

"TOM MERRY'S HOME-COMING."

VOL. 4.

The GEM 1st LIBRARY

NO. 94.

Grand Long
Complete
Tale by

Grand School Tale of
THE CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S COLLEGE.

Marlin
Clifford.



THE TELEGRAM!

"Merry!" shouted the porter. "Gentleman 'ere name of Merry?"



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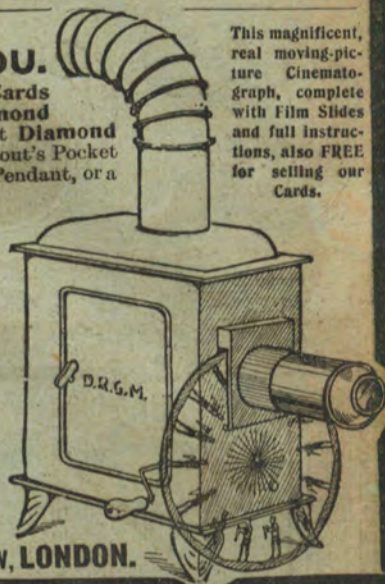
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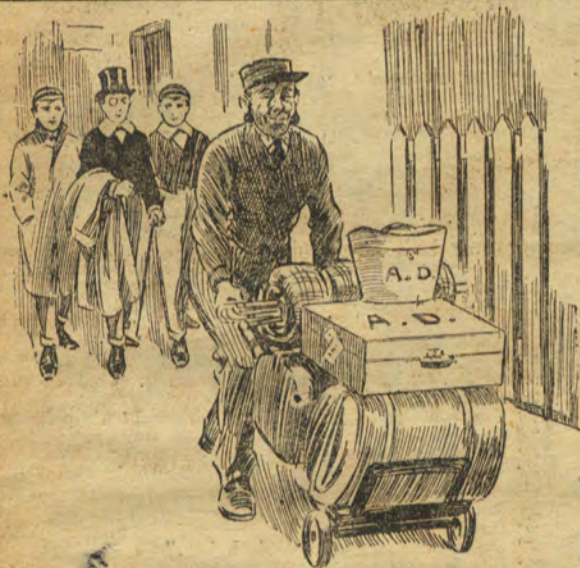
EVERY
THURSDAY

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TOM MERRY & CO.'S HOME-COMING

*A Grand Tale of the Chums
of St. Jim's*

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Homeward Bound.

"MERRY! Gentleman 'ere, name of Merry?"

Tom Merry looked round.

He was sitting in a crowded railway-carriage in Charing Cross Station. The carriage was crowded, not to say crammed; for although planned by the railway company to seat only six passengers, there were eleven in it—all juniors of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry, sandwiched between Manners and Lowther, had some difficulty in breathing, and still more in turning to the door of the carriage as the porter came up with a telegram in his hand, and inquired for a gentleman of the name of Merry.

Tom jammed his elbow into Lowther's ribs, and made him gasp, and knocked Manners under the chin with his other elbow, and made Manners grunt, as he turned to the door.

"Gentleman 'ere—"

"Here you are," said Tom Merry. "My name's Merry! C'est moi."

Tom Merry & Co. were just back from a holiday in France, and they were in the train for St. Jim's. It is not easy to drop suddenly out of one language into another—and so several of the juniors had been talking French to puzzled porters on the way from Dover to London.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the porter.

"C'est moi—I mean—"

"But—but there's no more to say, sir," said the porter, under the impression that Tom Merry had told him to say more. "This 'ere telegram is for a gent named Merry—"

"Sorry—I mean I'm the chap you want," grinned Tom Merry. "Hand it over. Here's a franc—I mean a bobblet."

The porter handed over the telegram, and received the shilling, with a grin.

"Merci," said Tom Merry, unconsciously saying "Thank you" in French from long habit, and the porter looked at him and went his way. He confided to his mate, significantly touching his forehead, that there was a young gent in the

train who was fair balmy. When he was given a telegram he told a chap to say more, and then he asked for mercy.

Tom Merry, ignorant of the doubts he had raised concerning his sanity, sat down again, before he opened the telegram. That is to say, he tried to sit down; but Manners and Lowther had closed up, and he sat half on Manners and half on Lowther. And with a combined effort those two individuals shifted him off, and Tom Merry staggered across the carriage, and rolled upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The telegram slipped to the floor as Tom Merry threw his arms round D'Arcy's neck to save himself.

And D'Arcy gave a howl.

"Pway mind what you are doin', deah boy. Ow! You have bumped my hat against the wotten partition."

"Never mind—"

"But I do mind. I wefuse to have my toppah wuined. Pway—"

"Ass! How could I help it, when those two dummies showed me?" demanded Tom Merry, righting himself at last.

"I wefuse to be addressed as an ass."

"Look here, where am I going to sit?" demanded Tom, looking round.

There certainly didn't seem to be an inch of space left in the carriage. Fatty Wynn was already gasping as he was squeezed between Figgins and Kerr, and Wally was standing up for greater comfort. Blake, Digby, and Noble were squeezed together as tight as they would go. The only possible chance was between Manners and Lowther, and Manners and Lowther were sitting shoulder to shoulder.

"You shouldn't have got up," said Lowther. "We were nicely packed in before, and you got out of your own accord. I don't know how we managed it, but we were packed in."

"Talk about sardines," said Blake.

"Now, you had better stand," said Lowther. "After all, it won't hurt you to stand for a couple of hours, and you can sit down and rest when we get to St. Jim's."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Rats!" said Tom Merry. "As head of the Shell, I ought

A DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

(New Series)

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to sit down before any of you Fourth-Form fags. Are you going to give me your seat, Gussy?"

"Wathah not, deah boy."

"Are you, Blake?"

"No fear."

"Perhaps you, Dig—"

"That's a jolly big perhaps," said Digby, with emphasis.

"You look very pretty standing," said Lowther.

"Look here—"

"Oh, I'll look, but I won't get up. What did you want to move for when we were nicely packed in like sardines?"

"I—I—I think we ought to change carriages, you know," gasped Fatty Wynn. "I'm being squashed."

"Oh, stuff!" said Noble. "We ought to stick together for the last lap of the journey."

"We look like sticking together at this rate," grinned Figgins. "The question is, whether we shall become unstuck at the end of the journey."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't laugh here, Blake—there's no room."

"Too late to change," said Harry Noble, as the train began to move out of the station. "We're off!"

"Well, who's going to give me a seat?"

"I give that one up," said Blake, as if Tom Merry had been asking a conundrum. "Ask us another."

"I'll sit on Gussy's knees."

"Sowwy, deah boy, but I couldn't have my twousahs wumpled. I'd do anythin' for a chap I like except wuin my twousahs. A chap is bound to be wathah particulah about his twousahs. It is imposs, to wespect a chap with baggy knees."

"Oh, blow your bags! I'll sit on Blake's knee, then."

"You can, if you find it comfy," said Blake.

And Tom Merry sat on his knee.

He reposed there for about the millionth part of a second, and then he leaped up with a fiendish yell.

"Oh! Yow!"

"Bai Jove, deah boy!" said D'Arcy, looking annoyed. "I weally wish you wouldn't make those sudden wows. Pway considah a chap's feelin's. It thavows me into quite a fluttah."

"Yow!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Some dummy ran a pin into me—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I had a suspicion you wouldn't find the seat comfy," said Blake. "Don't say I didn't warn y—"

"Yah! Ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry looked up and down the rows of faces. There was a stony grin on all of them. And there wasn't room for a fly to sit down.

Tom cast his eyes up to the luggage rack. Although the bulkier baggage of the juniors was in the luggage-van, many smaller articles were in the carriage with them, and the racks were pretty full. Among other things was Arthur Augustus's hat-box. Since a Calais porter had sat upon it D'Arcy had not trusted it out of his hands.

"I wonder if that hatbox is safe?" said Tom Merry, after reaching up and giving it a shove to the edge of the rack.

D'Arcy's glance turned anxiously upward.

"Bai Jove, it's in a wathah dangewous posish," he remarked. "Pway give it a push to the back of the wack, Tom Mewwy."

"Eh?"

"Pway give that hatbox a push to the back of the wack. It might damage my othah toppah if it fell down. It's my best toppah, and it would be howwid if it should be damaged."

"Yes, it would be rough," agreed Tom Merry. "What I'm afraid of is, that when the train jolts, it will come down with a bump."

"Yes, wathah. Pway push it to the back of the wack."

"Eh?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, you are vewy dense. Pway push that hat-box to the back of the wack, where it will be safe," bawled D'Arcy.

"Oh, the hatbox?"

"Yaas, wathah."

"Push it."

"Yaas, you duffah."

Tom Merry pushed the hatbox further over the edge of the luggage-rack. It swayed dangerously now whenever the train jolted.

And as the express was getting up speed the jolts were frequent and bumpy. D'Arcy put up his eyeglass, and stared at Tom Merry in blank amazement.

"Tom Mewwy, you uttah ass—"

"Hallo!"

"I asked you to push it to the back of the wack."

"You have pushed that hatbox into a more dangewous place."

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"By Jove!"

"Pway give it anotheah push, deah boy."

Tom Merry obeyed, and the hatbox was pushed further forward, so that it was now fairly toppling.

D'Arcy gave a yell of warning.

"You ass! It will come topplin' down in a minute! Push it back—bai Jove!"

He leaped up as the hatbox toppled over, and caught it, just in time to save it. He pushed it back carefully to the back of the rack, and then turned back to sit down again. Tom Merry was sitting in his place, and he regarded the swell of St. Jim's with a sweet smile.

CHAPTER 2.

The Telegram!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and stared at Tom Merry with an expression that ought to have brought a blush to the cheek of a gargoyle. But it had no perceptible effect whatever upon the cheek of Tom Merry.

"Tom Mewwy—"

"Hallo!"

"You are sittin' in my place?"

"I am quite comfortable, thank you."

"I did not inquire whethah you were comfortable, Tom Mewwy. I remarked that you were sittin' in my place."

"Thank you! I prefer to sit down."

"But I do not prefer to stand."

"Better sit on your knees, then, unless you're afraid it will make your trousers baggy," suggested Tom Merry affably.

"Pway don't be widiculous."

"Nice views we get from this train," remarked Tom Merry, glancing out of the window.

"Tom Mewwy—"

"Somebody speak?"

"Yaas, wathah, you wottah! I spoke."

"I suppose it's a habit you've got into," said Tom Merry resignedly. "You generally are speaking. Couldn't you go to sleep for a little while?"

"I wequest you," said D'Arcy, with elaborate politeness—

"I wequest you to vacate my seat, Tom Mewwy."

"Go hon!"

"Otherwise, although I shall be extremely sowwy to use violence, I shall have no wesource but to dwag you hence by force."

"Good gracious!"

"Pway take your choice, deah boy."

"Certainly. I prefer to sit down."

"I did not mean that—"

"Never mind what you meant, Gussy. If you don't mind, I should prefer this conversation to cease. Je suis ennuye—I'm getting bored."

"This discuss will not cease till you have vacated my seat, Tom Mewwy."

"My hat! Is it going on for an hour?"

Arthur Augustus did not reply to that question. He pushed back his cuffs carefully, and laid his hands upon Tom Merry's shoulders.

"Out you come!" he ejaculated.

And he pulled with all his force.

Now, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in spite of his elegant ways, was no weakling, and he put a good deal of force into that pull. But Tom Merry, the champion athlete of the Shell Form at St. Jim's, was a tough customer to tackle at any time, and in any way. He braced himself to stand the pull—and he withstood it.

Arthur Augustus tugged and tugged—and Tom Merry sat like a rock, looking at him with a smiling face.

"Oh!" gasped D'Arcy. "Come out, you beast!"

"Pull away," said Tom cheerfully. "It's good exercise, and it ought to bring your biceps up. Go it!"

And there was a general chorus from the juniors in the carriage.

"Go it, Gussy!"

And Gussy "went" it.

He put a tremendous effort into the pull—and succeeded. But he only succeeded because Tom Merry, for reasons of his own, suddenly allowed himself to leave his seat. Backwards went D'Arcy like lightning, crashing down in a sitting posture upon Jack Blake, who was seated opposite.

There was a roar from Blake, as the back of his head went against the wood behind, and a howl from D'Arcy as he released Tom Merry.

Tom Merry sank back again into his seat immediately. Arthur Augustus rolled off Blake's knees to the floor of the carriage, and lay there amid innumerable feet.

He sat up, looking bewildered.

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"



Blake picked up the poker from the grate, and brought it down upon the table beside Skimpole with a terrific impact. Crash!

"I can see no weason whatevah for wibald laughtah," said Arthur Augustus. "I wegard Tom Mewwy as a twicky beast! Bai Jove!"

He picked up the telegram Tom Merry had dropped in the carriage. It was still unopened. In the excitement of the contest for the seat, Tom had forgotten all about it.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom. "My telegram."

"Bai Jove!"

D'Arcy rose to his feet. He put the telegram in his pocket. Tom Merry viewed this proceeding with considerable astonishment.

"Hallo! What are you up to?" he demanded.

"Snuff!" said Arthur Augustus, dusting down his clothes. "I'm up to snuff, deah boy."

"That's my telegram."

"That's my seat."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther. "Gussy's scored this time."

"Yaas, wathah," said D'Arcy, with considerable satisfaction. "I weally considah that I have scored, you know."

"Give me my telegram."

"Yaas, in exchange for my seat."

"It may be important."

"It's vewy important for me to sit down. I shall gwow fatigued othahwise."

"Hand it over."

"Wats!"

"You're fairly done!" chuckled Figgins. "Take it calmly." Tom Merry laughed and rose.

"There you are, Gussy. Now fork out."

Arthur Augustus grinned, and fished the telegram out of

his pocket, and handed it to Tom Merry. He prepared to sit down, and then stopped.

"Upon reflection, Tom Mewwy, you can have my seat," he said graciously. "You see, it was weally the pwinciple of the thing I was contendin' for. You can sit down if you like."

Tom Merry laughed, and pushed D'Arcy into the seat.

"That's all right, Gussy. Sit down. I wonder whom this blessed telegram is from?"

"Look inside," suggested Wally. "I've always found that a good dodge when I didn't know whom a letter was from." Tom Merry did not reply to this piece of sage advice, but he opened the telegram. He glanced over it, and gave a whistle.

"News?" asked Manners.

"Yes."

"Read it out, then."

"Right you are." Tom Merry read out the telegram. "Shall be at the school to meet my darling boy.—PRISCILLA FAWCETT."

"My hat!"

"My only Aunt Jane!" said Wally.

Tom Merry looked thoughtful.

His old governess, Miss Fawcett, was very fond of him, and he was very fond of her. He had wired her from Dover to announce his safe return to England. It was just like her to journey to St. Jim's to meet him on his return to the school. But—

There was a "but."

Miss Fawcett's visits to the school were not infrequent, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 94.

A Grand Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By Martin Clifford.

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE ST. JIM'S SPORTSMAN."

and curiously enough there always seemed to be some trouble there to accompany them.

Miss Fawcett had the kindest heart in the world; and she would help people, and she would be kind, and would not be denied.

Hence, on many occasions—trouble!

Still, Tom Merry was very glad to think that he would be seeing his old governess, and other considerations were not for him to worry about.

Fatty Wynn looked up with an expectant expression in his eyes.

"I say, Merry, if your old governess is going to be at St. Jim's, I suppose she will be getting up some sort of a celebration, eh?"

"I—I shouldn't wonder."

Tom Merry had long ceased to wonder at anything Miss Priscilla Fawcett did.

"Then, I suppose, there'll be a bit of a feed?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I don't believe in any of these blessed affairs that don't take account of the fact that a chap gets hungry," said Fatty Wynn argumentatively. "People do get hungry—anyway, I know I do. And I'm always particularly peckish, somehow, at this time of the year."

"It is very kind of Miss Priscillah to take so much trouble to welcome us home," said Arthur Augustus. "I wegard it as weally wippin'."

"Yes, rather," said Tom Merry.

"I suppose there will be a feed—"

"Weally, Wynn—"

"Did you put that milk chocolate in your pocket, Figgins—the packet I gave you to mind while I was eating my sandwiches?"

"Yes," said Figgins.

"You haven't lost it?"

"No."

"Good. Where is it?"

"I've eaten it."

"Eh?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! you know, I wegard that as wathah funnay," said Arthur Augustus, while Fatty Wynn sat speechless. "Ha, ha, ha!"

The train rolled on, and the juniors, relenting towards Tom Merry, took it in turns to stand up; and most of the time was spent in a rousing chorus, which made other passengers put their heads out of the windows, wondering what was the matter.

And in high spirits the travellers arrived at Wayland, and changed there for the local line to St. Jim's, and so came back to Ryleombe, the old station they knew so well.

CHAPTER 3.

Miss Priscilla Takes a Nap.

TAGGLES, the school porter at St. Jim's, looked out of his lodge as the station cab from Rylcombe rolled in at the gateway. Taggles looked, and gave a little jump as he recognised the elderly lady seated in the cab. It was Miss Priscilla Fawcett, and there was a beaming smile of happiness visible under the shade of the mid-Victorian bonnet.

"My 'at!" said Taggles expressively.

Miss Fawcett caught sight of the old porter, and gave him a pleasant nod.

"You see I have returned, Taggles."

"Yes, ma'am," said Taggles, touching his hat.

"I am glad to see the school again."

"Yes, ma'am."

"My dear boy is returning from France to-day with his friends."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Do you know whether the Head is engaged, Taggles?" pursued Miss Fawcett. "I should not like to interrupt him."

Taggles rubbed his nose thoughtfully as he stood beside the halted cab.

"The 'Ead takes the Sixth this mornin', ma'am," he said.

"The Sixth Form, you know, ma'am."

"Ah, yes."

"Mornin' school will be well-nigh over now, though, ma'am," said Taggles, glancing up at the big clock in the tower, "and it's a 'arf-oliday this artemoon, ma'am."

"Thank you, Taggles."

And the cab creaked on towards the Head's house.

Taggles blinked after it, and shook his head forebodingly.

Then he went back to his lodge, still shaking his head, as though he scented trouble in the air since seeing the arrival of Miss Fawcett at the old school.

The cab stopped at the Head's house. There were two houses at St. Jim's—the School House and the New House.

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The Head's house was an adjunct of the School House, and formed the private residence of Doctor Holmes.

Miss Fawcett dismissed the cab, and was admitted to the Head's house. She discovered that the Head was still engaged in the Sixth Form class-room, and that Mrs. Holmes was absent on a visit to a relation.

She forbade word to be carried to the Head of her arrival, while he was engaged with the top Form. She was the most considerate of old ladies, and she would not have interrupted the Head's morning work for anything.

"I will wait in Dr. Holmes's study," she said, with a sweet smile.

And she was shown in there.

She knew that apartment quite well. It was a very comfortable room, looking out on the quadrangle. The armchair by the side of the cheerful fire looked very comfortable, and Miss Fawcett, having taken her bonnet off, and confided it to the maid, sat down to wait, choosing the armchair.

The great school was very quiet.

From the distant class-rooms came a faint hum of sound, which only seemed to make the silence more deep in the study. Birds were twittering among the almost leafless branches in the quadrangle.

The quiet, and the heat of the fire, added to the fatigue of the journey, soon produced their natural effect upon Miss Priscilla Fawcett.

Her head sank back upon the well-padded chair, and she began to breathe deeply and regularly. She was asleep!

Miss Fawcett slept quietly and peacefully.

Tap!

She did not hear the light knock at the door, and did not hear it repeated, nor hear the door open.

A face looked in, and a pair of furtive eyes glinted round the study.

It was Mellish of the Fourth at the door. Mellish was looking sullen, as he often did. He had a note in his hand for the Head, a note written by Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, explaining that Mellish had been impertinent and required caning. Mellish did not like taking that note; but he had to, and he had come to the Head's study in the expectation of getting a caning there.

Mellish did not know whether the Head was in his study or with the Sixth, and he had come to the study first, as the furthest off from the Fourth Form room, thus postponing the caning as long as possible.

If the Head were not there, he could then seek him in the Sixth Form room, and thus gain another five minutes away from lessons.

He looked into the study, and for the moment thought it was empty. Then the low sound of Miss Fawcett's breathing came to his ears.

He started a little, and looked at the figure in the armchair. Then he grinned, and stepped into the study.

"Miss Fawcett! My hat!" he murmured.

It was easy enough for Mellish to guess why she was there. Tom Merry was coming home that afternoon, and his old governess, of course, had come to the school to greet him, and to satisfy herself that her dear boy was quite well after his journey.

Mellish glanced at the calm, quiet face of the old lady with an ill-natured grin. He detested Tom Merry, as a small and mean nature always detests a big brave one. He detested anybody who was fond of Tom Merry; and Miss Priscilla was devoted to him. The eye of the Fourth Form cad rested upon Miss Priscilla's sleeping face, and then upon the inkpot on the table close beside her.

"Should he dare—"

Mellish's breath came thick and fast. After all, no one knew he was there—no one could guess he had been there if Miss Fawcett did not awake, and she was sound asleep. The

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long railway journey naturally told upon a lady of her age. She was deep, very deep, in slumber.

"Miss Fawcett!"

Mellish muttered the words in a low tone. The old lady slept on.

"Miss Fawcett!"

His voice was louder this time. But still the old lady showed no signs of awaking. Mellish made up his mind.

He twisted up a corner of his handkerchief, and dipped it into the ink. With the thick, black ink he lightly drew the pad over Miss Fawcett's face.

He blacked her nose, causing a strange alteration in her expression, and then stepped back, ready to dart from the room if she should awake.

But she slept on soundly.

Emboldened by his success, the cad of the Fourth returned to the attack. He dipped the pad in the ink again, and mixed a little soot from the grate to give it body, and then proceeded with a light touch to draw black circles round Miss Fawcett's eyes.

This finished, he blacked in a gigantic moustache upon her upper lip, with the ends curling up over her cheeks to her very ears.

Then, afraid to go further, he stepped on tiptoe to the door, and went out, lightly closing it behind him.

With a low chuckle he scudded away down the passage, heading for the Sixth Form class-room. He did not mind the caning so much now.

He found Dr. Holmes in the Sixth Form-room. The Head glanced at him, and took the note and read it, and frowned. Then he gave Mellish a cut on either hand, and Mellish went out of the room squirming, with a sullen brow.

But he was grinning when he re-entered the Fourth Form class-room again.

"Faith, and he looks as if he has enjoyed the canin' intirely," Reilly remarked.

"What's the joke, Melly?" asked Pratt, of the New House.

Mellish shrugged his shoulders.

"Nothing."

"Didn't you get the licking?"

"Yes."

"Didn't it hurt?"

"Yes."

"Then what are you grinning at, you image?" demanded Hancock.

Mellish chuckled.

"Nothing."

Mr. Latham looked across the class.

"I am sure there is someone talking!" he exclaimed.

And the juniors ceased to ask questions. Mellish sat rubbing his hands and squirming and chuckling by turns. He was wondering what the Head would think when he found Miss Fawcett in his study, and every time he thought of it he burst into a fresh chuckle.

CHAPTER 4.

Dr. Holmes is Surprised.

"G-G-GOODNESS gracious!" Dr. Holmes uttered that startled exclamation as he came into his study.

The good doctor had just been released from the Sixth, who had just been released from him, both parties being probably just as much pleased by the mutual release. Dr. Holmes had come to his study, where he generally spent an hour before lunch. He had come in, and crossed towards the armchair, picking up en passant a newspaper from the table. After a tiring hour's work in a class-room, nothing was so refreshing as to glance over a paper in a comfortable chair before a cheerful fire.

Then he caught sight of his visitor.

Now, Dr. Holmes knew that Tom Merry & Co. were returning that day; but he was far from attaching as much importance to the event as Miss Fawcett did.

In fact, the matters at the school would have gone on much the same as far as the head-master was concerned, if those heroes of the Lower Forms had remained in Paris for the term of their natural lives.

He was not, consequently, expecting any of their relations at the school to welcome them. There was nothing unusual in a junior getting leave, and nothing to make a fuss about when he returned. So the good doctor thought. But even if he had been expecting a general visitation of relations anxious about the juniors, he could not possibly have recognised the figure in the armchair as one of them.

He had not been told that Miss Fawcett was there. And certainly Miss Priscilla's most intimate friend—even Hannah, at Laurel Villa, or Tom Merry himself—would hardly have recognised her now.

Miss Priscilla could generally be known at once by her face or her bonnet. Her bonnet had been taken off, and her face—the reader knows what had happened to that.

It was absolutely unrecognisable.

The black nose, the black circles round the eyes, and the huge, blacked-in moustache, rendered the kind old face unrecognisable, hideous, and grotesque.

It was no wonder that the amazed Head never even dreamed of connecting it with the face of anybody he had ever seen before.

For a full minute Dr. Holmes stood looking at the startling figure in the chair.

"G-g-goodness gracious! Bless my soul!" he stammered. "Who—what is this person? How has she come here? Dear me! I—I—I—"

He backed away from the amazing apparition somewhat nervously.

"Bless my soul!" he murmured, as he retreated to the door. "Bless my soul! It is some—some intoxicated person who has intruded here, and fallen asleep in my study, overcome with drink. Horrible!"

He touched the bell.

Then he hurried out into the passage, to meet Binks, the School House page, as he came in answer to the ring. Binks was not in a hurry to come; he seldom was. But he came along the passage at last.

"Binks!"

Binks started on seeing the Head outside his study.

"Yes, sir!"

"There is a—a person in my study, Binks."

"Yes, sir!"

"It is a—a woman, Binks."

"Yes, sir," said Binks, unmoved.

"I am afraid she is intoxicated, Binks, as she is most grotesquely blacked about the face, and is fast asleep in my chair."

"Yes, sir!"

"I desire her to be removed."

"Ho!" said Binks.

"I do not desire her to be hurt," said the doctor. "I suppose she is some—some disreputable person who has come in to ask for alms—though how she found her way to my study I cannot imagine. Do not be violent with her, Binks. Persuade her to move, and conduct her to the gates. If she is in need of money, you may assist her to the extent of a half-crown, for which I will reimburse you."

"Ho!"

"And—and do it at once, please, Binks. I—I will present you with a shilling afterwards. It is most distressing. Come to me in Mr. Railton's study when it is done."

It might have been an execution or a murder the Head was instructing Binks to get "done," by the way he spoke. Binks grinned slowly.

"S'pose the pusson won't go, sir?"

"You must persuade her."

"But if she kicks up a row, sir?"

"If she—what—what—ah, you mean if she resists?"

"Yes, sir, if she kicks up a row," said Binks, who thought his variety of the King's English was quite as good as the doctor's, and who couldn't see the faintest distinction between resisting and kicking up a row.

"In—in that case Binks, you—you must use force, but—but I trust it will not be necessary."

"If she's a tough 'un, sir—"

"A—a what, Binks?"

"A tough 'un, sir. I mean if she cuts up rusty and is 'ard to 'andle, sir."

"Ah, yes, I think I perceive your meaning."

"If she's a tough customer, sir, will you lend a 'and, sir?"

The Head jumped.

"I! Binks! Certainly not!"

"I may not be able to 'andle 'er alone, sir."

"Then—then you must call upon Taggles for help," said the Head, wiping his brow. "I—I shouldn't care to witness so—so distressing a scene."

"Werry well, sir!"

"Come and tell me immediately it is done, Binks."

"Yes, sir!"

And the Head walked away with a troubled face and a rustling gown to Mr. Railton's study, to take refuge in the School House-master's quarters till the deed was done.

Binks entered the study.

He was prepared to see some disreputable female there, some charwoman who had taken liquid refreshment not wisely but too well, perhaps. But even Binks was startled by the strange and ghastly apparition in the chair.

"My honly 'at!" said Binks, aloud. "Well, this is a fair caution! She don't look werry tough, anyway, that's a good job. 'Ere, wake up! Houter this!"

He shook the sleeper by the shoulder, and Miss Priscilla Fawcett started up out of the land of dreams.

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"THE ST. JIM'S SPORTSMAN."

A Grand Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By Martin Clifford.

NEXT THURSDAY:

CHAPTER 5.

Miss Fawcett is Surprised, Too.

MISS FAWCETT looked at Binks, and Binks looked at Miss Fawcett. Binks had seen Miss Fawcett several times, but he had not seen her arrive that day; and if he had done so he would never have recognised her now. He gave her another shake to bring her fully to her senses.

"Ere! This ain't a place for a nap!" said Binks. "Houter that!"

"Eh!"

"Houter that, I say!"

"What?"

"Houter that chair."

"Ah! I am still dreaming!" murmured Miss Fawcett. "This looks like a pageboy I have seen here, whose name is Binks, or Chinks, or something of that sort. But Chinks would never venture to address me in such a manner."

Binks gave the old lady a fresh shake.

"Houter that chair, ma'am!"

"Chinks—"

"Hey?"

"Are you Chinks?"

"Well, of all the cheek!" said Binks. "I'll teach 'er to ring the changes on my name. Will you get houter that chair, or shall I yank you hout?"

"I am not dreaming," said Miss Fawcett wonderingly. "I am awake, and Chinks is shaking me and raising his voice. I am very much surprised."

"Houter that chair, ma'am!"

"Is the doctor disengaged?" asked Miss Fawcett.

"Well, he ain't engaged as I know on," said Binks humorously. "He's married, you see. He, he, he! Har you going to get houter that chair?"

"I have called to see the doctor."

"You can't see him."

"Chinks!"

"And don't you call me outer my name, either," said Binks, who had the dislike of a certain class of people for being "mis-called." "My name's Binks, and a good hold Henglish name, too."

"Ah, yes, Binks! I should have remembered."

"Which I ain't never seed you afore, and don't want to see you agin," said Binks. "The 'Ead, he says I'm to show you houter this room, so hout you come. Now, har you going to go quietly?"

"Of course I am," said poor Miss Fawcett, rising to her feet. "You say Dr. Holmes gave you instructions that I was to leave his study?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Dear me!" said Miss Fawcett. "But I called to see him."

"I dessay you did," said Binks, with a knowing chuckle. "But the 'Ead ain't taking any. He's a downy bird, is the 'Ead. He says to me, he says, 'Binks, my dear fellow, show that pusson houter my study,' he says."

"Dear me!"

"He ain't got nothing to give away, so 'taint any use to wait and see him," chuckled Binks. "Now, do come quietly."

"You are insulting!"

Binks grinned.

"Ho, ho! Do come on!"

"But I wish to see the Head!"

"Look here, if you want 'elp, you can 'ave it up to a 'arf-crown," said Binks. "But you've got to go!"

"You dare not tell me that Dr. Holmes said so!" exclaimed poor, bewildered Miss Fawcett.

"He did, rather!"

"Impossible!"

"Now, do come quietly, ma'am," said Binks. "I 'ate to use violence, even towards a lady wot has been drinking so hearily in the day."

Miss Fawcett shrieked.

"Drinking!"

"That's wot I said, ma'am."

"You little wretch!"

"Ho!" said Binks, nettled. "A little wretch, am I? Look 'ere, are you goin' quietly? If you don't, I've got to use force, and the 'Ead said so."

"It is impossible!"

"Oh, come on!"

"I—I—I must see the Head!"

"You can't!"

"I must!"

"Then I shall 'ave to use force," said Binks. "Mind, it's your own fault!" And he took a grip upon Miss Fawcett's arm, and propelled her to the door.

The old lady from Huckleberry Heath was so astounded that she made no resistance. In a few moments she was out of the study and in the passage.

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE ST. JIM'S SPORTSMAN."

"This way," said Binks, leading the way down the broad passage that led into the School House—"this way! Kim on!"

"But—"

"Kim on!"

The bewildered Miss Fawcett went with the page perforce. She could not resist the pull upon her arm, and she was too dazed and bewildered to think of doing so.

"Dear me!" she murmured. "I am mistaken in thinking I woke up. This is some dream—some fearful nightmare!" And she went unresistingly down the passage.

They emerged into the broad, flagged corridor into which the lower Form class-rooms opened.

The Fourth Form and the Shell had just been dismissed, and the passage was pretty well crowded with juniors.

There was a general yell at the sight of Miss Fawcett. The juniors crowded round to look at Binks's prize.

"My only hat," exclaimed Bernard Glyn, of the Shell, "what is it?"

"Wild Woman from Borneo," suggested his chum, Clifton Dane.

"Ha, ha! Where did you pick that up, Binks?" exclaimed Gore.

"Dear me," said Skimpole, blinking at the unfortunate old lady through his spectacles—"dear me, what a remarkable-looking person! Is this a native of some foreign clime, Binks?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What do you call it, Binks?" asked Mellish.

Binks made no reply to the many questions.

He piloted his prisoner through the crowd, and out of the great doorway into the quadrangle, in the clear sunlight of the winter day.

Miss Fawcett tried to come to a halt on the School House steps. A crowd of curious fellows were following, not knowing in the least what to make of the strange sight.

"My—my bonnet," faltered Miss Fawcett.

"Stuff!" said Binks. "If you came without a bonnet, you can go without a bonnet."

"But—but—"

"Oh, kim on!"

"I—I—I—"

"Kim on, I say!"

And Binks piloted the unfortunate old lady across the quad., amid the yells and questions of crowds of fellows on all sides.

Miss Fawcett accompanied him unresistingly to the gates.

She was dazed and bewildered. Binks marched her through the open gates, and released her in the road. From the direction of Rylcombe a number of youthful forms came striding down the road, several of them carrying bags and rugs.

"Now, you cut hoff!" said Binks. "Don't you come a-bothering the 'Ead any more, ma'am. You ought to know better at your time of life. Go 'ome and wash your face, and lead a more respectable life. You 'ear me?"

"You dreadfully insolent boy!"

"And 'ere's a 'arf-crown for you, accordin' to horders," said Binks.

"Boy—"

"Nuff said. You cut hoff!" said Binks severely. "I'm surprised at you. Are you going to take this 'ere 'arf-crown, or are you not?"

"Certainly not! I—"

"Then cut hoff!"

"I—I—I—"

"Will you be off?" exclaimed Binks, catching sight of the advancing figures, one of whom had broken into a run. "My honny 'at, 'ere's Master Merry come back again!"

Miss Priscilla gave a shriek.

"Tommy—Tommy, dear!"

Tom Merry ran forward. In spite of the grotesque face, he knew his old governess—the familiar voice told him who she was.

"Yes, dear!"

"Oh, Tommy—Tommy darling!"

And Miss Priscilla fell, half fainting, into the arms of Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 6.

D'Arcy Decides to Look into the Matter.

TOM MERRY threw his arms round the falling form of the old lady, and, after a single glance at her face, his eyes flashed round to Binks.

"Did you do this?"

Binks jumped at the tone, and at the look upon Tom Merry's face. He had never seen the hero of the Shell look like that before.

"Wh-wh-what, Master Merry?" he stammered.

"Did you disfigure Miss Fawcett's face like this?" shouted Tom Merry.

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"M-m-m-m-miss Fawcett!" gasped Binks.

"Did you not know?"

"Know! It ain't—it can't be Miss Fawcett!"

"It is! Get aside!" Tom Merry, with a white, set face, drew his old governess in at the gates. "Come into the lodge, dear."

"But—"

"Someone has blacked your face," said Tom Merry, in a low voice. "Have you been asleep?"

"Oh dear! Yes, I fell asleep while I was waiting for the doctor in his study," said poor Miss Fawcett. "I—I—"

"Taggles!"

Tom Merry did not wish Miss Fawcett to run the gauntlet of the whole grinning quadrangle. He led her into Taggles' lodge.

The porter jumped up.

"Why—what—who—"

"This is Miss Fawcett!" said Tom Merry sharply.

"Oh crumbs!" said Taggles.

"Someone has blacked her face with ink and soot while she was asleep in her chair," said Tom Merry. "Mrs. Taggles, will you help her to clean this off, and then take her up to the house?"

"Yes, Master Merry," said Dame Taggles.

Tom Merry placed his old governess in a chair.

"You are all right now, dear?" he whispered.

"Yes, Tommy darling," said Miss Priscilla faintly.

And Tom Merry left the old lady in Mrs. Taggles' kindly hands, and strode back to the gates, where Binks was surrounded by the juniors, and was answering their questions as well as he could.

"Binks!"

Tom Merry's voice made the School House page jump.

"Ye-es, Master Merry."

"You did not know that was Miss Fawcett?"

"N-n-no."

"That's likely enough," said Blake. "I didn't know her. I should never have recognised her as Miss Fawcett, Tom."

"Same here," said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"Somebody has played a dastardly trick on her," he said, between his teeth. "A jape like that on a man is all very well—not on a woman, especially an old one. I'm going to find out who it was!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "The pwopah capah now is to find out who it was, and give him a fearful thwashin'!"

"Hear, hear!" said Blake.

"I—I—I'm very sorry, Master Merry," said Binks, who, like nearly everybody at St. Jim's, was very fond of the hero of the Shell. "I—I never had the least idea that it was Miss Fawcett, and the 'Ead hadn't when he told me to take her out of his study."

"Take her out of his study?"

"Yes, Master Merry. He says to me, says the 'Ead, 'There's a drunken pussen in my study,' he says, 'and I don't know how she got there; but take her out, and come and tell me when you've done it.'"

Tom Merry's lips set hard.

"Then she was in the Head's study?"

"Yes, Master Merry."

"But—how—"

"She was fast asleep in the chair afore the fire," said Binks, almost tearfully. "How was I to know, with 'er face blacked like a nigger?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"I don't blame you, Binks. I knew she was to be here waiting for me, and I suppose she waited in the Head's study, and fell asleep."

"Yes, Master Merry."

"Then someone played this rotten trick," said Blake.

"But the chaps would all be in their class-rooms," said Figgins, looking keenly at Binks. "Where were you, Binks?"

Binks started.

"Oh, Master Figgins, you wouldn't suspect me?"

"Not for a moment," said Tom Merry hastily. "But if the fellows were in their class-rooms—and they cannot have been out many minutes," he added, looking up at the school clock.

"No, sir. The 'Ead found her there when he went in after dismissin' the Sixth Form, sir," said Binks. "The young gents must ha' been in the class-rooms when it was done."

"Well, I'm going to find out who it was," said Tom Merry, frowning. "That will do, Binks."

"You ain't waxy with me, Master Merry?" said Binks uneasily.

"No, no! You couldn't help it."

And Binks, comforted by the assurance, went his way. Tom Merry's eyes were gleaming. He went back to Taggles' lodge, while his comrades walked on to the school.

"Bai Jove, it was a wotten twick!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked. "I wathah think that it's up to me to help Tom Mewwy discovah the wottah."

"What can you do?" asked Blake.

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon him.

"You know that I have pwactised considerably as an amateur detective, Blake," he said, with dignity. "I have studied the methods of Sherlock Holmes and Sexton Blake, and I flattah myself that there are few mystewies I could not solve."

"I don't think!"

"Weally, Blake, you cannot have forgotten that when we were in Fwance I solved the mystewy of the bank wobbah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no cause for vulgah mewwiment in that statement."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall offah my services to Tom Mewwy," said D'Arcy coldly. "Or, wathah, as he is as sceptical as you chaps on the subject, I shall take up the case without offewin' my services, and shall acquaint him with the fact when I discovah the wascal."

"Good old Gussy!"

"I wegard that as a widiculous wemark. I already have a suspish on the mattah."

"Already!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You don't suspect one of us, I hope?" asked Monty Lowther, with a look of exaggerated alarm.

"Weally, Lowthah, as we have only just returned fwom a foweyn countwy, I could hardly— Oh, I see you are wottin', you wottah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't be an ass! This is a sewious mattah—"

"I suppose it's not so serious as getting some grub," said Fatty Wynn. "I can't think of holding out till dinner. You fellows coming to the tuckshop?"

"What-ho!" said Figgins.

"Weally, deah boys—"

Figgins & Co. strolled away towards the school shop. Lowther and Manners grinned, and walked away in another direction. They had some films to develop, having done a great deal of photographing in France, and they didn't feel particularly interested in D'Arcy's detective theories.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy, looking at Blake and Digby.

"Bai Jove. I weally think—"

"What with?" asked Digby.

"Pway don't be an ass, Dig. I weally have a suspish as to the chap who played this wotten twick upon Miss Fawcett."

"Rats!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"With all your extraordinary brain-power, Gussy, how the dickens can you have a clue, when you haven't been inside the school gates five minutes?" demanded Blake.

"I didn't say I had a clue, Blake. I said I had a suspish."

"Oh, rats!"

"I wathah think you will agwee with me when I mention the name."

"Go ahead!"

"Goah!" said Arthur Augustus impressively.

"Gore!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, I don't know—"

"Weflect, deah boy! Goah is Tom Mewwy's enemy—always has been—and it was ovah a twick—a dirty twick—he played Tom Mewwy that he was expelled fwom St. Jim's. The Head allowed him to come back again, but that doesn't prove that he's changed; it only shows that Dr. Holmes hopes he will change."

"You talk like a book, Gussy."

"Yaas, and you wemembah, too that Goah did play a wotten twick about Miss Pwiscillah once—got up an effigy in imitation of the respected old lady—"

"Yes, and Tom Mery licked him for it."

"That would only make Goah worse. Licking a chap like that doesn't always do him the amount of good it ought."

"Ha, ha! No; it's a waste of labour sometimes."

"It would only make Goah spiteful. So, you see, I have ewevy weason to suspect Goah."

"But Gore must have been in the class-room with the rest of the Shell."

"It's easy to slip out of the class-room for a few minutes. Goah might have been sent for somethin' by Mr. Linton."

"Yes, that's so."

"Or he might have made an excuse to get out, knowin' that Miss Fawcett was there. Knowin' that Tom Mewwy was comin' back, it's just the twick he would play."

"Yes, that's so, but—"

"But what, deah boy?" asked D'Arcy, in the patient,

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patronising tone of a great man willing to consider suggestions from lesser individuals.

"Well, I rather thought that Gore was turning over a new leaf since he's been expelled. The Head's letting him come back, and us not being down on him, seem to have made a sort of impression on him."

"Yaas, but that might be humbug."

"Well, it might."

"I hope I am not a suspicious chap," said D'Arcy. "I know there is no kind of bad form so absolutely wotten as bein' suspicious. But Goah has a bad record, and he cannot expect fellows who know him to take him on trust."

"Oh, no, that's true!"

"He will have to pprove his wepentance by good works before he can expect people to believe in it, as they say, you know."

"Yes, rather!"

"And I know for a fact that he hasn't given up bullyin' the fags, and that doesn't look as if his wepentance was genuine."

"A Daniel come to judgment," grinned Blake.

"Gussy is getting on," said Digby. "If he keeps on like this, I shouldn't wonder if they let him into the police force when he leaves school."

"Weally, Dig—"

"Hallo! Here's Herries!" exclaimed Blake. "Hallo! Hallo!"

"I am goin' to twack down Goah, and pprove whethah he's innocent or guilty—"

"Yes, but here's Herries and Towser!"

"Weally, Blake—"

Gr-r-r-r-r!

It was the well-known voice of Towser, the bulldog.

CHAPTER 7.

Towser's Welcome.

HERRIES, of the Fourth, came up with a beaming smile upon his face, and Towser, the bulldog, was jumping round him as if he had been a giddy little terrier, instead of a grave bulldog who ought to have known better. Towser was pleased to see the chums again, as much as Herries was.

Herries had been going to take the trip to France along with Tom Merry & Co., but he had been prevented by an attack of seediness on the part of Towser. Herries wouldn't have gone to Paris to be made President of the Republic if it involved leaving Towser while Towser was ill. So Herries had stayed at St. Jim's, and his fatherly care had evidently had its result, for Towser was looking very fit again. In fact, he was so fit that he was quite playful, somewhat to the alarm of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who never cared to have a dog sniffing about his immaculate trousers.

"Jolly glad to see you chaps again!" exclaimed Herries, shaking hands with Blake and then with Dig. "Had a good time?"

"Ripping!" said Jack. "So Towser's pulled round?"

"Yes—look at him!"

"He looks ripping—"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Give us your fin, old Gus!"

"Certainly, deah boy, but—"

"Anything the matter?"

"I do not quite like the way Towsah—"

"Don't look at him, then," said Herries carelessly.

"That's all right! Towser sometimes gets irritated if he's locked up. Keep your eyes off him, and he'll be as good as an angel. You can trust Towser."

"That's all vewy well—"

"So you had a jolly time in France?" said Herries. "So sorry I couldn't be with you, but I had to look after Towser."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Hallo!"

"Pway put a chain on that beastly dog, and dwag him away!"

"Blessed if I can understand Gussy!" said Herries. "A chap would think he'd try to be decent to a chap's dog for once, after coming home from a run abroad."

"Yaas, but—"

"After seeing French dogs, I should think you'd be really glad of the sight of a real true-bred British bulldog," said Herries indignantly.

"Yaas, but—"

"Besides, he won't hurt you. Towser wouldn't hurt a fly. When he kills a rabbit he never hurts it. Just a nip, and it's done; it must be almost a pleasure, really, it's done in such a workmanlike way. When he got at Mellish's white rabbits the other day—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"Well, it was funny, though Mellish didn't seem to see

it," said Herries, with a grin. "Towser was extra hungry that day. The rabbits weren't hurt. They simply disappeared. Mellish made a fuss, but I told him, what could he expect if he left a cage door open. Rabbits will run out, and bulldogs are bulldogs. Mellish couldn't deny that."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"He threatened to poison Towser," said Herries. "I told him if anything happened to Towser, something would happen to him, and sharp. Why, a dog like Towser is worth a dozen chaps like Mellish. Talk about the sanctity of human life. I could point out a lot of chaps who'd be missed a jolly sight less than Towser would be. Mellish is one, and Gore is another. By the way, those two aren't on such chummy terms lately."

"Oh, how's that?" asked Blake, who was naturally anxious to know all the news.

His trip abroad had been a short one, but he felt as if he had been away from St. Jim's a long time, and he wanted to know what had happened all the while he was gone.

Herries shook his head.

"Blessed if I know! Gore's turning over a new leaf, perhaps, or else Mellish gets on even his nerves. They don't chum as they used to. Gore was licking him, too, the other day, and Mellish asked Clifton Dane to interfere."

"And did he?"

"Yes, he gave Gore a licking. Gore put up a good fight, and took his licking quietly when he had the worst of it. And he never said what he was licking Mellish for, and Mellish never said, either."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Hallo!"

"Pway call Towsah—"

"Hi! You boulder, Towser—Towsy! But, speaking about Melly's white rabbits, he didn't deserve to have animals, you know. He used to keep them in a filthy state, and I know he never fed them regularly. I used to give them grub myself, because he neglected them. It was a mercy Towser polished them off. I pointed that out to him, but some chaps are so unreasonable. He wanted me to pay for the rabbits."

"Cheek!" said Blake.

"What-ho! I told him Towser had eaten the rabbits, not I; and he could consider that part of Towser belonged to him if he liked. That was fair."

"Fair as anything."

"Yes, and I offered to let him pay for Towser's licence next time, as a proof of part ownership—and he was quite insulting. Some fellows can't see reason. Towser! Why, where is that blessed dog?"

"He's snuffin' wound my legs, Hewwies. I should be awfully obliged if you would put the fwightful beast on a chain!"

"Rats! He's only a little joyful."

"Weally—"

"Besides, you're looking at him," said Herries indignantly. "You know, he gets excited if you watch him."

"You uttah ass! If I don't keep an eye on him, he will buwy his teeth in my twousahs!" exclaimed the exasperated swell of St. Jim's.

"He's more likely to do it if you do keep an eye on him, Gussy. I've told you he doesn't like being looked at."

"I—I wefuse to be bothahed by a beastly dog!" said Arthur Augustus. "I'm certain he means to wip my twousahs as soon as I take my eye off him. I have always noticed that Towsah has no wespect whatevah for a fellow's twousahs!"

"He's all right so long as you don't look at him."

"Wats! I shall wetire!"

And D'Arcy retired, at a rather hurried pace, towards the School House. Towser looked after him, and broke into a trot in pursuit. Perhaps Towser thought that D'Arcy was starting a game with him, or perhaps he imagined that a guilty conscience caused this sudden flight. At all events Towser pursued merrily.

D'Arcy looked back, and saw the bulldog pursuing him, and broke into a run. For himself the swell of St. Jim's feared nothing; he was as brave as a lion. But his trousers! He dashed wildly towards the steps of the School House.

Towser gave a merry snort, and dashed in pursuit. Up the steps went the swell of St. Jim's, panting; and he naturally took a step too many under the circumstances, and came to grief.

He found himself suddenly sitting on the steps, with Towser's jaw only a couple of yards away. He waved his hands wildly.

"Keep off, you feahful-beast! Shoo! Shoo! Yah! Keep off!"

Herries was whistling to Towser, and calling to him, and Towser, with a reluctant look at D'Arcy, turned and trotted back to his master. Arthur Augustus sat on the steps, and gasped for breath.



"T—this is the tuck-shop, er—I mean, here is the shop!" stuttered Fatty Wynn, waiting for Miss Fawcett to enter.

"By Jove! The wotten bwute! I have been thwown into quite a fluttah!"

And D'Arcy staggered up. A Shell fellow came out of the doorway of the School House, and gave him a hand up.

"Merci," said D'Arcy—"I mean, thank you very much, deah boy!"

Then he gave a start.

The hand on his sleeve—the helping hand—was stained with ink; the fingers fairly blackened it. D'Arcy, startled, looked at the fellow who was helping him; it was Gore, of the Shell.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus.

CHAPTER 8.

On the Track.

GORE grinned at the swell of St. Jim's.

"Narrow escape!" he remarked. "But I think Tower was only playing, you know. I don't think he'd hava bitten you."

"I wasn't afraid for myself," said Arthur Augustus; "but I had these twousahs made in Pawis, and I don't want them

wuined. That feahful beast has no wespect for a fellow's twousahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is weally no laughin' mattah, you know. Goah! Bai Jove; though, have you had an accident with an ink-bottle?"

Gore glanced at his hand.

"Phew! I didn't know I had so much ink about me!" he remarked. "I upset a bottle in my study when I was filling my inkpot."

"Bai Jove!"

"I think I'll go and wash some of it off," said Gore.

And, with a nod, he strolled away.

Arthur Augustus jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and looked after the Shell fellow with a very curious expression.

He already suspected Gore of having inked Miss Fawcett's face as she sat asleep in the Head's study, and now he had come upon a positive clue with surprising suddenness. Gore's fingers were smothered with ink!

His explanation might be true, or it might not. What was the best course for an amateur detective to pursue under the circumstances? Although he was convinced of his abilities as an amateur detective, D'Arcy had a natural shrinking

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from anything like spying, and exactly how to carry out investigations, and at the same time avoid acting in a spying manner, was a puzzle.

He looked out into the quad again. Herries had taken Tower away in the direction of the kennels, and Blake and Digby were coming towards the School House. Tom Merry and Miss Fawcett had gone into the Head's house.

Blake and Digby grinned as they joined Gussy on the steps.

"Pretty good for an impromptu sprint," said Blake. "You're in form, Gussy! Your run abroad has done you good!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"I saw you talking to Gore," remarked Dig, with a grin. "Have you discovered any clues yet?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Eh?" said Blake and Digby together.

"I have discovahed a clue, deah boys!"

"Oh, come off!"

"I am speakin' quite sewiously! I have discovahed a clue! Goah's fingahs were smothahed with ink!"

"Phew!" said Blake.

"It's a fact, deah boy! He said he had upset a bottle of ink in his study when he was fillin' his ink-bottle."

"Very likely he did."

"Yaas; but——" D'Arcy hesitated. "I don't quite know what to do. It seems caddish to doubt a fellow's word, I know."

"Not a fellow like Gore," said Blake promptly. "I've known him to tell lies, if it comes to that, and many of them!"

"Where is he now?"

"He went away to wash his hand. He hadn't noticed the ink on it till I remarked on it!"

"Well, it's a curious coincidence," said Blake, "if nothing more. Let's have a look in Gore's study, and see if there's any trace of a bottle of ink being upset."

"Yaas, wathah; I was thinkin' of that, but—but——"

"Well, go on!"

"Doesn't it seem a little as if we were spyin' on the chap?"

Jack Blake gave a roar.

"You ass! How can you investigate without making investigations?"

"Well, I suppose it would be wathah difficult!"

"Oh, come on!"

And Blake led the way upstairs. D'Arcy and Digby followed him. They hurried along the Fourth Form passage, and into the Shell quarters, and stopped at the study next to Tom Merry's, tenanted by Gore and Skimpole.

Blake knocked at the door, and entered.

Skimpole, of the Shell, was there, seated at the table, with his left elbow resting there, the fingers of his left hand being clutched in his hair. In his right he held a pen, of which he was thoughtfully gnawing the handle. There was a half-written sheet before him, and Skimpole was blinking at it through his spectacles, evidently in the throes of the deepest thought.

He did not look up as the chums of the Fourth came in.

"Hallo, Skimmy!" said Blake.

Skimpole did not answer. He was evidently deep in composition. Skimpole was strong on every kind of "ism," including Socialism, Determinism, Darwinism, and so forth. When he sat down to write the outer world was lost to him. Words of six or seven syllables would roll off his pen with as much facility as if he understood what they meant. Sometimes, however, he would be buried in thought, thinking out some scheme for social amelioration, and then he was deaf to everything.

Sometimes these fits of abstraction would seize him in the class-room, and then Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, would gently awake him with a rap over the knuckles with a pointer—a proceeding which the amateur Socialist regarded as a flagrant infringement of the rights of a free citizen of a free country.

Blake picked up the poker from the grate, and brought it down upon the table beside Skimpole with a terrific impact.

Crash!

Skimpole jumped.

The inkpot jumped into the air, giving his foolscap a beautifully dappled appearance, and he blinked round at the Fourth-Formers.

"Really—— Ah, Blake! Oh——"

"Wake up!"

"I was not asleep; I was merely thinking! I am glad to see you fellows home again. But, dear me, you have spoiled my paper!"

"Never mind; it wasn't worth anything!" said Digby consolingly.

"Really, Digby——"

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"I suppose there's plenty more piffle where that came from?" suggested Digby, with a disparaging glance at Skimpole's big, bumpy forehead.

"It was an article for the Christmas Number of 'Tom Merry's Weekly,'" said Skimpole. "It deals with the question of starvation in London in the winter——"

"Oh!"

"It will be an appropriate article for a Christmas Number, as I am calculating the number of children who perish of hunger in the metropolis alone during the Christmas season——"

"Chuck it!"

"It is necessary to go into these matters, Blake, or they will never get altered," said Skimpole gently. "We have what is called a Government in this country. Yet innocent children are hungry and ragged. We are going to change this by introducing Socialism. Now, I am teaching the young idea how to shoot, so to speak, by putting an article on the subject into the Christmas Number of the school paper. A simple sum, showing how many children perish of hunger——"

"Shut up!" roared Blake. "Do you want to give us the creeps, you frabjous ass?"

"Really, Blake——"

"If I find anything of the sort in the Christmas Number of the 'Weekly,' I'll tear it up, and then tear you up!" said Blake warningly. "You just bear that in mind! But I didn't come here to talk Socialism——"

"With your limited intelligence——"

"Are you looking for a thick ear, Skimmy?"

"Certainly not! I was merely stating a fact!"

"If you want to giggle, Dig, you can go out in the passage!" said Blake crossly. "And I don't see what you are twisting up your mug like that for, Gussy!"

"I wasn't twistin' it up, and I wufuse to have my face spoken of as a mug!"

"What were you doing with it, then?"

"I was smilin'!"

"Well, you ought to go behind a screen to smile, then!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Look here, Skimmy, what about that bottle of ink that Gore upset here?" said Blake. "Have you cleaned it up?"

"Eh?"

"Have you cleaned up the ink?" roared Blake.

"What ink?"

"The ink that Gore upset here."

"I was not aware that Gore upset any ink, Blake."

"Then he must have cleaned it up himself."

"I presume so, if he upset any!"

"That isn't like Gore, deah boys," said D'Arcy, with a shake of the head. "You know what an untidy boundah he is, and he always leaves things for othah fellows to do, too!"

"Yes, I know he does."

"I am bound to say that Gore has shown some decided signs of improvement lately," said Skimpole, blinking at them. "It is since the time he was allowed to come back after being expelled. I think that my arguments at last are having some effect on him. I have tried for a long time to convert him to Socialism, and absolutely without result; but I must say that he seems to be becoming more decent now. He used to hide my spectacles, and that was a great trouble to me, as I am very short-sighted, and, once they were off, I could not see to find them. Now, he has not played that very mean and spiteful trick for a long time."

"Bai Jove!"

"And then he has ceased to tear up my books and papers, and to play the mouth-organ when I am explaining anything," said Skimpole. "He still calls me by opprobrious epithets when I am speaking about Determinism, but he allows me to talk about Socialism without rudeness, which is a great change."

"Well, I suppose some isms are less idiotic than others," said Blake. "I don't know much about Socialism, but I know Determinism is rot. So Gore shows his sense. But what on earth is making him civil to anybody? That's the puzzle."

"It is the effect of my arguments——"

"My dear chap, the effect of your arguments is quite the reverse. It makes people uncivil," said Blake. "It makes them bunk, too. I'm off. Come on, you chaps!"

"I should like to read out this paper to you."

"Read it out, then."

"Certainly, I——"

"You don't mind if we get the other side of the door, do you?"

"Really, Blake——"

The chums of the Fourth left the study. Blake slammed the door, and Skimpole was left alone with his precious paper. In the passage the chums exchanged significant glances.



Gore released Mellish as if he had suddenly become red hot. He dragged off his cap and stood staring sheepishly at Miss Fawcett.

"Looks bad," said Blake. "Gore is too jolly careless to clean up ink he's upset. He would leave it for Skimpole to do."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Looks as if it's a whopper about spilling the ink. Gore is never particular to a whopper or two when it suits him."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Dig. "He rapped that out on the spur of the moment, to account for the ink on his fingers."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then if we look into the matter further, the next thing is to discover whether Gore was absent from the class-room or not a short time before classes were dismissed," said Jack Blake thoughtfully.

"I suppose we can ask some of the Shell fellows?" said Dig.

"Yes. Let's look for Glyn or Clifton Dane; they'll tell us like a shot."

"Good! Get along to Kangaroo's study."

And the Fourth-Formers, feeling themselves hot on the scent now, walked along the Shell passage to the end study, the quarters of Kangaroo, Glyn, and Dane, otherwise known as Cornstalk & Co.

CHAPTER 9.

Miss Fawcett Wishes to Celebrate an Important Occasion.

"MISS FAWCETT! I am so—er—pleased to see you!"

And Dr. Holmes shook hands very cordially with the lady who came into his study leaning on the arm of Tom Merry.

"Really, Dr. Holmes!" said Miss Fawcett faintly.

"I did not expect you—I mean I did not know you were coming, Miss Fawcett," said the Head. "How curious that you should arrive just at the same time as Merry."

Miss Fawcett murmured something.

"And have you had a pleasant holiday in France, Merry?" said the Head, shaking hands with Tom in his turn.

"Yes, sir, very pleasant, thank you."

"Pray sit down, Miss Fawcett."

And the Head waved his hand towards the armchair. Miss Fawcett shivered and drew back.

"I—I will take another chair, please," she said hesitatingly.

The Head looked a little surprised.

"Certainly, madam!"

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Tom Merry pulled out a straight-backed chair for Miss Priscilla, who sank into it.

The old lady had quite cleaned off the traces of Mellish's little joke, in Taggles' lodge, and there was nothing to indicate that she was the strange "pusson" whom Binks had ejected from the study.

The Head glanced at Miss Fawcett and at Tom Merry in some surprise. He could see that the old lady was not quite herself, and Tom's hard, set look was very unusual.

"I trust you are quite well, Miss Fawcett," he said mildly.

"Oh, dear!"

"Miss Fawcett has been insulted since she came to the school, sir," said Tom Merry.

The Head started.

"Insulted!"

"Yes, sir. You must know about it—"

"No, I do not wish Dr. Holmes to know, Tommy darling," said Miss Fawcett faintly. "I quite forgive the ill-natured person who played that trick upon me."

"But Dr. Holmes must know, dear. Taggles will tell the doctor, and everyone in St. Jim's is talking about the incident," said Tom Merry mildly.

"Oh, dear! I do not wish to have anyone punished."

"I don't understand this," said the Head. "What has happened?"

"I hope you will punish no one, sir," said Miss Fawcett, in great distress. "I should be very sorry if my visit here caused pain to anyone."

"But—but—"

"And a punishment too, would mar my dear Tommy's home-coming."

"But what has happened?"

"Promise me that you will inflict no punishment. It was merely a thoughtless trick upon myself."

"Pray tell me what it was."

"I—I was shown into your study to wait for you—"

"Then you have been here some time?" asked the Head. "I was not aware of it."

"I gave special orders to the maid not to interrupt you, as I knew you were busy with the dear boys," said Miss Priscilla.

"Ah, I understand!"

"While I was here—I suppose I was a little fatigued—I fell asleep in the chair. I was awakened by Chinks—I should say Binks—removing me forcibly from the apartment."

"Good heavens!"

"Acting under your instructions, as he informed me."

"My dear madam!"

"And—and I do not know what would have happened if my darling Tommy had not come to the rescue," said Miss Fawcett, with a little sob.

"But—but—I—surely—"

"Someone had blacked Miss Fawcett's face while she was asleep, sir," said Tom Merry, Miss Fawcett having forgotten to mention that rather important detail.

The Head drew a quick breath.

"Oh, I—I see! Then the—the person I saw—"

"Was myself, sir," said Miss Priscilla, with dignity.

The Head turned pink.

"How can you ever pardon me?" he exclaimed. "I—I hadn't the faintest idea, of course. That anyone would dare to play such a trick upon a visitor of mine seems incredible. It is amazing—absolutely astounding."

And the Head dropped into his chair, overwhelmed.

"I do not wish anyone to be punished," said Miss Fawcett.

"Punished! If it was a St. Jim's boy, I will expel him. If it was anyone else—it could have been no one else but Binks—"

"Oh, I am sure it was not Chinks—Binks!"

"Then it was one of the boys, and he shall be expelled."

"Doctor—"

"Or at least flogged."

"Oh, no, no!"

"But, my dear madam—"

"My dear doctor—"

"Such an outrage—"

"I forgive the person."

"But—but—"

"I entreat you, Dr. Holmes, to let the matter rest where it is," said Miss Fawcett. "I prefer to leave the boy to his conscience. I would not wish to make anyone regret my coming here, and especially on the occasion of my darling's home-coming."

Dr. Holmes hesitated. He wished very much to discover who had played such a trick upon his guest, and to make an example of him; but Miss Fawcett was very much distressed.

"Well, perhaps, madam, the wretched boy who did this may safely be left to the contempt of his companions and Form-fellows," said the Head slowly; and for a moment

his eyes met Tom Merry's. "If he is discovered, I am sure the boys will show their disapproval of his conduct in a very marked manner."

"They are sure to, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Then you will not inquire into the matter, Dr. Holmes," said Miss Fawcett, in great relief.

"Since you wish it, madam, I will allow it to rest where it is, as far as I am concerned," said the doctor.

"Oh, thank you so much! Now, I called, my dear doctor, in connection with my darling boy's home-coming," said Miss Fawcett. "But perhaps the dear child had better run away to his dinner. I think I hear the bell."

"Certainly!"

Tom Merry left the study. He was ready for his dinner, as a matter of fact, though he was thinking less of that important function than of finding the "rotter" who had tried to make Miss Fawcett look ridiculous. Dr. Holmes had said nothing on the subject, but Tom Merry understood very well that it was left to him to find out the culprit, and to visit him with an unofficial punishment.

"And now, my dear madam," said Dr. Holmes, a little nervously. He could see by the expression of Miss Fawcett's face that she had some idea in her head, and he was a little afraid of Miss Fawcett's ideas.

"I was thinking, Dr. Holmes, that on an occasion like this—"

"Like—er—what, madam?"

"My darling Tommy's home-coming."

The Head elevated his eyebrows a little.

"But he has been away so short a time, Miss Fawcett."

"But he has travelled in a foreign country, among all sorts of dangers."

"I believe the danger of travelling in France is very limited in our days, madam," said Dr. Holmes, with a smile.

"Possibly, though I am told Paris is very full of pitfalls, and I specially warned my dear boy not to fall into any of them," said Miss Fawcett. "However, I was thinking that on the occasion of his home-coming—"

"Yes?" said the Head resignedly.

"That some sort of a celebration would be proper. I believe it is now very near the time of breaking up for the Christmas holidays."

"Yes, very near."

"You would perhaps not care to let the school break up a week or two earlier—"

"Madam! Why?"

"To celebrate—"

"Ahem! I am afraid it would be impossible," gasped Dr. Holmes.

"Of course, I should not care to interfere with any arrangements at St. Jim's," said Miss Fawcett, with her charming smile. "Perhaps, instead of that, you might grant an extra holiday to-day."

"It is a half-holiday this afternoon, madam."

"Ah, that is fortunate!"

The Head thought it was, too. He glanced at his watch.

"Dear me! It is time for luncheon."

"Yes? You would have no objection, Dr. Holmes, to my providing some treat for the dear boys, to celebrate my darling's home-coming?"

"N-n-n-no, not at all, Miss Fawcett."

"I am so glad. You are very kind, Dr. Holmes."

"Oh, no! May I take you in to lunch?"

And Dr. Holmes gave the kind old lady of Huckleberry Heath his arm; and during lunch Miss Fawcett entertained him with many plans for the entertainment of the boys of St. Jim's, to celebrate the home-coming of her darling Tommy, to all of which Dr. Holmes listened with exemplary patience. But he could not help wishing a little, at the bottom of his heart, that Tom Merry was still in Paris, and his kind old governess at Huckleberry Heath.

CHAPTER 10.

Arthur Augustus is Quite Certain.

BUZZ!

"Bai Jove, deah boys, that's the dinnah-bell!"

"Go hon!"

"But it's dinnah, you know!"

"Dinner can wait," said Blake. "Come on."

And Jack Blake continued on his way to the end study in the Shell passage. There was a sound of voices proceeding from it—three voices, apparently all talking at once.

Kangaroo had rejoined his chums, and they were insisting upon a minute account of all that had happened during his trip with Tom Merry to Paris—and Kangaroo, at the same time, wanted to know all the news of St. Jim's. They seemed to be settling the question by all talking and nobody listening, and there was a perfect babel in the end study as Blake kicked the door open.

"Hallo, you bounders!" said Blake. "Haven't you heard the dinner-bell?"

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"Nix," said Kangaroo. "Has it gone?"
 "No, it's still there. Can't you hear it?"
 "Hallo! Has Blake come back as funny as he went?" asked Bernard Glyn. "How did they stand his jokes in Paris? Any casualties?"

"Look here, dummy——"
 "I wegard our fwiend Glyn's wemark as quite in ordah, Blake. I wegard it as wotten of you to follow in Lowthah's footsteps, and work off all sorts of wotten gags on your fwiends."

"Are you looking for a fat nose, Gussy?"
 "Weally, Blake——"
 "Well, if it's dinner, we may as well go," said Clifton Dane. "Awfully good of the three of you to come and tell us dinner was ready."

Blake snorted.
 "We didn't come for that. We wanted to ask you a question."

"Phew! Does it take three of you to ask one question?" asked Kangaroo, with an air of astonishment.

"Don't be an ass!"
 "Go ahead and ask the question," said the Cornstalk. "Don't confine yourself to one. You can ask two if you like."

"Weally, Kangawoo——"
 "Leave it to me, Gussy. I——"
 "Yaas, but——"
 "Don't interrupt. I want to know——"
 "It's you who are intewwuptin', Blake."
 "Shut up!" roared Blake. "I want to know, Kangaroo, if anybody went out to the Shell class-room this morning during lessons?"

"Well, if I had double-length, gilt-edged, back-action, non-skidding, telescopic eyes, I might be able to tell you," said Kangaroo. "But as I was in a railway train all the time, and have only the common, or garden, kind of eyes, I must give it up."

"Ass! I wasn't asking you! Glyn, or Dane——"
 "What on earth do you want to know for?" demanded Dane.

"I've a reason."
 "Jai raison," said D'Arcy. "Vous voyez——"
 "None of your Saturday-to-Monday French here," said Glyn. "Vous n'avez pas raison. Vous etes fathead. Yes, as a matter of fact, a chap did leave the class-room——"

"Who?"
 "I did," said Glyn. "I left it—where it is. You surely never expected me to take it along with me when Linton turned us out?"

Jack Blake glared at the humorous youth from Liverpool.
 "You utter ass! Is this a time for jokes, when dinner's waiting? Did any chap get up on his hind legs and trot out during lessons?"

"Yes."
 "Well, what chap was it?"
 "Gore."

"Bai Jove!"
 "Sure it was Gore?" exclaimed Blake excitedly.
 "Yes. Well, it might have been Gore's ghost," said Glyn.

"I wasn't observing him very closely, and I know it's the time of year for ghosts. But as far as I can say, as an eyewitness, it was Gore himself."

"Jolly good!" said Digby.
 "Blessed if I can see anything good in Gore going out of the class-room to fetch his blessed Virgil," said Glyn. "But perhaps you're like the chap in the play, who found sermons in stones and good in everything. I'm going to dinner."

"And Cornstalk & Co. marched off, and the chums of the Fourth followed them more slowly to the dining-room. There was conviction in every mind now."

"Goah left the class-room," said D'Arcy. "Goah had stains of ink on his fingahs. Goah was the chap anybody natuwallly suspected in the first place of playin' the twick. Goah is the man."

"Looks like it."
 "Oh, it's a dead cert, deah boy! There's no twaces in his study to beah out his assertion that he upset a bottle of ink, either."

Jack Blake nodded thoughtfully.
 "Everything tells against him, there's no mistake about that," he remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "I suppose it was Gore," Digby remarked. "Finding that he left the class-room during lessons is the finish. Gore's the chap. Of course, it's no good trying to prove just what he did with his time—there was no one to see him, or he wouldn't have done what he did. It was because there was no one watching him that he did it. It's only possible to get circumstantial evidence, and I don't see how it could be stronger than it is."

"Quite wight, deah boy. I wathah think I have worked out this case vewy well. Pewwaps you will admit now,

Blake, that I have somethin' of a gift as an amateur detective."

"Well, you've got somethin' of a gift as an amateur gramophone, anyway," said Blake. "Ring off, and let's get some dinner."

"Weally, Blake——"
 "Oh, come on—let's have the rest afterwards!"
 "I was thinkin'——"

"You exaggerate! Come on."
 "Pway don't be an ass. I was thinkin' that I haven't changed my clothes since we awwived. It is imposs. for me to go in to dinnah in dusty boots and with the stains of twavel all ovah me."

"Not at all. Come on."
 "I will go up and——"
 "Now, you jolly well won't!" said Blake, taking hold of his arm. "You'll come in with us! Collar his other fin, Dig!"

"What-ho!" said Dig.
 "Weally, deah boys——"

Arthur Augustus expostulated in vain. He was skated along to the dining-room, and they ran him in at such a speed that they could not stop in time, and they crashed together into the Fifth-Form table.

Lefevre of the Fifth was raising a spoonful of the liquid portion of Irish stew to his mouth. The stew was hot, and Lefevre was raising the spoon slowly. Blake, Digby, and D'Arcy crashed into the back of his chair.

The spoonful of liquid went into Lefevre's eye, and the spoon went into his waistcoat. The Fifth-Former gave a fiendish yell.

"Ow!" gasped D'Arcy. "I weally beg your pardon."
 "Yow!" shrieked Lefevre, knocking madly at his eye. "Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Sorry!" gasped Blake.

"Dear me," said little Mr. Lathom, blinking through his spectacles from the Fourth-Form table; "dear me! Has anything happened?"

"Blake! Digby!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "D'Arcy! How dare you!"

"Weally, sir——"
 "How dare you rush into a room like that?"
 "It—it—it was an accident, sir!"

"Blake!"
 "I—I was helping Gussy in, sir!"
 "You will take a hundred lines, Blake. Go to your place at once."

"Ye-es, sir."
 The Fourth-Formers went to their table. Lefevre cast a glance full of wrath after them, and mopped at his face with his handkerchief. Blake gave D'Arcy a severe look as they sat down.

"I suppose these are what you call your table manners?" he remarked.

"Weally, Blake——"
 "If that's how the D'Arcys enter a dining-room, I can only say that the aristocracy have a great deal to learn."

"You uttah ass——"
 "I have noticed it about you very often, Gussy. Your manners have not that repose which stamps the caste of Beer de Beer."

"Weally——"
 "The next time I have sixpence to spare, I shall buy you a copy of 'Good Manners for Bad Boys,'" said Blake severely.

"I am sure there is someone talking!" said little Mr. Lathom.

And D'Arcy, who was trying to think of a crushing reply, turned to his dinner instead.

CHAPTER 11.

A Fitting Celebration.

"TOMMY!"
 Tom Merry came out of the dining-room with Manners and Lowther. Miss Priscilla was in the hall, and she came quickly up to the juniors, with her usual kindly smile.

"My darling Tommy!"
 Tom Merry turned a little pinkish. Great as his affection was for his old governess, he did not particularly enjoy being called a darling before a crowd of grinning juniors. But he wouldn't have let Miss Fawcett see that for worlds.

"Yes," he said. "Yes, dear."
 "It is a half-holiday this afternoon," said Miss Fawcett.

"The Head has kindly given me permission to institute some kind of celebration for your home-coming."

"Oh!" said Tom Merry.
 The chums of the Shell had been going to celebrate their home-coming by getting up a football match. As Lowther had remarked pathetically, he had almost forgotten what it

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was like to be bumped over on the footer field, or to get an accidental hack on the shin.

"Now, what would you like, darling?" said Miss Fawcett.

"Like?"

"Yes. I wish to arrange anything you care for, you know—anything you would like—and I will help you."

Tom Merry looked a little perplexed.

"It's awfully good of you," he said.

"Not at all, my sweet child!"

"Here, come and listen to this," murmured Mellish of the Fourth. "People pay to see things less funny than this. Come on, Gore."

"Oh, shut up!" said Gore.

"Why, what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing."

Mellish shrugged his shoulders. He could not quite make out his old companion lately. He had been going to tell Gore of that little joke with the ink and soot in the Head's study, but he thought he had better not—Gore was so changed somehow the last few weeks.

"Would you like to play hop-scotch, or anything like that?" asked Miss Fawcett.

Monty Lowther gasped, and Tom Merry turned pinker.

"We—we don't play hop-scotch," he said faintly.

"Or marbles?"

"They play marbles in the Second."

"Or here-we-go-round-the-mulberry-bush," suggested Miss Fawcett.

"N-n-n-not a bit."

"No. Perhaps you would prefer to stand—I think you call it stand—a feed—I think you call it a feed—to your friends?"

Tom Merry brightened up.

"Well, that's not a bad wheeze!" he exclaimed. "We might have a footer-match, and you could watch us, dear."

"Yes, certainly, I should be very glad; as then I should be on the spot to nurse you if you should be injured."

"Hum! Then we might have the feed," said Tom Merry. "You could see about getting—you—do these things so well—"

"Ripping!" said Manners. "I can't forget some of the spreads at Laurel Villa. And Fatty Wynn dreams about them."

"Does he really?"

"Yes; and lives on the memory sometimes, Miss Fawcett. "It's a jolly good idea to have a feed to celebrate our return; the fellows all expect something. The only difficulty is that we blued all our tin in Paris."

"You—you what?"

"Blued all our tin—"

"Tin? Your—your money?"

"Yes, Miss Fawcett."

"But—why did you blue it?" asked Miss Fawcett, very much puzzled. "I have heard that the small copper coins become covered sometimes with a kind of anamalcule through being handled by dirty fingers, and are disinfected. Was it a process of disinfection you were referring to?"

"Ha, ha—I mean, oh, no!"

"I should hardly have thought people would take the money after it was blued," said Miss Fawcett. "They might not have thought it good money."

"I—I mean we spent it," said Lowther—"blued it, you know—spent it—got rid of it!"

"Oh! That is probably slang?"

"Ye-es!"

"Ah, I perceive!" said Miss Fawcett. "I think there is a great deal of slang used now that I do not know."

"Quite probable, Miss Fawcett."

"Well, the feed's a jolly good wheeze!" said Tom Merry.

"Fatty Wynn will help you in the selection of the stuff; and we can have it in a class-room. Mr. Railton will give permission if you ask him."

"Certainly, dear Tommy!"

And Miss Fawcett walked away to Mr. Railton's quarters to get the necessary permission, which was accorded at once.

Tom Merry strolled out into the quadrangle with his chums. It was a clear, cold afternoon, with a keen breath of winter in the air.

Monty Lowther snuffed up the keen air with enjoyment.

"It's ripping to be back, though we had a splendid holiday!" he exclaimed. "I only want to get a kick at a footer again; and then everything in the garden will be lovely!"

Tom Merry nodded a little absently.

"I can't help thinking of that rotten trick played on Miss Fawcett," he said. "The Head as good as left it to me to find out who it was."

"That won't be easy."

"Hallo, Merry!" Fatty Wynn came over from the direction of the New House. "Figgins is looking for you. He wants a game of footer."

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"Ha, ha! So do we."

"Good! I don't mind keeping goal," said Fatty. "But—"

"But what? You feel fit, surely?"

"Oh, I'm fit enough! Only, you see—well, weren't you saying something in the train about Miss Fawcett getting up some sort of a giddy celebration?" said Fatty Wynn a little indignantly. "Is there anything of the sort coming off?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything in that to snigger at!" said Wynn. "What I mean is that if you are standing a feed I can help with expert advice, and do any bit of cooking that may be necessary."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm a bit low in funds; but we'll have a whip round—"

"Not a bit! Miss Fawcett is standing a feed, and she's finding the tin," said Tom Merry, laughing. "She'll be glad of expert assistance. In fact, I've said you'd help her."

Fatty Wynn beamed.

"Jolly good!" he exclaimed. "I'll be pleased to help. Where is she?"

"In the School House."

"I suppose I'd better go and offer my services at once? It's no good wasting time."

"Good! You're hungry, I suppose?" said Monty Lowther sympathetically. "It's nearly ten minutes since dinner."

"Well, a chap doesn't really get enough to eat here if he's got a really healthy appetite," said Fatty Wynn. "You see, I've got a healthy appetite, and a curious thing is that I always get specially hungry at this time of the year. I had some stew and a chop at dinner, and a couple of helpings of pudding, and a few pears, that's all. I have just had a dozen tarts at Mrs. Taggles' shop to fill up, but, of course, that's not enough. I feel jolly empty."

"You must!"

"Still, if we're going to have a feed, I can hold out an hour or two, with a few snacks," said Fatty Wynn. "I'll go in and find Miss Fawcett, then. Figgys can find somebody else to keep goal for once. Pratt'll do."

And Fatty Wynn went into the School House.

The Terrible Three chuckled.

"Good old Fatty!" said Tom Merry. "Wild horses wouldn't drag him down to the ground to keep goal now, I fancy. I don't know whether I ought to play footer, either. I ought to look into that affair of the Head's study."

"That's all right," said a familiar voice at his elbow—"that's all right, Tom Mewwy. I've looked into that for you."

And the Terrible Three looked round, as the chums of Study No. 6 came out of the School House. Tom Merry looked at D'Arcy in some surprise.

"You've looked into it?" he repeated.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You don't mean to say you know who it was?" exclaimed Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!" repeated D'Arcy.

"Gammon!" said Manners.

"I warged that as a vulgah expression, Mannahs," said Arthur Augustus. "I have placed my ability as a pivate detective at the disposal of Tom Mewwy in this mattah, and I am glad to say that I have succeeded."

"Is this a joke, Blake?" asked Tom Merry.

Blake shook his head.

"Straight as a string!" he said.

"Then who was it?"

"Goah!"

Tom Merry started. The same name had come into his own mind, as the first suspicion natural under the circumstances, and if he had investigated the matter, that was the line his first investigations would have taken.

"Gore?" he repeated.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy nodded with complete conviction.

"Yaas, wathah! Goah of the Shell!"

CHAPTER 12.

Guilty, or Not Guilty?

GORE of the Shell strolled out of the School House at that moment, just in time to hear his name uttered. He glanced at the group of juniors, and came over towards them.

Tom Merry & Co. looked a little uneasy. The sudden appearance of the fellow they had been discussing made them feel unnaturally awkward. But Gore seemed to be in an unusually good humour.

"I'm glad to see you back at St. Jim's, Merry!" he exclaimed.

"Thank you!" said Tom.

Gore flushed.

"Oh, I suppose you don't care whether I'm glad or not!"



There was a sudden cry from the clms. "Tommy! my darling, stop!"

he said, in a low voice. "Well, there's no reason you should."

"I didn't mean that," said Tom quickly.

Gore looked from one to another.

"I heard you speak my name," he said. "I thought perhaps you were discussing the footer team for the game this afternoon. If you should want me, I'm ready."

"Oh!"

"I've been sticking to footer while you've been away, Merry," said Gore rather eagerly. "I don't want to shove myself forward, but you might give me a trial when you want to fill up a place, that's all. I'm not so bad at half."

Tom Merry's brows clouded.

Gore evidently had no idea that he was suspected, and from his talk it was hard for Tom Merry to suspect him; but the truth had to be got at somehow.

Tom plunged into the matter in his direct and straightforward way.

"Look here, Gore, I wanted to speak to you," he said. "It's an unpleasant matter, but it's got to be settled."

Gore started back.

"Oh!"

"We may as well have it out at once," said Tom Merry.

"Oh, yes!" said Gore. And something like his old sneer crept over his face. "I understand."

"You understand?" asked Tom.

"Yes. And you needn't trouble to go on. I might have expected it. Well, never mind! I thought you might like to give a fellow a chance, that's all."

Tom Merry looked at him steadily.

"What are you talking about?" he said. "I don't think you know what I was going to say, after all."

"Oh, yes, I do! You want me to understand that I'm not wanted," said Gore bitterly. "You don't care whether I take up footer or not: and you don't care a hang what I do, anyway. You helped to get me off lightly when I made a fool of myself; and you don't want to be bothered with me any more. Well, there's no reason why you should. I don't want to hang on to you, I assure you."

And he turned away.

"Stop!" said Tom Merry.

"What's the good?"

"Stop, I tell you!"

"Hang it! Give your orders to somebody else!"

"Stop him!"

Blake and Digby took hold of Gore by the arms, and jerked him back.

Gore looked at them savagely for a moment, and then, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets, he waited.

"Well?" he said sullenly.

"You're either lying or you're making a mistake," said Tom Merry quietly. "You know—or you ought to know—that I should be only too glad to stand by a chap who'd made a bloomer and was trying to make up for it. But if I can't believe you off-hand you've only got yourself to thank. You know jolly well that you've never made it a point to stick to the truth. How can you expect people to take your word when you've taken them in before?"

Gore went crimson.

"I suppose you're right," he said slowly.

"I'd take you on trust quite willingly," said Tom Merry. "It isn't that. But something's happened—something that's got to be cleared up. That's what I was going to speak to you about when you jumped to a wrong conclusion."

"Oh, I see!" said Gore, his face clearing a little. "What's happened? Have you got something up against me from before you went to Paris?"

"No, since."

Gore looked astonished.

"But I haven't met you since, till this moment."

"It's about my old governess—Miss Fawcett."

"Miss Fawcett?"

"Yes. While she had fallen asleep in the Head's study this morning some cad blacked her face, and—and made her look a guy."

"Yes, I saw her; but I didn't know it was Miss Fawcett when Binks took her out," said Gore. "Nobody knew."

"Then you didn't do it?"

Gore started.

"I! Tom Merry!"

"Yes, you. Did you do it?"

"No."

"As I said before, it's your own fault if I can't take your word. I've heard you tell a barefaced lie before, so how do I know you're not telling one now?" said Tom bluntly.

"I—I suppose you've a right to insult me if you like," said Gore, in a low voice. "But I'm telling the truth now, whatever I've done before."

"I hope so, but—"

"Hang it, I must have been in the class-room if it happened in the morning—and it did," said Gore. "I didn't know Miss Fawcett was here, even."

"You left the class-room during the morning to get your Virgil."

Gore started again.

"By George! I remember I did now. You seem to have been looking into it," he added, with a sneer.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "I have brough't my experience as an amateur detective to bear on the mattah, Goah. I wegard it as the best thing you can do to confess."

"Confess!"

"Yaas, wathah! Then you will get off more lightly."

"But I haven't anything to confess," said Gore, beginning to look a little scared as he read the grim expression of the faces round him. "I didn't do it."

"Then how did you come with the inky fingahs aftahwards?" demanded Arthur Augustus, in quite a magisterial tone.

"I told you—I upset a bottle of ink in my study, filling the inkpot."

D'Arcy smiled superior.

"I have investigated your studay," he said. "There is no sign there of a bottle of ink having been upset."

"I cleaned it up, ass."

"I wofuse to be called an ass. I—"

"Did you think I was going to leave it on the table to soak in?" demanded Gore.

"You have used an oppwobwious expression—"

"Look here, Gore—"

"Pway don't intewwupt, Tom Mewwy. Goah has used an oppwobwious expression—"

"Oh, do ring off, Gussy! Look here, Gore, you're the last chap in the world to clean up the ink you upset. You'd have left it to Skimpole."

"Well, I didn't—I cleaned it up."

"It looks jolly suspicious, anyway."

"I dare say it does," said Gore. "So you believe that I played that trick on your old governess?"

Tom Merry looked undecided.

"If you deny it—" he began.

"I do deny it!"

"Wats!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "His guilt is cleahly pwoved, and I wposose that we wag him before we go down to the footah."

Tom Merry shook his head.

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"It does seem pretty clear, I know," he said. "But Gore denies it. There are other fellows who might have done it."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Is that all you've got against me?" said Gore slowly.

"Yes."

"And if I could clear that up—"

"If you clear that up, all will be plain sailing," said Tom Merry. "Until it's cleared up, I can't help suspecting you, and you can't blame me."

"I don't blame you," said Gore quietly. "I'll try to clear it up."

"You! How?"

"By finding out who did it."

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "Find him out, and show him up—that will settle the matter, and I shall be jolly glad for one."

"He is found out and shown up already, Tom Mewwy."

"Oh, give the chap a chance!" said Blake, as Gore walked away. "Blessed if I don't begin to think somehow that we've made a mistake."

"Impossa, deah-boy."

"Rats!"

"If you say wats to me, Blake—"

"Well, I do, and many of 'em. Let's get down to the footer. There goes Fatty Wynn, with Miss Fawcett to the tuckshop."

Fatty Wynn was piloting the old lady from Huckleberry Heath towards the school shop kept by Mrs. Taggles. There was a serene smile upon Wynn's plump face. The chums grinned, and went down to the playing-field, and soon afterwards in the stress of a real hard slogging football-match, both Gore and the incident of the morning were forgotten.

CHAPTER 13.

Fatty Wynn Lends His Aid.

FATTY WYNN was in his element.

From the football-field he heard shouts and cheers, but, though a keen footballer as a rule, the fat Fourth-Former turned a deaf ear to them now.

He was more accustomed to acting as a goal-keeper than as a squire of dames; but he was a very Brummel to Miss Priscilla.

The prospect of a feed of unusual dimensions had brought a happy smile to his face—a smile that wouldn't come off.

"And we shall be able to purchase all we require at the school shop?" asked Miss Fawcett, as Fatty Wynn guided her towards Dame Taggles's establishment.

"Oh, yes!" said Fatty. "Mrs. Taggles has a really large and varied stock. Of course, if there had been more time, it would have been a good idea to get some of the things from the village. But Dame Taggles is a good cook, and I know everything she makes, and I can select a jolly good feed. The principal thing is the tin."

"Indeed! You are alluding to the tin in which the cakes are made, I suppose. Does the variety of tin make any difference to the cake?"

Fatty Wynn chuckled his fat chuckle.

"No, Miss Fawcett—I mean the spondulics, you know."

"Dear me! I do not think I have heard of them before," said Miss Priscilla, with a perplexed expression. "Some variety of foreign fruit?"

"Ha, ha! The needful," hinted Fatty.

"I suppose all the things we purchase will be needful?"

"Ye-es. But the—the ready."

"The feast must be ready by the time dear Tommy has finished playing cricket," said Miss Fawcett. "I forget—is he playing cricket, or football?"

Fatty Wynn grinned at the idea of cricket a few weeks before Christmas.

"Football, ma'am," he said.

"Ah, yes, a very rough game," said Miss Fawcett, as a sudden yell from the playing-fields came to her ears. "Is that somebody hurt?"

"No, that's a goal."

"Oh, I see! I think goals are very—very barbarous," said Miss Fawcett. "I am always afraid of my darling being injured in taking those dreadful goals. How much nicer it would be if the boys made runs instead of taking goals, the same as in cricket."

"Ye-es."

"Or they might agree beforehand which side was to have the ball, and take it in turns," said Miss Fawcett thoughtfully. "That would save so much of that dreadfully rough scrambling."

Fatty Wynn almost choked.

"Ye-es," he gasped.

"Though really, I should much prefer to see the dear lads playing battledore and shuttlecock," said Miss Fawcett, with her charming smile. "Or marbles."

"Yes, they're—they're ripping games."

"There is no danger in them, or very little," said Miss Fawcett. "I have never heard of any serious injury resulting from marbles, except in one case. A little nephew of mine had a dreadful mark round one of his eyes, and in answer to inquiries, he stated that he had been playing marbles. But I believe the injury was the result of some dispute regarding the ownership of some of the marbles, and was not directly attributable to the game itself."

"V-v-very likely," murmured Fatty Wynn. "Here is the shop."

"What a pretty little shop, and how sweetly this tree must shade it in summer!" said Miss Priscilla.

And they entered.

"As I was saying," remarked Fatty Wynn, "it's a question of the ready—I mean the tin—that is to say, the cash."

"Oh, I comprehend!"

"I could make a very decent show on a pound," said Fatty Wynn judicially. "It all depends on the kind of feed you want to give Tom."

"Oh, the best—the very best."

"Then you'd better give me carte blanche," said Fatty Wynn. "I'll order the stuff, and you can settle with Mrs. Taggles."

"An excellent arrangement."

"If it comes to too much, you can knock off the items."

"Certainly."

And Fatty Wynn began to give his orders.

They were many, varied, and extensive. They ranged up and down Mrs. Taggles' shop, leaving no stone unturned, so to speak.

Mrs. Taggles, with a very cheerful smile upon her face, added and added to the steadily-growing pile on the counter.

That pile soon assumed the shape, and almost the size of a pyramid.

Miss Fawcett sat down, and looked out of the door into the quad as Fatty Wynn went on with his orders. Two juniors had stopped under the tree outside the tuckshop, and their voices floated in to Miss Fawcett. As for Fatty Wynn, he was deaf and blind just then. The two juniors were Reilly, of the Fourth, and Gore, of the Shell.

Reilly had been coming to the tuckshop, and Gore, who was walking gloomily along with his hands deep in his pockets, caught sight of him, and signed to him to stop. Reilly stopped. The cheery Irish junior did not like Gore, but he was an obliging fellow.

"I want to speak to you, Reilly."

"Faith, and there's no law against it," said Reilly cheerfully.

"I just wanted to ask you a question—it's nothing really."

"Go on wid yo. I want some ginger-pop, and sure ye're keeping me waitin'. Come in and have some wid me."

"Oh, no, thanks! I don't want anything. I only wanted to know if anybody in the Fourth left the class-room this morning during lessons."

The Irish junior looked astonished.

"Faith, and phwat—"

"Never mind why," said Gore irritably. "I just wanted to know, that's all. Did anybody get out of the Fourth Form-room while lessons were going on?"

"Only Mellish."

Gore started violently.

"Mellish!"

"Yes; he was sent to the Head to be caned."

"Oh!"

"Faith, and he came back grinnin' like a Cheshire cat, as if it was fun to be caned," said Reilly. "He seemed to enjoy it, though he makes fuss enough as a rule. But what's the matter about it, intirely?"

"Oh, nothing! I just wanted to know. Thanks."

And Gore strolled away. Reilly stared after him for a full minute, amazed by the strange and apparently objectless inquiry; and then he walked into the tuckshop, with an impression that Gore's brain was going.

"And a few of the pineapples," Fatty Wynn was saying.

Reilly stared at the pyramid on the counter.

"Faith, and is it buying up the shop ye are, Fatty?" he inquired.

"Eh? I'm getting a few things."

"Begorra, and what would you call a lot?"

"It is a little celebration for my darling Tommy, on the occasion of his safe return from a foreign country," said Miss Fawcett. "Are you one of my dear Tommy's friends?"

"Faith, and I love him like a brother," said Reilly, glancing at the pile on the counter, while his mouth watered.

"Dear me!"

"He's such a ripping chap," said Reilly. "Faith, and no wonder his friends are glad to see him back!"

"Then you will come to the—the feast?" asked Miss Fawcett.

"Wid pleasure, ma'am," said Reilly. "Faith, and I wouldn't miss a feed with Tom for anythin' in the wide worruld!"

"Is that all?" said Mrs. Taggles, when the pyramid showed signs of filling up all the available space on the counter.

"C'est tout!" said Fatty absentmindedly.

"Two?" said Mrs. Taggles, in surprise. "I think you have more than two of everything, Master Wynn. Say two what?"

"Ahem! I mean that's all. Let's see the bill."

"I will make it out."

Dame Taggles was some time making out the bill, and no wonder. Reilly finished his ginger-pop and strolled away, the happy possessor of an invitation to the feed. Mrs. Taggles emerged from a brown study, and many blots of ink, with a bill for four pounds seventeen shillings and threepence-halfpenny.

Fatty Wynn whistled.

"Is the bill made out?" asked Miss Fawcett gently.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Give it to me, please."

"I'm afraid it comes to a big figure."

"Never mind."

"Of course, you can knock off any item," said Fatty Wynn. "Here's the bill, ma'am—four pound seventeen and threepence-halfpenny. It's a lot, I know. I—I say, shall I take off—ahem!—well, one of the tins of condensed milk? That will reduce it by—ahem!—fivepence."

"Oh, no!" said Miss Fawcett.

And she extracted a purse from her bag, and a little book from her purse, and a five-pound note from the little book, and handed it to Fatty Wynn.

"Good!" said the fat Fourth-Former, in great relief.

"Here you are, Mrs. Taggles."

And Mrs. Taggles took the note with much pleasure. Then Fatty looked at the huge pile of comestibles.

"We shall have to get these carried somehow," he said.

"My—my pockets won't hold 'em. I'll get Binks to fetch 'em in a bag."

"Very good!" said Miss Priscilla.

And Fatty Wynn, with a happy and satisfied smile, piloted the old lady of Huckleberry Heath out of the tuckshop.

Binks was impressed into the service, and while he was fetching the things Miss Fawcett was busy preparing the empty class-room for the feast which was to be ready for Tom Merry as soon as he came off the football-field.

CHAPTER 14.

Miss Fawcett Steps In.

TOM MERRY was thinking of anything but feasts just then. The football, after the long deprivation of the game, was proving most enjoyable. Figgins was captaining a New House junior team, and Tom Merry's eleven found them tough opponents. But that was what they liked, and a hard, slogging game was the result. A crowd of fellows gathered round the ground to look on. In the first half the leather had twice whizzed into the New House goal, as much as anything on account of the fact that Fatty Wynn was not in his usual place between the posts. Only one goal had been scored against the School House; but Figgins meant to set that right in the second half.

Mellish, of the Fourth, was standing among the spectators.

Mellish did not play footer himself when he could help it, but he frequently watched the games, finding a great deal of amusement in picking faults with the players, and sneering at their form to the other slackers like himself.

"Blessed fluke!" he remarked, when Figgins equalised by sending in a long, low shot that beat the School House goalie all along the line. "What are the idiots yelling for?"

"Oh, they'd yell for anything!" said Carker.

"That was a fluke, but Figgins doesn't seem to know it. Equal chances whether it went in or outside the goal."

"Of course, that's so," said Carker, knowing perfectly well that it wasn't so.

"They make a lot of fuss about this game," said Mellish, with a yawn. "Blessed if I can see it myself. Anybody could kick a ball about."

"I should think so."

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ANSWERS

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"Rot!" said Mellish. "I—Hullo!"
He turned round as he felt a touch on his shoulder.
"I want to speak to you," said Gore.
"Go ahead!"
"Not here."
"I want to watch the game," said Mellish.
"I want you to stroll with me."
"Look here—"

"Are you coming?"

"Yes," said Mellish sullenly.

They walked away from the football-field together. Gore did not speak till they were under the trees near the School House, a quiet and deserted spot on a half-holiday.

The cad of the Fourth was feeling very uneasy. He did not understand Gore at all lately, and he did not like the look upon the Shell fellow's face.

"I've a bone to pick with you," said Gore at last.

Mellish forced a laugh.

"Go on!" he said. "Nothing wrong, I suppose?"

"That depends. You were sent to the Head to be caned this morning."

"Yes; I cheeked old Lathom, and he picked upon me. He lets Blake and his lot do as they like," said Mellish venomously.

"Well, they wouldn't be likely to act like you, in any case," said Gore.

Mellish sneered.

"I've noticed that you've been trying to pander to that lot lately," he said. "I knew you'd begin again the moment they came back."

Gore clenched his hand for a moment, and then unclenched it again, and went on very quietly.

"Did you go to the Head's study?"

Mellish was on his guard at once. He eyed Gore cautiously out of the corners of his furtive eyes.

"No!" he said.

"Sure?"

"Of course. The Head was taking the Sixth, and I went to the Sixth-Form room with old Lathom's note."

"And you didn't look into his study at all?"

"Why should I?"

"Never mind why you should," said Gore, "or why you shouldn't. I'm asking you whether you did or not."

"Well, I didn't," said Mellish sullenly.

"What were you grinning about, then, when you came back into the class-room?" demanded Gore. "You don't generally grin after a caning."

Mellish started.

"How—how do you know?"

"I do know," said Gore. "What was the joke?"

"I—I—"

Gore's hand fell heavily upon his shoulder.

"I know what the joke was," he said, in a low, steady tone.

"Then you needn't ask me," said the other, with an attempt at bravado. "I don't see that it's your business, anyway."

"You did go to the Head's study, and you found Miss Fawcett asleep there in the Head's armchair. You blacked her face; that was your idea of a joke."

"It might have been yours, if you'd had the nerve," said Mellish. "What are you gammoning about? You know you'd have done it."

"Tom Merry suspects that I did do it."

"Oh! Have you had a row?"

"Not exactly. I want to clear myself."

"What does it matter?"

"It does matter. You've got to own up to Tom Merry."

Mellish changed colour.

"You're mad. I couldn't."

"You can, and must."

"I won't!" said Mellish, looking very scared. "They'd rag me—"

"You should have thought of that before."

"You're a good one to preach," said Mellish savagely. "I can't make you out. What are you humbugging for lately?"

Gore winced.

"Never mind," he said. "I don't want Tom Merry to think I played that rotten trick on his old governess. You've got to own up."

"Well, I won't."

"You'll get a licking if you do, I suppose; but I'm jolly certain you'll get one if you don't," said Gore, grasping the cad of the Fourth by the collar. "Now, then, what are you going to do?"

"You—you bully!" said Mellish between his teeth.

"You—you hypocrite. I won't say a word. You can go and eat coke! Hang you!"

"I'll wring your neck if you don't—I—"

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE ST. JIM'S SPORTSMAN."

A Grand Tale of Tom Merry
& Co. By Martin Clifford

Mellish began to struggle. Gore's temper, never very sweet, was giving way now. He cuffed the Fourth-Former right and left, and Mellish yelled in earnest.

"Help! Ow! Yow! Help!"

"Bless my soul!"

Miss Fawcett's horrified voice broke in upon the scene. The old lady stood looking at the two in horrified amazement.

Gore released Mellish as if he had suddenly become red-hot. He dragged off his cap and stood staring sheepishly at Miss Fawcett.

"My dear boys," said Miss Fawcett, "you should not fight."

"I—I wasn't fighting," said Mellish. "He—he was bullying me. He always bullies chaps who are smaller than he is."

"Gore! I think your name is Gore, or Bore—"

"It's Gore."

"Ah, yes, Gore! Really, Gore, it is very wrong to bully and ill-use smaller boys," said Miss Fawcett gently. "You must feel it is wrong. Your own conscience cannot approve of such conduct, and your kind teachers will not love you."

Gore writhed. Mellish scuttled off, glad of the opportunity to escape, and he chuckled as soon as he was safe. Gore would have been glad of a chance to justify himself to Miss Fawcett, but appearances were against him.

"My dear boy," went on Miss Fawcett, "you must think better of this. A boy who begins life by bullying grows more and more brutal as he grows older, and is in great danger of ending his days in prison or on the scaffold. Think of the pain that would cause to your relations."

Gore was more likely to think of the pain it would cause to himself, but he said nothing.

"I am going down to the football-field to watch my darling Tommy," said Miss Fawcett. "Will you give me your arm as far as the field, Gore?"

Gore grinned a little. This was Miss Fawcett's transparent device to keep him from following Mellish.

"Certainly, Miss Fawcett," he said.

"Thank you very much, Gore."

Gore conducted the old lady down to the football-ground. The game was drawing to its conclusion now, and the excitement was intense, as the score was still level. Miss Priscilla smiled as she heard the ringing shout:

"Go it, Merry! One goal more!"

"Dear Tommy!" she murmured. "Which is Tommy, Gore? They move so quickly that I cannot distinguish one from another."

"There he is," said Gore, watching the active figure; and he grew excited, too. "He's on the ball! Figgy's got it! No, he hasn't! My hat, did you see Tom Merry dribble it round Pratt's feet? Ha, ha! Pratty doesn't know where it's gone. Go it, Merry! Kick—kick! They'll be on to you!"

"Bless my soul!"

"Kick—kick!"

"Dear me!"

"Kerr'll be on to you! Kick!"

"Oh, dear! Surely Tommy is not going to kick Kerr?"

"No, no! The goal!"

"But—but why should he kick the goal? Is he not likely to hurt his feet against those dreadfully hard wooden posts?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Got it, Merry!"

"Oh, dear! Where is Tommy now?"

Three or four figures were sprawling over, and Tom Merry was underneath, but he had passed to Blake, and Blake had slammed the ball in. There was a roar.

"Goal!"

"Who has taken the goal, Gore?"

"Blake," said Gore; "but it was Tom Merry's goal, you know."

"But is Blake allowed to take it if it is Tommy's goal?" asked Miss Fawcett, in surprise. "Do the rules of the game allow players to take one another's goals?"

"Ha, ha! I mean, Tom Merry gave him the chance, you know. He passed to Blake just in time, and he had drawn the defence out of the way."

"Dear me!"

"Hullo, there's the whistle! School House wins! Hurrah!"

"Hurrah!" roared the crowd.

The players trooped off the field.

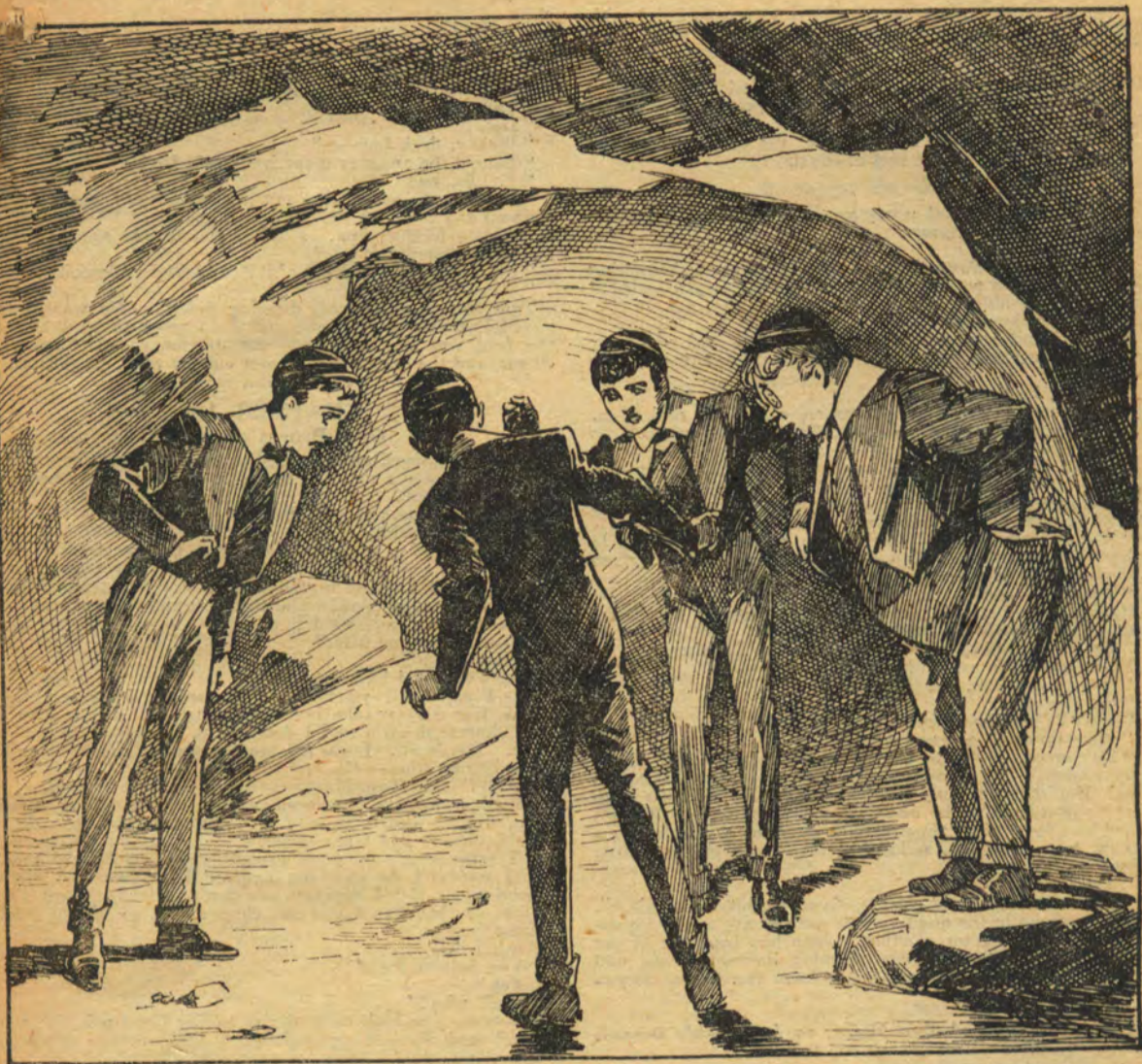
"Where is Tommy?"

"Here he is."

Tom Merry came in view. He was smothered in mud, his jersey was torn, his hair was towlsed, his face dirty, and there was a smear of red over his nose and cheek. There was a cheerful grin on his face, however.

Miss Fawcett gazed at him in horror.

"Tommy! Tommy, darling, you—you are wounded!"



There was a general exclamation of amazement as Harry Wharton flashed the light down upon the sand. For there—plain to their astonished gaze—was the track of a boot—a human footprint. (An exciting incident in the grand, long, complete school tale entitled, "THE SMUGGLERS' CAVE," by Frank Richards, in "THE MAGNET" Library, now on sale.

CHAPTER 15.

A New Light on the Subject.

TOM MERRY looked puzzled for a moment, and then burst into a laugh.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "My darling Tommy!"
 "It's all right!"
 "But—but you are wounded!"
 "Ha, ha! Only Figgy's fat head bumped me on the nose. It's all right. Let me go and clean up, and then I shall be ready for the feed."
 "But—but perhaps I had better wire for a medical man—"
 "Wire for my grandmother!" said Tom Merry. "It's all right! You'll see me looking as clean as a new pin in five minutes."
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 Most of the fellows were grinning gleefully, but Miss Fawcett seemed quite unaware of it. She watched Tom Merry disappear in the dressing-room with an anxious eye, and then walked away with Gore, leaning more heavily upon his arm.

"Poor boy!" said Lowther, in the dressing-room. "Is he wounded, den? Shall we get him a sugar-stick, and—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Tom Merry, reddening.

"But you are wounded!"

"Shut up," roared Tom Merry, "or you'll jolly well be wounded, too, and on the nose!"

"Yaas, wathah! I must say I agwee with my fwiend Mewwy there. I wegard your jokes on this subject as bein' in wathah bad taste, Lowthah."

"Go hon!"

"Yaas, wathah! And I wish to wemark furthah—"

"Never mind about any further remarks, Gussy," said Blake cheerfully. "There's the feed to think of now. It must be nearly ready."

"Weally, Blake—"

"I must say I'm hungry," remarked Digby. "Nothing like footer to give you an appetite."

"What-ho!" said Herries. "This is a ripping idea of Miss Fawcett's, and a chap can understand it. Sometimes they give young fellows a treat by taking them to a lecture. I had an uncle who did things like that!"

"I say, it was wathah cwivious—"

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE ST. JIM'S SPORTSMAN."

"What, the lecture?"

"No! It was wathah cawious Miss Fawcett's bein' with Goah. I noticed that she had taken Goah's arm."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, it was rather odd. I noticed it."

"Gore is getting quite civilised," remarked Bernard Glyn. "I hear that he has left off ragging Skimpole in their study. Wonders will never cease!"

"Faith!" said Reilly, looking in at the door. "Are you fellows going to be all the rest of the day?"

"What's the hurry?"

"The feed."

"Eh? How does that worry you?" demanded Kangaroo.

"Faith, and I'm coming!"

"Oh!"

"You see, Miss Fawcett asked me as soon as she knew that I was a close and particular friend of Tom Merry's, bedad!" said Reilly grinning.

Tom Merry laughed.

"I suppose I shall see a good many close and particular friends I never heard of before for the next hour or two," he remarked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Never mind, come by all means, old kid!" said Tom. "There's room, and I've no doubt there's plenty of grub, as Fatty Wynn is looking after that part of the business."

"Faith, and he's moved mountains!" said Reilly admiringly. "I thought he was takin' over Mrs. Taggles' business at first, bedad! But, speaking about Gore, you were saying he was very queer lately—"

"Well, I don't know whether it's queer for a chap to behave decently," said Glyn, laughing; "but we had given up expecting it of Gore."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Reilly tapped his forehead in an extremely significant way. The footballers stared at him blankly.

"Hallo! Anything wrong there?" asked Lowther.

Reilly gave him an indignant glare.

"No, ye spalpeen, but Gore—"

"Oh, Gore!"

"Yes; he's going rocky!"

"What on earth do you mean?"

"He's going rocky in the crumpet, bedad!" said Reilly mysteriously. "I've noticed that he never rags Skimpole now. But that was only the beginning. He paid me ninepence yesterday that he owed me from last term. When I asked him for it some time back he gave me a whack with a cricket bat. Now he's suddenly paid me up without being asked."

"Amazin'!"

"Faith, and it's right ye are, Gussy! But that isn't all. He stopped me in the quad a while back to ask me silly questions—wanted to know whether a chap had been out of the Fourth Form class-room this morning during lessons, and wouldn't explain what he wanted to know for. What do you think of that?"

"Bai Jove!"

"What?" exclaimed Tom Merry, coming quickly towards Reilly. "What? Did Gore ask you that?"

"Faith, and he did!"

"And—and was anybody out of the class-room during lessons?"

"What does it matter?"

"Never mind why it matters! Answer me!"

"But, faith—"

"Answer!" roared Tom Merry, shaking him.

"Faith, ye're as mad as Gore! Yes, Mellish—"

"Oh, Mellish!"

"Yes, he was sent to the Head to be caned, and, sure, he came back grinnin' like a Cheshire cat—"

"Mellish!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Bai Jove! I nevah thought of him, you know!"

"He was out of the class-room, then?" said Tom Merry, towel in hand, and forgetting that his face was wet. "Was he gone a long time?"

"Faith, and he was!"

"Did he go to the Head's study?"

"Faith, that depends on where the Head was. I don't know whether the Head or Mr. Railton was taking the Sixth," said the Belfast boy, looking very much puzzled; "but what does it all matter, anyway?"

"It matters a lot! Somebody blacked Miss Fawcett's face in the Head's study, as you know—all the school knows—"

Reilly gave a long whistle.

"Howly Moses! That was what Mellish was sniggering over, and, sure, I remember now he had ink on his handkerchief sticking in his pocket."

Tom Merry's brow darkened.

"We've suspected the wrong chap!" he said abruptly.

"Pwaj don't jump to conclusions, Tom Mewwy!" said Arthur Augustus judiciously. "I should nevah advise a chap to jump to conclusions."

"Why, you jumped to a conclusion yourself about Gore the first place!"

"Well, I—I—"

"Faith, and I think—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, there was a lot of evidence to support the suspish, and I'm not convinced yet that Goah was not guilty."

"Rats!"

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Behold the amateur detective!" said Digby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wefuse to admit that my conclusions are w'ong!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's indignantly. "I pwefer to investigate furthah first. Besides, you fellows agreed with me in my theowies."

"Oh, don't try to get out of it!" said Blake admonishingly.

"Weally, Blake—"

Tom Merry finished his dressing quickly. He wanted to see Mellish and to see Gore, and there was little time before the feed was due. He left the dressing-room before his chums, and the first person he met outside was George Gore.

CHAPTER 16.

Gore Proves an Alibi.

GORE stopped and coloured as he saw Tom Merry. He hesitated a moment, and then came up to the hero of the Shell.

"I want to speak to you, Merry."

Tom Merry nodded.

"And I want to speak to you, Gore. But go ahead."

"I—I told you I'd find out who it was that played that trick on Miss Fawcett in the Head's study this morning," said Gore, speaking slowly, and with a troubled countenance.

"Yes. Have you found him?"

"Yes, I've found him."

"Who is it?"

Gore's troubled look intensified.

"I—I can't tell you!" he exclaimed. "I suppose this sounds like a fairy-tale, but I can't help it. It's a chap I have chummed with, and I don't think I ought to give him away. That's all. I wanted him to own up, but he won't. I was licking him—"

"Well?" said Tom Merry curiously, as Gore paused.

"Well, somebody interfered, and I let him go. I'm not going to lick him. He only did what I might have done myself, once," said Gore bitterly. "I wouldn't do it now, but I suppose it's no good expecting you to believe that. But I wouldn't do anything against Miss Fawcett. She's a good sort. But I suppose you don't believe a word I'm saying, or that I've found the chap at all, so it's no good talking."

"But I do."

"You believe me?"

"Yes."

"Well, why?"

"Because you look as if you're telling the truth, for one thing," said Tom Merry quietly. "And another thing is, I'm pretty certain I know the chap who did it."

Gore started.

"You know him?"

"Yes. There was a Fourth-Form chap out of the class-room this morning, and he most likely went to the Head's study."

Gore was silent for a moment.

"Don't give me his name," he said. "I can't give him away, and I can't help you. But—but I think I can prove that it wasn't I."

"How so?"

"By the time it happened," said Gore. "I didn't think of that at first—and D'Arcy didn't think of it, either," he added, as the swell of St. Jim's came up with the other juniors.

Arthur Augustus put up his eyeglass, and looked at Gore.

"What did you say, Goah? I wathah think that I did not ovahlook anythin' of importance in investigatin' this case."

"Rats!"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort—I—I mean, I wefuse to allow anybody to say wats to me. Undah the cires—"

"Shut up, Gussy, and give a chap a chance to speak!"

"Weally, Glyn—"

"Order!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "Go on, Gore!"

"Well, there was the time it happened," said Gore. "I asked the maid who let Miss Fawcett in, and she says that she—Miss Fawcett—arrived after half-past eleven. She isn't sure of the exact time, but she says it was after half-past eleven. You can ask her yourself if you like."

"That's not necessary," said Tom Merry quietly. "Go on. I think I can see what you're getting at."

"Well, I wanted my Virgil for second lesson, and I was back in the class-room with it before a quarter to eleven."

and Gore. "After that, I didn't leave again till I came with the rest at twelve. Glyn and Dane were there, they'll bear me out."

"Right-ho!" exclaimed Bernard Glyn at once. "That's no enough, Tom Merry. Gore was certainly back in the class-room before eleven, anyway."

"And it couldn't possibly have been Gore who did the trick, then," said Blake.

D'Arcy's face was a study.

"But I understand that you chaps had inquired about that," said Tom Merry, looking a little distressed and a little indignant.

Blake coloured.

"You see, the business was really in Gussy's hands," he said. "And I remember we were in rather a hurry for dinner at the time we were inquiring about a chap leaving the Shell class-room."

"But surely you thought of asking the time he was out, and the time the affair happened, Gussy?" demanded Tom Merry.

D'Arcy's face was very pink.

"You see, Tom Mewwy—"

"Whom did you inquire of?"

"These chaps."

Tom Merry looked at Glyn and Dane.

"And didn't he ask you anything about the time Gore was out of the class-room?"

"Not a whisper."

"You see," said Arthur Augustus haltingly. "As an amateur detective—"

"As an amateur duffer."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"If you had thought of inquiring on that point, you would have saved a lot of trouble," said Tom Merry. "It never occurred to me that you could be such an idiot—"

"Weally—"

"Well, it's plain, isn't it?" said Gore. "Whoever it was, it couldn't have been me."

"That's so."

"Yaas, wathah! But weally, in placin' my expewience at the disposal of Tom Mewwy in this mattab, I—"

"Oh, rats!"

"Weally, Goah—"

"Bosh!"

"I wefuse—"

"Rubbish!"

"Goah—"

"You're an ass!"

"Bai Jove! Will you hold my hat, Tom Mewwy, while I give Goah a fearful thwashin'?"

"No, I won't," said Tom Merry. "I'll hold Gore's hat while he gives you a fearful thrashing, though."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"And if you ever begin any of your amateur detective dodges again, I'll jolly well give you one myself," said the hero of the Shell wrathfully.

"I should uttably decline to allow you to do anythin' of the sort—"

"Ring off, Gussy!" said Blake. "Now—"

"I wefuse to wing off! I—"

"Now, Reilly, did you notice what time it was that Mellish was out of the Fourth-Form room?" asked Blake.

Reilly shook his head.

"Faith and I didn't; but I know it wasn't more than a quarter of an hour before we were dismissed."

"That makes the time suit," said Blake. "I say, I'm sorry, Gore!"

"Yaas, wathah! I'm sowwy, as fah as that goes."

"And the next time you're engaged on detective work, you'd better not be in such a hurry for your dinner," grinned Monty Lowther.

"Oh, it's all right!" said Gore. "I'm glad it's cleared up, that's all."

And he walked away.

"Hang it all, Gussy, you owe him an apology."

D'Arcy shook his head.

"Not at all, deah boys. I've told him I'm sowwy, and that's enough."

"But you suspected him—"

"Only of playin' a mean twick, and he has played mean twicks enough to wendah my suspish perfectly justifiable."

"Well, there's something in that," Blake agreed. "A chap has no right to expect to be taken on trust, unless he has a character to match."

"Yaas, wathah! That is how I look at it, deah boys. If Goah turns ovah a new leaf, and weally becomes decent, 'm willin' to take him up; though, as a wule, I endeavah to keep my circle of fwiends select, not to say swagah. But until he has pwoved that he's decent, I pwefer to keep him at arm's length. He might have welapses, you know. And it would place a fellow in a doocid awkward posish to

have a fwiend who welapses into lyin' and bullyin' ewewy now and then!"

"You talk like a book, Gussy—or, rather, like a gramophone! Tom Merry's gone on—so suppose we go and see about that feed?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And they did.

CHAPTER 17.

Brought to Book:

TOM MERRY had followed Gore quickly. The bully of the Shell was walking away under the elms, his hands in his pockets, and a gloomy expression upon his face, as he tramped through the fallen leaves.

He started as he felt Tom Merry's touch on his shoulder, and turned round.

"Don't buzz off like that," said Tom Merry. "There's no need to get your rag out because you were suspected."

"I know I deserved it, if that's what you mean; but that doesn't make it pleasant."

"Well, no. But, to be quite frank, your record's a pretty bad one, and you can't be surprised at a chap suspecting you, when the evidence looks black, too."

"I'm not surprised."

"I mean, you oughtn't to bear malice, you know."

"Well, I'm not bearing malice," said Gore. "I don't owe D'Arcy a grudge, if that's what you mean; or you, either."

"Good!"

"Is that all?" said Gore.

"Not quite. We're getting up a big feed—or, rather, Miss Fawcett and Fatty Wynn are getting it up—to celebrate my home-coming, you know, and my safe escape from the perils of the Custom House and the Channel steamer," laughed Tom Merry.

Gore laughed too.

"Yes I know."

"Well, I want you to come."

"Me!"

"Yes, you."

"Rubbish!" said Gore. "You don't want me. You want to make up for suspecting me, by standing me a feed. I don't want a feed!"

Tom Merry coloured a little.

"You never were an easy fellow to get on with," he remarked. "I suppose you never will be. But I do want you to come."

Gore looked him straight in the face.

"Honest?" he said.

"Honest Injun!"

"All right. I'll come! And jolly glad," added Gore, after a moment's pause.

"Right-ho! Come on, then," said Tom Merry cheerily.

They walked towards the School House. Tom Merry paused at the steps.

"It's No. 4 on the ground floor," he said. "I'll join you in a few minutes. I've got to speak to Mellish."

Gore went in alone. Five minutes later Tom Merry tapped a weedy Fourth-Former on the shoulder. Mellish turned round, and his face assumed a sickly tint as he faced the hero of the Shell.

"Hallo, Merry! So glad to see you back at St. Jim's," he murmured.

"Liar!"

"Oh, I—I mean it's jolly, you know. I hear you're standing a feed. I—I'll come if you like."

"I couldn't eat at the same table with you, if I were starving," said Tom Merry scornfully.

Even Mellish coloured at that.

"What do you want with me, then?" he asked sullenly.

"I want to speak to you about that affair in the Head's study," said Tom Merry quietly; and Mellish's face went more sickly than ever.

"I—I don't know—"

"Don't start telling lies."

Mellish's face assumed a venomous look.

"So Gore has told you," he said savagely. "I'll pay him out—"

"Gore has told me nothing about you; he hasn't mentioned your name."

"Then how—I—I mean, I don't know anything about—"

Tom Merry smiled scornfully.

"It's too late to begin lying now," he said. "You've given yourself away, even if I didn't know already."

"It—it was only a lark," said Mellish, beginning to be scared. "I—I didn't mean—I—I— You're not going to give me away to the Head?"

"No."

"You see, it was only a lark—"

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A Grand Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By Martin Clifford.

"Come into the gym."

"Wh-wh-what for?"

"To take a hiding."

"I—I—"

"You can have it here if you like," said Tom Merry. "The Head's not going to inquire into the matter. Miss Fawcett asked him not to. I'm going to make you sorry you played a mean trick on an old lady. Put up your hands."

"I—I—"

"Will you fight or take a hiding?"

"I—I—"

Tom Merry's knuckles tapping on his nose, cut Mellish short, and he put up his hands. If he was to be licked, he felt that he might as well defend himself. In a moment they were going at it hammer and tongs. Mellish knew a great deal about boxing, and if he had had the courage would have been able to put up a good fight. Now, fear itself—fear of getting hurt—made him use all he knew, and put his "beef" into the fight.

There was a sudden cry of horror under the elms.

"Tommy! My darling!"

Tom Merry dropped his hands. Mellish staggered away to the nearest tree, and stood leaning on it, gasping.

For the second time that afternoon Miss Fawcett had saved him from a well-deserved punishment.

"Tommy!"

"Ye-es. I—I was just coming."

"Tommy! You were fighting—and on the first day of your return from a foreign country," said the shocked Miss Priscilla.

"Well, I wasn't exactly fighting. I—I was giving Mellish a licking."

"My darling boy! This is very wrong! How can you expect your dear teachers to pat you on the head, and call you by caressing terms of affection, if you raise your hand in anger against the countenance of your schoolfellow?"

Tom Merry grinned. Mellish was quietly sneaking among the elms, and Tom Merry was content to let him go.

"It is very wrong, Tommy."

"But—"

"The poor boy's nose was quite swollen."

"Serve him jolly well right," said Tom Merry resentfully.

"Oh, Tommy!"

"It was that chap put the ink on your face in the Head's study."

"Oh! The bad boy! I—I forgive you, Tommy, if that is the case; but, still, it is wrong to—delight to bark and bite—I—I mean to growl and fight."

"I wasn't growling."

"No, of course you were not, my darling. But you must not fight that wretched boy any more. I forgive him, and I hope he will be sorry some day. Now, all is ready, dear, and I came to look for you. Come in with me."

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry.

And he took Miss Fawcett in to the feed.

And a splendid feed it was; Fatty Wynn had really surpassed himself. The table groaned, as a novelist would say, under the viands; but the viands themselves speedily yielded to the attacks the juniors made upon them. Miss Fawcett presided over the feast, and was beaming good-humour upon everyone, and everybody else, even Gore, was in a good temper and in the best of spirits.

It was a feast that all remembered, and that Fatty Wynn dreamed of in happy dreams for many nights afterwards; and all agreed that Tom Merry's home-coming was a great success.

THE END.

(Another grand, long, complete school tale of Tom Merry & Co. next Thursday, entitled "The St. Jim's Sportsman," by Martin Clifford.

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STEPHEN VILLIERS, his brother. He is Sam's companion in all his exploits.

After the sweeping defeat of the Germans in London, as related in "Britain at Bay," the country is astounded by two brothers—men named Carfax.

Harrington Carfax, a scientist-inventor, discovers the way to make gold, and presents to the Chancellor of the Exchequer £100,000,000.

John Carfax has invented an absolutely perfect aeroplane, and he takes Sam and Steve to Germany.

The two young scouts are landed from the Condor, Carfax's airship, to spy out the land, but they are surprised by the Germans, and in the confusion Stephen is captured. He is sentenced to be shot, but, to save him, Carfax captures the German Crown Prince, and offers to make an exchange of prisoners. This is accepted, and Colonel Euse, the German officer, who was on the point of having Stephen shot, is forced to deliver up his prisoner to Sam, who has come to demand his release.

(Now go on with the story.)

The Wayside Inn.

"The old ruffian nearly chewed his moustache off," said Stephen to his brother. "But it was evidently a command from somebody whom he'd got to obey, and so he sent me back to my cell. How on earth did it all happen, Sam? What did you do?"

Sam told him of all that occurred since they parted at the cell-window before the dawn.

"Holy pokers, but that's the limit!" cried the amazed Stephen. "Isn't Carfax a wonder? I told you he'd pull it off somehow! But the Crown Prince! By jingo, it's a pity they couldn't make more use of an advantage like that, besides just rescuing me!"

"That was enough for me, old chap!" said Sam. "Of course, we take risks enough, and if you were shot in battle, or scouting, hard as it would be, I wouldn't blame the Germans for it. But to have you murdered—why, I'd wipe

Germany out if I could do it, rather than that. An' Carfax would have, for that matter. He was goin' to burn Berlin if anything happened to you!"

"They've no business to shoot a chap for doin' his duty, that's sure. They're not all such sweeps though. But the Prince—"

"We'll have to let him go now. He didn't approve of your sentence, only he wouldn't let himself be forced into anything. I rather liked him for it. We've got to jog on back to Husum somehow, Steve. It's no good tryin' to get another horse, so you'd better hop up behind me."

Sam mounted, and took his brother up behind him. They did not travel at any pace, for the horse was tired, and had earned an easier time. There was no immediate need for haste, so they did not press him.

"I say," said Stephen, "this is a precious rum business! Two British cadets ambling through Germany on one horse won't get very far without causin' remark, I should think."

"No," said Sam, "but I've got a permit from Von Strelsau, passin' us through, and as long as we keep to the high road we aren't likely to be shot on sight. That old bird—what's his name, Euse?—didn't ask me about the permit. I believe he hopes we'll get sniped on the way, that's why he turned us adrift without any guard."

"Vindictive old sweep!" said Stephen. "It's plain how down they all are on anybody who's connected with the Condor. But I should have thought they'd have made more fuss about us, seein' that I'm to be exchanged for their blessed Prince."

"So I thought," agreed Sam; "it's extraordinary. I've heard Von Strelsau's a great soldier, but he doesn't seem to think the Royalties matter much. He seemed to think the whole thing a nuisance. As for Colonel Euse, he evidently doesn't know about the Prince's capture at all, or he wouldn't have sent us off like this. Von Strelsau plainly didn't give him any orders about it."

"Rummy thing," said Stephen.

"Yes. They think differently at Berlin, though, an' when the authorities there learn what's up, I fancy there'll be a pretty fuss made. But I'll bet Von Strelsau won't care," he added, laughing. "I say, Steve, aren't you infernally hungry? What did they give you at Erzfeldt?"

"I had some rations served me early this mornin', but they didn't go far. I could eat a bullock."

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"THE ST. JIM'S SPORTSMAN."



"So could I. Hardly had any grub since the Condor started taking in petrol. Let's go to one of these little country inns an' get something; no hurry, and we're too famished to wait till we reach Husum. It's a deuce of a way."

They came to a clean-looking wayside "bierhaus," a mile further on, and decided to try it.

"Wonder if they'll serve us?" said Stephen, as they dismounted. "Quite likely they'll refuse."

There appeared to be nobody about. Sam took the horse into the stables, put it into a loose-box, took out the bit, and after vainly trying to find an ostler, found some corn himself and emptied it into the manger. It seemed very strange to the boys to be doing such a thing, clad in their uniforms, in the heart of the enemy's country.

They entered the inn by the back door. The only person they could find was a huge, fat, flaxen-haired innkeeper comfortably asleep behind a sort of bar. Wondering what their reception would be, the boys woke him up with some difficulty.

"The war don't seem to trouble him much," remarked Stephen.

The innkeeper blinked at them and yawned. He did not seem in the least struck with their English appearance or their khaki uniforms, and looked about as much interested as a cow.

"We want some bread and cheese, and any other grub you can let us have!" said Sam in German.

The innkeeper pointed to one of the pews into which the beer-room was divided, as if speaking were too great an effort, and nodded. The boys took this to mean that he would bring the provisions if they took seats, and they did so.

There were a table and two benches in each of the many compartments into which the room was divided, a curious arrangement which Sam remembered having seen in other Schleswig inns. It was not possible to see who was in the next compartment when one was inside without getting on the bench and looking over the partition. However, the room was empty, and the boys seated themselves.

The food did not appear, and after waiting some time, Sam went to look for the innkeeper and found him snoring again, in his old position. This time Sam stuck to him till he waddled off and unearthed some provisions from a pantry. There was bread, butter, cheese, a large Frankfort sausage, and—as the boys did not care for lager—a large jug of fresh milk. As soon as Sam had obtained these, the innkeeper went to sleep again almost before there was time to pay him for them.

"Uncommon quiet place this," said Sam.

"Don't wonder, with such a landlord," returned Stephen, attacking the provisions wolfishly; "surprisin' that he troubles to get up in the mornin'—might just as well not."

"Wonderful fellows to sleep, some of these Germans," said Sam, with his mouth full; "suppose it's the beer. But this chap's a champion! All the better for us—we don't want to be taken any notice of. I doubt if he gave us a second glance."

"Wish I could follow his example an' have a good long snooze," said Stephen sleepily, after the food had been polished off. "Hardly got a wink last night, as you can guess. Neither did you, old chap!"

"Mustn't do that," said Sam drowsily, "we can rest for a bit though, and give the horse a chance. I shoved him along pretty hard, coming out, and he's got a double load now."

Despite their good intentions, both the boys dozed off into slumber. While on service, they could remain alert and sleepless for amazing lengths of time. But now, with no danger threatening, and after a long bout and a square meal, sleep overtook them, since it mattered little.

Stephen was the first to open his eyes, and he was vaguely aware that somebody else—two or three men—had entered the room. He had a dim idea that they were in the next compartment towards the door, and that the fat landlord served them with beer and returned to sleep again. Stephen, only a quarter awake himself, dozed off once more.

The men in the next pew were talking in low voices, and in the hard North German accent, though in educated tones. So quiet was the room, that their words, though so low, were audible beyond the partition, and seemed to mingle themselves vaguely in Stephen's dreams.

The Warning.

"Old Fritz asleep, as usual," said one voice.

"Ja!" returned the next. "If the world came to an end he would still sleep, provided the bierhaus were left standing. This is extraordinary news, eh, about the Prince?"

"They say the British airship captured him; but I do not believe it. The Condor, isn't she called?"

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"It is true!" said the other emphatically. "I have just had it from Karl, who has ridden in from Frederick's division."

"These military fellows seem unable to look after themselves," said the first voice. "If we were not sharper than that, we should do little good, eh, Johann? It is time somebody put a stopper on this Condor. Do you know?"—his voice sank a little lower—"that her commander, the aeronaut, is a brother of our man?"

Stephen's senses awoke when he heard the name Condor. He opened his eyes, and, without moving, caught fairly plainly the conversation on the other side of the partition.

"A brother? What, of Harrington Carfax?" replied the second voice.

"Yes. A dangerous pair, aren't they, for any country to have for enemies. But for them, it is thought Britain would have knuckled under to us."

"Would she?" thought Stephen scornfully.

He nudged his brother, and Sam, catching the drift of their conversation as soon as he was awake, glanced at Stephen meaningly.

"It is a good deal easier to get hold of Harrington Carfax than the aeronaut," said the other German, whoever he was, "and he has given Tarlenheim enough trouble, as it is."

"Of the two brothers, I consider Harrington the most dangerous," said the first man. "The owner of the airship is terrible enough, and he makes more show with that machine of his stalking through the clouds; but a man who has the command of more gold than all the nations of the world—that man has a greater power than a whole fleet of flying-machines."

"Our superiors think so too," said the other man, with a grim laugh, "or we should not have been ordered to deal with Harrington first. I wish I had been given the job."

"Tarlenheim has been at it a week now, with Schenke to help him. They have both got service in Harrington's house. Good, isn't it, at such short notice? They expect to—"

"Sh! Aron't we talking rather too much for a public place?" said the first man anxiously.

"Oh, it's all right! What safer place than this? There's nobody but old Fritz, and he is snoring. Of course, the Government couldn't countenance our work, Johann, and I suppose there'd be a fuss if some of those in power knew. But, thank goodness, we've got a sensible chief at the head of our own department. Before the sun rises to-morrow, Harrington Carfax will have ceased to live. A good thing for Germany, and for all the world—except, perhaps, Britain."

"Is it fixed for to-night, then?"

"Tarlenheim expected to do it to-night, as I heard. And, you know, he rarely makes a mistake in his calculations. He will not fail—he is about the best of us. If he said to-night, to-night it will be."

"Well," said the other man, after a pause, "I'm not so sorry not to be in his place, after all. But it will be a great service. Why should our business be thought any worse than that of the soldiers? We risk our lives just as they do. And in cases like this we do far more good at a smaller cost of life."

"Harrington Carfax will be an easy prey, at least," said the first man; "a little dried-up scientist isn't likely to give much trouble."

"How will Tarlenheim do it—with a pinch of powder out of a bottle?"

"He will make sure, even with the knife, if necessary," said the other grimly. "You know Tarlenheim. Come, let us be going!"

The unseen speakers rose, and the boys, peering round the edge of the partition, saw their backs as they departed. They looked a most ordinary pair of Germans, quietly dressed in tweed clothes.

When the strangers had gone, the two young scouts looked at each other in blank consternation.

"Here, let's get out of this!" said Sam, rising. "Quick! We must push on to Husum with all possible speed!"

"What on earth could they have meant?" exclaimed Stephen.

"Meant?" retorted Sam, hastening to the stable. "Isn't it plain enough? We've overheard the talk of a couple of members of the German Secret Service, and there's a scheme afoot to murder Harrington Carfax! That's what it meant!"

"That's how I understand it. But it must be rot, Sam! Germany would never attempt such a—"

"Germany! What has that to do with it? It's the chief of her Secret Service that has to be counted with in this business, and he's not particular. His men have been suspected of more than one ugly business," said Sam, biting the horse and leading him out quickly. "And he knows the German Empire has more to fear from Harrington Carfax than from any man on earth."

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"That's true. But—"

"Can you doubt, after what you've heard, that he means to wipe out the gold-master and his secret at one blow?" said Sam hotly. "Didn't you understand that some fellow they call Tarlenheim is now a spy in Harrington's house in Hampshire, and that it's this very night he is expected to kill John Carfax's brother? To murder him, that's the word!"

"You're right, though I could hardly believe it," Stephen said, breathing deep. "To-night—that's what they said."

"There's some special reason for that, too, you can be sure," ejaculated Sam, springing into the saddle. "Up you get behind me, quick!"

"What's to be done?"

"Ride like the deuce to Husum, and let John Carfax know. We must get warning to Harrington somehow."

"What a ghastly business for a great nation to be mixed up in!" said Stephen, with a shudder, as he mounted behind Sam. "It's hardly to be believed!"

"Worse things than that have happened in history," replied Sam sourly. "We'll not let Harrington fall into this trap if we can help it. Of course, he knows nothing."

"He'd be an easy prey, too, poor little beggar, as that brute said. Clever as he is at science, he's day-dreaming half the time."

"Think what it will mean to Britain, too, if he is killed and his secret with him! He has entrusted it to nobody."

"He was decent to us, and trusted us," said Stephen. "We'll do our best, if that were all."

Sam urged the charger along as fast as he could drive him, and both the boys were impatient at the slow progress. The horse, though fast, was a sullen-tempered one. He had been ridden very hard in the morning, and now, with a double load, it was hard to get him along.

"Wish we could swap him for a good fast dogcart!" cried Stephen. "What's that coming up behind?"

The sound of galloping hoofs were heard, and soon afterwards a dozen troopers and a captain, all of the Royal Lifeguards, who belong to the Kaiser's Household Cavalry, came sweeping along the road.

"Halt, there!" cried the officer, as soon as he was within shouting distance of the boys. "Is one of you the lad who was lately a prisoner in Colonel Euse's hands?"

"Yes," replied Sam.

"Good heavens!" muttered Stephen. "More trouble? Are we goin' to be stopped again, and at a time like this?"

"I am here to take you into Husum, and deliver you to Colonel Blake," said the Lifeguards' captain abruptly.

"Your horse is ridden out," he added, with a glance at the charger. "We are under orders to make all speed, so I shall provide you with mounts."

He spoke to two of his troopers, who dismounted, and were left behind, while the boys were requested to mount their horses. A minute later the troop was cantering on at a rapid pace, the two brothers in its midst.

"It's just as I thought!" said Sam. "There's a deuce of a fuss now the prince's capture is known at headquarters, and these chaps have been sent on to see we're delivered safely, and to take the Prince back."

"Good egg!" said Stephen. "I thought they were going to recapture us at first."

"It's the best bit of luck we could have met with," Sam replied, "and I hope it'll hold out. We shall reach Husum now as quickly as ever these chaps can get us there, with good horses, and no delays for anybody. They belong to the Kaiser's Guard."

It was evident that the envoy had orders to take very special care of the boys. Sam and Stephen were completely shut in by the troopers as they rode, and each of their horses' bridles was held by the man nearest. If Field-Marshal Von Strelsan was casual about captured princes, the other authorities certainly were not.

Von Strelsan's lines presently came in sight, and were left a good way off on the right. The troops rode straight out across the plain towards General Blake's impregnable position on the peninsula next Husum, the Guards' captain ordering a trooper to show a white flag.

It was not long before the troop was ordered to halt by a British picket, and a cavalry patrol galloped out and inquired the German officer's business under the flag of truce he carried. The explanation was quickly made, and the troop was obliged to remain where it was, while its captain and the two boys rode in with the British patrol.

Right round the lines they came, till the Condor was in sight, and there they halted. General Blake and John Carfax came to meet them, and the latter gripped Stephen's hand with heartfelt emotion.

"My boy, you can't think how glad I am to see you safe out of it!" he said. "If any harm had come to you, I was planning such a vengeance as no nation ever dreamed of."

"Yes, sir, I owe you my life as it is, and I can't thank you enough!" exclaimed Stephen. "But never mind me,

sir; there's a much more important matter, and I want to tell it you privately at once. Harrington—"

"Wait; let's get this off first," said Carfax. "General Blake, as far as I am concerned, the Prince is free."

"He may return at once with the escort that is waiting for him," said the general. "I congratulate you on your ride, Lieutenant Villiers. As for you, Stephen, I'm as glad to see you back as your own chief is—I can't say more."

Prince Frederick came forward, brought by Hugh and Kenneth, and the German Lifeguardsman saluted him with great respect.

"So I'm exchanged?" he said, and he glanced towards Carfax, with a smile. "Well, Mr. Aeronaut, I'm glad you've got your man back. I didn't want him shot—only a prince does not do things under compulsion, even when he is a prisoner of war. Good-bye. General Blake, I have the honour to bid you au revoir!"

The Prince made his farewells, and departed, with some ceremony, going out to join the waiting troop, with which he cantered away.

It was a somewhat impressive leave-taking, the departure of the Royal prisoner from the camp of the invaders, and at any other time the boys would have been interested in it. Now, however, they were too impatient and anxious even to notice it, and were immensely glad to see the back of Prince Frederick.

"Now, sir," said Sam eagerly to Carfax, "do come aside and hear our news, for we've something more important than a dozen Crown Princes! Your brother Harrington is in great danger, and so is the secret that, I know, he values more than his life."

Carfax was astonished and startled, wondering where Sam could have picked up any news of Harrington on the Schleswig plains. The young scout told his story quickly, however, and Carfax listened intently.

"You heard that," he exclaimed, "word for word, as you have told it?"

"Word for word, sir!" put in Stephen. "For I heard it, too. We thought we must be dreaming at first, and I don't wonder you do, too."

"No, I do not," replied Carfax quickly; "it does not even surprise me. Such a thing sounds terrible enough, but I know something of the man who pulls the wires of the Secret Service, and that he has no scruples. Deeds as dark as this have been whispered of concerning him. Did you hear his name mentioned?"

"No, sir," said Sam.

"He is a man who carries no name," said Carfax grimly. "I have expected this more than once, since we took the field. You heard no more?"

"Nothing, sir, except the name of the actual spy—Tarlenheim. How are we to save your brother? I thought, if I reached you in time, we might telegraph to him."

"It cannot be done from Germany," said Carfax, striding rapidly back, with knitted brows towards the lines. "There is no certainty of getting a message through over any of the North Sea or Channel cables, either."

"What can we do, then?" exclaimed Stephen.

"There is only one way. We must go ourselves—in the Condor. We must tackle this man Tarlenheim at his work!" said Carfax grimly.

"What, sir! Can we be in time?" cried Sam.

"I pray so," replied Carfax. "It is the only way. If the Condor can do it, she shall. Aboard there, quick!" he cried to his two assistants, as the airship was reached. "General Blake!"

"Yes," cried the general.

"I must leave this country on the instant, but if I am successful, it will not be for long. I have a matter of great urgency and danger to see to."

"Good luck go with you, Carfax!" said the general. And five seconds later, with her crew aboard, the Condor soared up into the clouds.

Then, at a pace that made the wind roar through her frame-work, she headed for England, both the life and the mighty secret of Harrington Carfax, the gold-master, depending on her alone.

The Flight to Andover.

Once the Condor was fairly under way, and heading for England at her utmost speed, the endurance of the boys gave out altogether.

Save for the hour's nap in the little wayside inn after leaving Erzfeldt, they had had no sleep for thirty-eight hours or more, and a very wearing time of it into the bargain. Now the anxiety of reaching the airship was over, and the result was merely in the hand of time, Sam and Stephen could keep up no longer.

"You're dead beat," said Carfax, glancing at them.

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"Turn in for a spell, youngsters. We've a long journey before us, and there's nothing to be done till we reach England."

The boys scarcely heard him—they went straight off to sleep where they stood, leaning against the engine-shed, now that duty no longer kept them up. The airship was just clearing the land and soaring over the North Sea, when slumber overcame them. Kenneth, failing to wake them, carried them each bodily into the deck-house, and left them snoring in two of the bunks.

The Condor's crew stood watch by turns, having had some sleep during the day. Without a hitch or a pause the great vessel sped on her way hour after hour, turning in from over the sea at the Texel, for reasons of her own, and then making a bee-line across Belgium and Flanders till she brought France in sight, and crossed Picardy at an immense height.

It was already growing dusk rapidly when Sam and Stephen, refreshed by an unbroken sleep, came out on deck and found the Condor leaving the Pas-de-Calais shores, and heading north-west across the Channel.

"Hallo! That's France we're leaving astern, isn't it?" exclaimed Sam.

"Yes," Carfax replied. "You would be able to see the English coast easily from this height if it were less dark."

"What's the time? How has she been doing?"

"Magnificently!" said Carfax. "I've never driven her so hard. We've been seeing what is the utmost speed we can knock out of her."

"I should think so!" said Sam. "If there was never need for haste before, there is now. It's awful to think of Harrington in such danger, and being unable even to get a message to him."

"It is," said Stephen, "but we're bound to be in time now; why, we shall land at the very house before it's been dark long. By jove! It seems beyond belief that we should have left Germany only a few hours ago, and here we are nearly home!"

"There has been a strong wind helping us till half an hour ago," said Kenneth, "and what with that and our own forced speed, we've done as high as seventy miles an hour for some time. The wind's dropping now, though. It doesn't much matter, for we're bound to be in time with our warning—bar accidents."

"Thank goodness!" said Stephen fervently. "I didn't believe it possible, even for the Condor, when we started. And although I was about as anxious as anybody need be over my own troubles yesterday, this makes me feel worse, I can tell you. I could be spared pretty easily, but what a ghastly disaster if anything happened to Harrington! I say, what's that yonder?"

Stephen's sharp eyes had caught sight of a dim shape in the sky, away to the north-east, about the same height above the sea as was the Condor.

All hands turned to gaze at her keenly, and telescopes and field-glasses were levelled at the object. It seemed like a gigantic, ghostly-looking water-melon hung in the sky.

"It's an airship!" said Carfax. "One of the long-shaped, gas-bag machines."

"She's something like the Parseval, that we wrecked last week up in Schleswig," said Sam, watching the monster with intense interest, "only she has a broader and bigger gas-container. Can't see anything of her car at all—it's too dark for that."

"Which way is she moving?" said Stephen.

"It's impossible to say," answered Kenneth, "we're going at such a speed ourselves, and her pace isn't much. Wonder if the chief means to speak her? Hope not, for she's a long way out of our course."

"Can she be English?" said Sam. "Or one of the French ones?"

"It's impossible," said Carfax slowly, his glass to his eye, "though I can see nothing of her car. But I know the shapes of all the French aerostats well, and she is not one of them. She's German, unless I'm much deceived."

"German!" cried Sam. "Whoever thought of meeting an enemy over the Channel! How has she passed over France? I thought you said, sir, that none of the German balloon-airships could get as far as this from home?"

"She must have started from South Holland," said Carfax. "She's lying motionless, I think, waiting for night before she moves. But what her game can be I cannot guess."

"Aren't you going to tackle her, sir?" said Hugh, for the aeronaut made no motion to alter the Condor's course, and the German airship—if such she was—rapidly faded out of sight.

"No," said Carfax, "I shall turn aside for nothing till I reach Andover and see Harrington. That bag-of-wind yonder can do no great harm."

"My word!" muttered Sam. "But she's within touch of

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England even now! Suppose she goes there and starts bombarding Dover—or even London!"

"She knows better than to attempt it," said Carfax grimly. "Have no fear about that, my lad. I could destroy three big towns while she was damaging a single village. Germany will take no such risks while the Condor remains at Britain's service. The Teutons don't want to give us any such excuse now."

"She seemed to be pointing for England when she disappeared," said Kenneth.

"I doubt it," replied the aeronaut. "But if she does, she must take her chance. There are two gas airships as good as she is at Aldershot—they have lately been completed, and they'll have to tackle her, if need be. I have more important work on hand, and I will not delay it for a back number like that machine we've just left behind. Keep up the speed there, Kenneth!"

Carfax had a thorough contempt for what he called "gas-bag" airships, and was justified by his own recent dealings with them, as the easy defeat of the Parseval seemed to prove.

The Condor went racing ahead, and the boys, though they had been startled to find a German machine so near to England, were greatly relieved that Carfax did not feel forced to go in chase of her. They were tense with anxiety to reach Andover with their news, and grudged every moment of delay.

"We can make hay of her some other time," said Stephen joyfully. "This is no time for loitering on the way, is it, sir? Most likely we shall fall in with her on our way back."

"And then there'll be one vessel less in Germany's 'Aerial Fleet,' as she calls it," said Sam, with a dry chuckle. "It seems queer to think how those sort of craft were thought such a lot of, not long since. D'you remember the fuss that was made about three years ago? The Nulli Secundus, they called her—"

"When she sailed round St. Paul's, an' got blown to rags by a breeze at the Crystal Palace a day or two afterwards?" put in Stephen. "I remember."

"The fact is, that those machines have hardly been improved on at all since the first ones were turned out," said Carfax, looking ahead to where the first twinkle of the lights on the Hampshire coast became visible. "They're a little speedier, but their gas-bags can carry no more weight than these; they can't go any great distance, and in a gale of wind, they're simply helpless. The Condor, being a true aeroplane, is as superior to them as an 800 horse-power motor-car to a donkey-cart. We'll leave that fellow to his own devices, as you say, and when we've time to go an' look for him he'll wish he'd never left the Fatherland. By jove, but the Condor's doing herself magnificently to-night! There's St. Catherine's Point, and the Needles Lighthouse. Well, it's been a nice little trip, and Harrington will be pleased to see us to dinner."

"It'll be enough for me if we find him safe an' sound," muttered Stephen.

"Oh, they wouldn't tackle him so early in the night!" said Sam. "We're in good—Hullo! What now?"

The Condor gave a jolt or two, her engines coughed and rattled, and the loud report of a back-fire from one of the cylinders was heard.

The airship seemed to have lost all grip of herself, and they felt her stagger to a standstill and begin to descend.

"By jove, something up!" exclaimed Hugh, darting to the engine-house, and as Carfax shouted a question, Kenneth thrust his head out of the door.

"She's broken down, sir! Look out for the overhead fans, Hugh!"

"My goodness!" exclaimed Sam, under his breath, as Carfax ran to the engine-shed. "Is she goin' to fall?"

Such a lurch did the airship give that both the boys held their breath and grasped the side-rail. They had had such faith in the wonderful machine up till now, having seen her perform apparent miracles, that it had hardly occurred to them that anything could happen to destroy her. But now, hanging in mid-sky at that dizzy height, a couple of thousand feet above the sea, they realised thoroughly for the first time what disaster would mean. For something had evidently gone wrong.

The great fans and propellers at the stern of the airship had ceased to revolve. Carfax and his crew were hard at work adjusting some gear and levers on the middle deck, with great haste, though what they were doing was more than the two brothers could tell. The Condor dropped no farther, but hung motionless, and the great horizontal fan-wheels overhead were still spinning, though much less rapidly than usual.

"Is she going to drop, sir?" exclaimed Stephen, as Carfax came hurrying back to the engine-house.

"No, no—there's no fear of that. But the engines have broken down, and it will be some time before we can go ahead again," was the answer.

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"Valves have gone to blazes, sir," cried Kenneth, "and the sparking-plugs on the port engine have failed!" "Come on! We've a spell of hard work before us," said Carfax, throwing off his coat.

The chief and the two assistants tackled the engines at once, with skilled and rapid hands. They presently announced that the breakdown was worse than they expected. It would take a good two hours to get the Condor in order again, and send her along.

Sam and Stephen, knowing nothing of the petrol engines, were unable to give any help, and they were maddened with impatience and helplessness.

"This is awful!" said Stephen desperately. "My heavens, we shall be too late, after all! And we can no more get a warning to Harrington than if we were in the moon!"

"If only we were over the land, perhaps they would let her down and give us a chance to reach Andover!" groaned Sam. "But there's nothing but open sea below us. Could anything be more sickening—right at the very last, too!"

The coast of the Isle of Wight was no distance away—perhaps a mile or two—and it was terribly tantalising to see twinkling lights on the headlands beyond.

What exasperated the boys most, was the cool and leisurely way in which Carfax seemed to be working. He was really doing the work with extreme rapidity, though very quietly, at it looked, to anybody not an engineer, as if he were doing it very easy. Nor did he seem in the least anxious or concerned, as the time went by.

"By gum! I always said the chap was made of iron,"

his cold-bloodedness. "Why, sir, it's nearly eleven! Isn't it likely to be past the time that vile assassin would have chosen for his deed?"

"Quite possibly," said Carfax, still smiling. "You're rather anxious about my brother, I suppose?"

"Aren't you?" blurted out Sam.

"No, not very," replied Carfax, as quietly as ever. "I have made all speed on my way here for various reasons. But I can't say I considered Harrington's life in much danger, if that's what is worrying you, my lads."

"In no danger, sir, with a German spy of the Secret Service in his house, sent out on purpose, and expecting to make sure of him to-night!" cried Sam. "And he knowing nothing about it, unless we are in time to warn him! Well, sir, I shall be surprised if we find him alive—that's all!"

Carfax gave a gentle laugh.

"I shall be more surprised if you do not find he knows more about it than you can tell him, Villiers."

Sam stared at him in astonishment.

"How can he possibly know, sir? We only overheard it ourselves by accident, and in the nick of time!"

"You don't know my brother Harrington very well yet," said Carfax. "You look upon him as a clever little scientist, half a hermit, I think." The boys glanced up at each other. "There is very little goes on in Europe, however secret, that does not reach him, often before Courts and Governments learn of it; and what he does not know he can very quickly find out."

Sam raised his eyebrows.



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muttered Sam, and he and Stephen went forward; "but has the chap no affection for his brother at all? Or, doesn't he care what the loss of Harrington's secret means?"

"One'd think not, to look at him."

"I'm called a pretty cool hand myself, they tell me," said Sam; "it's no good gettin' flurried when you're in a tight place. But when you were in the hands of that butcherin' Prussian colonel yesterday, it fairly gave me the jumps, and here's this chap tinkering away at the engines coolly as you please, an' whistling through his teeth! Listen to him! Yet he seemed keen enough at first."

"Two hours clean gone!" sighed Stephen, glancing at the cased clock on the bridge. "It don't matter much now what we do, I should think."

"She'll do now," said Carfax, stepping out of the engine-room. "Try her on the low gear first, Ken."

The engines began to purr and spit again, as smoothly as ever they had done. The airship moved ahead slowly, and then, increasing her speed, flew along at her usual slashing pace, though not quite so fast as she had travelled from Husum.

"All's well," said Carfax, taking his place on the bridge. "It was not Kenneth's fault she broke down. It was my driving her so hard for so long a stretch. But I wanted to see what she could do in a great emergency. Now we are all right."

"All right!" echoed Stephen bitterly. "Don't you think this delay will have—will have been fatal to your—I mean—"

"Fatal to Harrington?" said Carfax, with a cool smile. "No, I don't think so."

"Don't think so!" said Stephen, positively staggered by

"You don't quite believe me," said Carfax, smiling. "If you ever bet, I will wager you a dinner in Berlin, when we reach it, that you'll find he knows this business, inside out, already, and is quite prepared for it."

"You believe he'll get the better of this Secret Service assassin, sir?" cried Stephen.

"I shall be very much astonished if your precious Tarlenheim can catch Harrington napping," said John Carfax.

"I think I overheard you call me a man of iron just now. But I am a mere man of putty compared to Harrington. And if you feel inclined to pity anyone," added Carfax drily, "pity the spy that is seeking his life. He will need it."

The aeronaut turned away, and the two boys walked to the fore rail, wondering what to think of it all. They still felt incredulous.

"I can hardly swallow this, Steve," murmured Sam. "I hope it's true, but still— You see, Carfax rather worships his brother, I think, an' would believe anything of his powers."

"If it were Carfax himself, I should think it much more likely," said Stephen; "but Harrington, in spite of his wonderful power of producing gold, and his knowledge of science, doesn't strike you that way."

Sam nodded, and the impatience of the boys was no whit abated. They felt that John Carfax was suggesting impossible things, and their anxiety to reach Andover increased. They had not long to wait, for the Condor had already left the Channel behind her, and was passing high and swiftly over Hampshire, over the course of the River Test.

"We are within touch now," said Carfax. "Kenneth!"

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE ST. JIM'S SPORTSMAN."



"Yes, sir!"

"We cannot leave the Condor near Harrington's house. After landing us, you and Hugh will take her on to our enclosure at home. Fit her out with fresh accumulators, and all the gear she wants, and replenish the petrol tanks. You will be in need of a rest, and can then turn in. I will communicate with you directly I want you, from here."

"Very good, sir."

"If there is any difficulty about the accumulators at home, you can charge them from Harrington's dynamo on your return here. My brother," said Carfax, turning to Sam, "has in his house one of the most powerful private electric plants in England, by the way."

Sam did not want to hear about the electric plant. He was consumed with anxiety to find out whether they were in time, or if Harrington had fallen a victim yet to the treacherous, unknown enemy in his house, and grudging every moment of delay. The Condor, gliding down swiftly from the skies, lit in a small field bounded by thick woodlands. John Carfax and the two boys sprang off her platform, and away she soared out of sight into the dark heavens, in charge of the assistants.

"We have half a mile to walk," said Carfax, striding out. "It would not have done for the Condor to be seen near the house."

The two young scouts would rather have thrown all other considerations aside, and alighted at the very doors, to save time.

The old manor-house by the river loomed in sight very soon, and with anxious hearts the boys hurried towards it. Had some dark tragedy already taken place within these walls, or were they in time?

The three travellers reached the great double front doors, and their leader rang a peal on the deep-toned iron bell. After a short pause the doors were opened—not by footmen, as before, but by Harrington Carfax himself, quiet and mysterious-looking as ever, and in evening-dress.

"Thank goodness!" blurted out Stephen fervently. "We're in time!"

Harrington Carfax is Mysterious.

"John!" said the wizened little man, his keen eyes fixed on his brother in mild surprise. "A pleasant surprise, this. What brings you here? The two young Villiers, too, I see. Come in!"

"Phew! This is a relief!" said Sam, warmly taking the thin hand Harrington held out to him.

The famous scientist looked mildly astonished.

"These young gentlemen have some news for you, Harrington," said John Carfax, a slight twinkle in his eye.

"I shall be glad to hear it. You know how little news I get, cooped up here," said Harrington simply. "Have you dined, by the way?" he added, showing them into the fine old dining-hall, where a pile of logs blazed on an open hearth big enough to camp in. "I have sent the footmen to bed, but the staff in my kitchens can serve a meal at any hour. I will have one laid in the morning-room at once."

"We are rather hungry," said his brother. "We've had little leisure for food."

Harrington touched a bell, and gave an order to the butler who appeared.

"Well, John, where are you from?" said the little gold-master, when the door was closed again. "You came in the Condor, of course?"

"We left Husum about two o'clock," said Carfax.

"Indeed! A long journey. You must have driven her hard, John. What did you think of it, young gentlemen?"

"We only wished she'd go twice as fast, sir," said Sam emphatically, "for

we had a fearfully anxious journey of it, especially when a delay occurred. And the truth is, we didn't expect to find you alive."

"Really," said Harrington, with polite surprise, "you astonish me! But I am quite well, as you see."

"Yes, thank goodness!" said Stephen fervently. "I know what a terrible loss your secret would have been, sir, and, of course—er—I mean, for your own sake, we—"

"Quite so," replied Harrington, smiling; "but I'm rather in the dark, you know. Suppose you tell me about it while we're waiting for supper?"

"Certainly," said Sam. "I—er—there's no chance of our being overheard here, sir, is there?" he began, lowering his voice.

"Not the slightest," returned Harrington genially.

"Well, sir, have you had some trouble of any sort? Have you noticed any danger—to yourself, I mean?"

"Not to my knowledge, certainly," said Harrington, looking surprised.

Sam glanced at Stephen, as much as to say, "I told you so."

"The chief thought you'd know about it, sir, but I felt sure that was impossible. We only heard of it ourselves by accident. To put it in a nutshell, we've learnt that there's a dangerous spy here in your household, and he is the chief mover in an infernal plot to murder you!"

Harrington opened his eyes wider, looked at Sam, and laughed gently.

"Oh," he said, "you mean Tarlenheim."

Both the boys felt completely flabbergasted. John Carfax grinned silently.

"Is that it?" asked Harrington. "That's the man you meant, I think?"

"Yes, Tarlenheim," said Sam feebly.

"Quite right. He's my chauffeur. Of course he doesn't call himself Tarlenheim here. Arthur Mylton is the name he engaged himself under. Doesn't sound very German, does it? He's a very good chauffeur. Your information's quite correct."

"Then you did know all about it!" said Sam explosive, amazed to find John Carfax's prediction true. "You know he is a spy, and dangerous to you?"

"He proposes to assassinate me to-night, about two o'clock!" said Harrington, taking out a cigarette and lighting it thoughtfully. "But I think—not!"

"Proposes to!" exclaimed the astonished Stephen. "D'you mean he's threatened you, sir?"

"Dear me, no! Naturally, he does not know I have any inkling of the matter," said Harrington; "but that is his plan at present, if you care to hear it. I'm sorry I didn't quite understand what you meant at first, Villiers, when you said 'danger.' It was stupid of me, but I should not myself have considered it a danger—except, of course, to Tarlenheim," he added pensively.

"Exactly," said John Carfax grimly. His brother laughed. "And you strained your engines, and used up your petrol to come and tell me this, John?" he chuckled. "Come, now, John, really!"

Sam and Stephen looked thoroughly crestfallen. "It was our fault," they said. "We were afraid that—"

"No, no!" said Carfax. "It was not only the youngsters, Harrington. There are other matters it is important I should see you about; and, besides, I wanted to make sure of this matter, too. A lot depends on you now, you see. Couldn't afford to lose you, old boy; and as the young 'uns were anxious as well, I kept up the speed."

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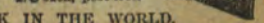
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