better take cover, you chaps, an' get ready. Jerry won't be long now, if he has luck!"

"Have you got a rifle to spare?" said Sam. "I'm no great shakes myself, except with a pistol at close quarters, but my young brother here is a bit of a duke."

"By Jove, yes, I'd forgotten that!" said Marten eagerly. "I've heard of his shooting. It'll be a ceet. for him every time—I'll give up mine to him."

"No need for that," said Basil; "there are half a dozen rifles, all Lee-Metfords."

"Good egg!" said Stephen. "Plenty of ammunition?"

"Loads! Twenty packets—revolver cartridges, too, though we've only two pistols. They're 450's."

"Just what I want," said Sam; "I've got an empty 450 iron on me. Give us a pocketful."

The ammunition was quickly divided, and the little party stretched themselves out comfortably behind the chimney-stacks, Sam, Steve, and Marten taking the centre one.

They kept a watchful eye on the Mansion House roof, where the flag flapped in lonely grandeur at the truck of the tall staff.

"If you've got five minutes before the tow-row begins, you might tell us how the dickens this pic-nic started, an' how you've got these weapons up here? I'd hate to die with a puzzle like that worryin' me."

"That's soon told," said Marten. "We were all bank clerks—I was a cashier in the South-Western—when London was a bit different to what it looks now. All except Jerry that is—he was in the Mansion House police-court. The six of us here belonged to the Norwood Rifle Club, where we were all pretty useful with the Morris tubes."

Sam nodded.

"When this beastly invasion started we were at work, an' when the Germans were drawin' near London most of our club formed a sharp-shooter company and prowled about the Essex borders."

"Well, the corps was pretty well smashed up finally, when we had to fall back on London an' help defend the barricades, with thousands of others like us. Two of us have already lost kinsfolk in these vile street executions; and as all of us are wanted by the Germans we've decided to get those cursed colours down an' mop up a few of the drab-coats as a finish. When you came bursting in we were just shutting up shop."

"I can understand your feelings," said Sam, "but how about the Johnny getting through the Mansion House? It's in German hands."

"We've left that to Jerry, and he won't fail us. He knows the place inside and out, and he's hidden up inside. If he fails by any chance, the rest of us will get out an' try by turns. That flag's got to be dowed!"

Sam quite fell in with the idea, though he was of a practical turn of mind, and would rather have done something more useful than hauling down the flag when it would certainly be run up again after they were disposed of. He would have preferred a scheme for lowering the Kaiser's colours altogether, but there was evidently no chance of that.

"There's no way off this roof, of course, once the place is fairly alight?" he said.

"Only by jumping off the parapet into the street," said Marten drily, "a little matter of seventy feet or so, I should think. There is a back staircase, it's true, but it only leads down to the third storey, and we've blocked the lower end of it. The fire will be below that."

As there was as yet no sign of anybody appearing on the Mansion House, Sam got up and made a tour of inspection of the roof, and then had a look at the back staircase. He said nothing when he came back, but in answer to Stephen's query, he remarked that there did not seem much chance of getting clear of the house after it was lit, unless they grew wings within the next hour.

"I shouldn't wonder if you did grow wings by that time," said Marten grimly; "that's if your record here below is good enough. But it won't be in this world."

"Seems a rum idea to deliberately frizzle oneself up on a blazing housetop," observed Stephen.

"There'll be plenty of Germans getting up here before the fire reaches us—enough to exterminate us pretty easily before we could do the same for them. The point is, that they won't survive to brag about it, for the fire'll cut 'em off. The fire's for the Germans, not for us. That's the joke."

"Rummy ideas of humour you fellows have got," murmured Stephen. "The—"

"Look out!" broke in Marten warningly. "There's somebody comin' up on the roof yonder. It's Jerry! By Jove, he's done it!"



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N.B.—Hector Drake is in "Pluck."

The Editor

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