

NEXT
WEEK:

"THE CIRCUS AT ST. JIM'S."

A Splendid Tale of
TOM MERRY & Co.

EVERY
THURSDAY

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No. 95.

Complete Stories for Everyone and Every Story a Gem!



THE ST. JIM'S SPORTSMAN.

A grand, extra long, complete
tale of Tom Merry & Co.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Unappreciated Magnificence.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY, usually known at St. Jim's College as the swell of the School House, stood in front of the big mirror in his study, No. 6, in the Fourth Form passage, and surveyed himself critically, and with growing satisfaction. He had had the big mirror put in at his own expense, and had religiously replaced it as often as it was smashed by a flying boot or cricket-bat, or other missile.

Needless to say, D'Arcy very often made use of the mirror, and he frequently remarked to his study-mates—Blake, Herries, and Digby—that he regarded it as indispensable.

But never had the big mirror seemed so valuable to him as on this afternoon in late autumn, as he stood and smiled with satisfaction at the gorgeous image therein reflected.

He was dressed in full fox-hunting costume, pink coat, silk hat, white buckskin breeches, hunting-tops, and spotless hunting cravat, and white gloves, and he held a dainty silver-mounted hunting-crop in his hand. He looked a perfect picture.

And such, evidently, was his own opinion as he surveyed the reflection of all this magnificence in the mirror, with his monocle jammed in his eye, and a triumphant smile on his face.

"Bai Joye," he murmured, "I wathah think I shall do. I wathah think it is wippin'!"

Afternoon school had been over for some time, and all the rest of the world of St. Jim's was out in the playing-fields punting footballs about.

Consequently D'Arcy had the study to himself, and contentedly reckoned on his chums being absent until about six o'clock, when they generally came in to have tea.

For once, however, he had reckoned without the curiosity of his chums. They had been expecting him to come out for the last half-hour, and their patience was exhausted by now.

With one accord they left the football they had been

punting about with Figgins & Co., of the New House, and made a bee line for their study, exchanging grim looks as they went.

And so it came about that D'Arcy was still admiring himself in the mirror, when the door was suddenly kicked open, and three juniors stared into the room from the threshold, where they had remained apparently transfixed by the sight that met their gaze.

D'Arcy turned his monocle on his gaping chums with a self-satisfied smile.

"Hallo, deah boys!" he said. "How do I look? I wathah, think it's wippin'!"

His chums continued to gaze at him in stupefaction, without uttering a word.

"I see you are transfixed with silent admiration, deah boys," continued D'Arcy genially.

This modest remark seemed to break the spell.

Blake, the leader of Study 6, stepped forward into the study, and eyed his elegant chum grimly.

"Going to a fancy-dress ball as a tailor's dummy?" he asked.

D'Arcy gasped.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Oh, are you going to act in a charade?"

D'Arcy glared.

"Certainly not," he began frigidly. "I am surprised——"

"So am I," said Blake severely. "I am very surprised indeed at you, Gussy."

"Weally, Blake——"

"I am surprised to find you dressing up like a kid, and looking at yourself in the glass—just like a giddy peacock!"

"I wefuse to be compared to a giddy peacock!"

"Rats!" said Blake, giving his elegant chum a shove. "Come out of it! Take that rotten fancy dress off, and come and punt a footer about!"

D'Arcy gave a yell.

"You wuff wottah, Blake! This is not a fancy dwess, you ass!"

"What is it, then?" demanded Blake.

A DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

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"It's my new huntin' togs, of course!"

Blake, Herries, and Digby gave a simultaneous gasp.

"What," said Herries, "do you mean to say you are really going to wear that Covent Garden get-up?"

"Weally, Hewies—"

"You'll get locked up," said Digby, wagging a forefinger at the swell of St. Jim's warningly. "And it's no use looking to us to bail you out!"

"Weally, Dig—"

"Now, Gussy, don't talk rot!" said Blake. "You know you can't hunt from school."

"But I am goin' to hunt, deah boy."

"Oh, rats!"

"Suahly you do not doubt my word, Blake?" said D'Arcy, with a gleam in his eyes.

"Oh, come off! How can you hunt when you are at school?"

"My governah has got the Head's permish for me to go out on half-holiday occasionally," said D'Arcy, with dignity.

"You know that I can wide Badgah whenever I like."

"What are you going to hunt—cats?" asked Digby, with an air of interest.

"Weally, Dig! My governah has subscibed to the Sussex Vale Hunt for me, so I am entitled to weah pink, with the Hunt buttons," answered the swell of St. Jim's proudly.

"My only aunt! So you are really going out hunting on a real live horse, after real live rabbits?" said Blake, in a tone of awe.

"Weally, Blake! The Sussex Vale are fox-hounds, as you know vewy well! I should wefuse to go out huntin' wabbits!"

"My hat, here's a wheeze!" exclaimed Digby. "Gussy blossoming out into a sportsman!"

"Weally Dig—"

"What I want to know, Gussy," said Blake severely, "is this. Who's going to look after you when you go out John Peeling?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway do not be absurd, Blake! I do not wequiah anyone to look aftah me. Besides, my bwothah Conway, as well as the governah, hunt with the Sussex Vale.

"Oh, yes, of course! But all the same, I don't think you ought to go out without your keeper, do you, chaps?"

"Certainly not," said Herries and Dig together.

"Weally, Blake—"

"So if Gussy is determined to go out chivvying the elusive Reynard—"

"Of course I am, deah boy!"

"The only thing to do, then," continued Blake solemnly, "is to look after him."

"But I don't want lookin' aftah, I tell you!"

"Ah, no! But we know better," said Blake, with a wise wag of the head. "We must find out some way of looking after you."

"Certainly," said Dig and Herries, nodding their heads solemnly.

"You wotiahs!" shouted the exasperated D'Arcy. "I will not be looked aftah like a kid. I shall wefuse to be looked aftah!"

"Your mistake, Gussy," said Blake, shaking his head.

"We're your keepers, you know, and we must do our duty."

"Certainly," chorused Dig and Herries together.

"I wefuse to listen to such wiculous wemarks!" exclaimed the irritated swell of St. Jim's hotly. "I wegard you as a set of utah wotiahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall immediately wefire fwom your pwesence!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The indignant swell of St. Jim's strode to the door, with a great squeaking of boots, and left the study, almost slamming the door, and with none of that repose on his countenance which he cultivated so carefully, as stamping exclusively the cast of Vere de Vere.

He left his chums roaring, all the solemnity gone from their faces now that they had succeeded in "pulling his leg."

And the swell of St. Jim's, as he strode along in high dudgeon on his way to the dormitory to change, heard the echoes of their laughter floating faintly down the Fourth Form passage.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 2. A Little Argument.

"WELL, I'm blessed!" gasped Blake, at last. "Of all the giddy chumps!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fancy wasting a good footer afternoon standing in front of a looking-glass admiring himself in some new clothes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 95.

NEXT THURSDAY:

"THE CIRCUS AT ST. JIM'S."

"Ah, well, I suppose it's like the one and only Gus, after all! He's always— Hallo, you needn't come in! We'll excuse you!"

Blake's last remarks were addressed to a pleasant-looking, handsome face, crowned with a crop of curly hair, which had suddenly appeared round the study door.

In spite, however, of this scarcely cordial greeting of Blake's, the owner of the face only smiled, and came further into the study.

"This isn't a Shell study, you know, Tom Merry," pursued Blake, with heavy sarcasm; "but still, if you want to make use of it, of course we can all turn out and cram in somewhere else."

Tom Merry, the leader of the Shell juniors at St. Jim's, laughed carelessly.

"All right, Blake old man," he said, "don't try and be so sarcastic, or you'll bust something! I only just looked in—"

"Well, now you've looked in, look out again," put in Digby.

"Rats, Dig! I only just looked in—"

"So you said before, Tom Merry," remarked Herries. "Get on with it!"

"How can I get on if you asses keep interrupting?" asked Tom Merry, with some heat. "I say I just looked in—"

"That's three times you've said that," remarked Herries, looking at the ceiling thoughtfully.

Tom Merry glared at him.

"Look here, Herries—" he began wrathfully.

"Oh, chuck it, you two!" broke in Blake impatiently.

"Get on, Merry, and then get out!"

Tom Merry transferred his gaze to Blake, and breathed hard through his nose.

For a moment it looked as if the peace of the study might be disturbed.

Remembering his mission, however, and no doubt remembering also that the odds in a rough and tumble would be three to one against him, Tom Merry restrained himself.

"Well, you are a polite set of asses," he remarked, with a snort. "I've a jolly good mind not to tell you at all!"

"Get on with the washing!"

"Well, as I was saying," went on Tom Merry, keeping his eyes on Herries, "I looked in—"

"Four!" muttered Herries, still gazing at the ceiling.

"To say," continued Tom Merry, glaring at Herries, but otherwise disregarding the interruption, "that I have just had a thumping—"

"A good job, too!" grunted Blake. "Just what you wanted!"

"Ass!"

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"You ass, I say I came to tell you that I have just had a thumping—"

"Yes, I know you did, and I say that I'm pleased to hear it. A good thumping's just what you Shell-fish want. Who gave it to you—Railton?"

"Oh, you—you ass!"

"Look here—"

"You hopeless lunatic!"

"By Jove, I—"

"I was going to say," howled the exasperated leader of the Shell, "I'd just had a—"

"Thumping!" finished Blake, equally excited. "I know what you said! And I've a good mind to give you another one."

"Oh, you fatheaded lunatic—"

"By gum! I'll—"

"You utter cuckoo—"

"Chuck him out!"

"You babbling—"

"Come on!"

The three chums of Study 6 made a rush at the excited Shell junior, and grasped him with no gentle hands. He made a bolt for the passage, but it was too late.

He was grasped as he went down with a bump, and Blake took a seat on his chest, while Herries and Digby took charge of his wriggling arms.

"Now," said Blake, grinning, "who's a cuckoo? Who's a babbling something? Who's a lunatic? Eh?"

Tom Merry gave a gasp like escaping steam.

"Y-you!" he managed to gasp out.

Blake grinned.

"We'll see about that!" he said cheerfully, raising himself about a foot from Tom Merry's chest, ready to jump down on it again. "Now, who's—"

Blake got no farther just then.

The door was suddenly burst open, and two youths rushed in.

They were Manners and Lowther from the Shell, Tom Merry's study-mates, come to see what had happened to their leader.

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& Co. By Martin Clifford.



"'Elp!" panted the page boy. "'Elp! Master D'Arcy; 'elp me. I didn't do it a-purpose! 'Elp!"

The opening of the door had sent Blake flying off Tom Merry's chest and across the room, so that for the moment he was hors de combat.

Manners and Lowther therefore made a rush at Herries and Digby, and in a moment the four were engaged in a terrific struggle.

Tom Merry sat up, still gasping, and Blake sat up too, also gasping.

They glared at each other and then rose at the same time and grappled with each other, and went reeling about the study locked in a close embrace, to the great detriment of the study furniture.

The trampling and struggling was terrific.

The noise soon brought a crowd of fellows from the neighbouring studies to view the struggle from the passage, and before very long the passage was blocked with a mob of delighted juniors, who encouraged the combatants with chaff and shouts.

"Go it, Blakey!"

"Wipe the floor with the Shell-fish!"

"Never mind the furniture—give 'em socks!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Just at a most exciting moment, when Herries was sitting on Manners, Lowther had got Dig's head into chancery, and

Tom Merry was kneeling on Blake in the fender, preparing to rub ashes into the Fourth-Former's face, the inevitable interruption occurred.

The crowd of yelling juniors was parted violently, and two or three irate Sixth-Formers, armed with canes, burst into the study, and without wasting breath in words, began to lay about them at the combatants with charming freedom.

Then, indeed, were the grunts of the struggling juniors changed into yells of pain, and the combat ceased as if by magic.

Herries and Manners, Lowther and Digby, parted as if each had suddenly become red-hot, and it was with considerable alacrity that Tom Merry changed his kneeling position to one which offered less temptation to Kildare, the big Sixth-Former who was also captain of the school, to ply his stinging cane so readily.

"Perhaps you'll make a little less row for a bit now," roared Kildare, giving Blake a few stinging cuts that caused him to scramble to his feet in haste. "I never heard such a ghastly shindy in my life! We could hardly hear ourselves speak down below!"

The six juniors surveyed each other sheepishly while they rubbed the tingling portions of their respective anatomies.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 95.

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

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE CIRCUS AT ST. JIM'S."

"Well—er—perhaps—perhaps we were a bit noisy," began Tom Merry, eyeing Kildare diffidently. "You see—"

"Yes, I see a lot of disreputable-looking young ruffians," roared Kildare, glaring at the dusty and dishevelled juniors ferociously. "I've a jolly good mind to lay you all over the table, one after another, and give you half a dozen of the best!"

"Good idea," chimed in Knox, another of the Sixth-Formers, a bully and a most unpopular prefect at St. Jim's. "Here goes!"

And with a sudden movement Knox grabbed Digby, who chanced to be nearest to him, and wrenching his face downwards over the table, dealt him a vicious cut.

Digby gave a yell that woke the echoes and wrenched himself free in time to escape a second cut.

"Here, that'll do, Knox! Drop it!" said Kildare sharply. "They've had enough already!"

Knox looked annoyed.

"I think a jolly good hiding—" he began.

But Kildare cut him short.

"I tell you they've had enough," he said sternly. "None of your bullying tricks here, Knox."

Knox glared, but Kildare, apparently not noticing, went on, addressing the discomfited juniors.

"You'd better get to work and tidy up this study," he said. "But I warn you, no more row! If I have to come up to you again, I'll make you sit up, and none of you will be able to sit down for a week!"

And with this complex and dark threat Kildare left the study, and walked down the passage which was now quite empty, followed more closely by Knox and the other Sixth-Formers.

As the door closed behind the Sixth-Formers, the juniors in Study 6 looked at each other in silence.

They looked at each other's red faces and dusty persons, and they looked at the wrecked study.

And for some moments they found no words to express.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Blake at last, with emphasis. "Here's a go!"

And the juniors, looking round ruefully, agreed that it was, indeed, a "go."

"It's all your fault, you fatheaded Shell-fish," broke out Blake warmly. "If you hadn't come in here talking rot, Tom Merry, we should not have been obliged to chuck you out."

"Rats!" said Tom Merry, heatedly. "If you hadn't been such a lot of silly asses, you'd have listened to what I'd got to say, before—"

"I tell you—"

"Rats! I tell you—"

"Bosh! It was your fault! You—"

"Look here—"

"I'll jolly well—"

"Look here, you two asses," broke in Digby. "Don't start scrapping again, for goodness' sake! I, for one, don't want Kildare up here again!"

And Dig rubbed himself ruefully.

"Nor I, by Jove," said Manners. "Nor any of us, I should think, so shut up, Tom, and let's bunk. It's past tea-time now."

"All right. But all the same, if that ass Blake—"

"If you hadn't been such a—"

"Oh, shut up!" roared Manners, Lowther, Herries and Digby together. "If you two don't stop scrapping, we'll shove you both in the box-room, and let you scrap there alone!"

"Well, all right, but—"

"But rats!" said Manners rudely. "Come on."

"Yes, but—"

"Come on, I tell you!"

"Well, we may as well give these bounders a hand with their study," suggested Monty Lowther good-naturedly. "It's in a fearful mess, and no mistake."

"Right-ho! Come on, then!"

And all six juniors set to work to put the study to rights as far as possible.

It is true that the table and one of the chairs were smashed, and the glass of the bookcase broken, but the study soon began to look a little more like a place of human habitation, and less like a Sicilian home after a severe earthquake.

"By gum, old Kildare did lay into me!" groaned Tom Merry, as he endeavoured to mop up a stream of ink from the floor with about a square inch of blotting-paper. "He's a ripping good chap, and a rattling skipper, but he does lay about him when he gets a bit excited like that."

"Yes, by Jove, and so does Darrell," grumbled Monty Lowther. "I feel almost as if I'd been flogged by the Head!"

"Yes, it's a bit thick that we can't have a bit of an argument in our own study with a lot of Shell bounders—fellows, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 95.

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE CIRCUS AT ST. JIM'S."

I mean, without the prefects coming in and laying into us right and left," growled Blake.

"Still, we were making a dickens of a row," grinned Tom Merry. "Why, half the House was standing yelling at the door!"

"Well, that wasn't our fault, was it?" grunted Blake.

"We were providing the entertainment," grinned Lowther.

"Anyway, there's no excuse for a cad like Knox to lay into me like he did," put in Digby.

"No, that's so," chorused the others.

"I believe I'm marked for life," continued Dig, with rueful indignation.

"Ha, ha! Bad luck, old chap," said Tom Merry. "That was a bit too thick, certainly. That brute Knox wanted to take old Kildare at his word and lay into all of us!"

"Yes, and Knox is a New House prefect. 'It's nothing to do with him, anyway,' put in Herries.

"That's so," assented Blake, nodding his head. "Still, I suppose he was in Kildare's study, talking about the footer or something."

"All the same, we can't have that sort of thing," said Tom Merry, decisively. "We mustn't let the prefects get their tails up too much, you know."

"Ha, ha! No."

"So I propose that we reckon that we owe Mr. Knox one, to be paid back when opportunity offers," finished Tom Merry, looking very virtuous.

"Hear, hear!"

"Good!"

"Well, I think you chaps are about straight now, so we'll bunk," said Lowther at last, looking round the study. "If you have it papered and painted, and get some new furniture, you may get it to look decent again in time."

"Ha, ha! Come on!" said Manners.

"Just a minute," said Tom Merry. "Now, Blake, do you want to hear what I came in to say, if you asses had let me say it."

"Oh, yes, go ahead!" growled Blake. "Get it off your chest!"

"You ass, I've a jolly good mind not to—oh, well, here goes, then. I came to say that I've just had a thumping fine piece of news. Cousin Ethel's coming to stay with Dr. Holmes for a whole fortnight! I've just heard from her."

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

"Yes, you asses, I thought that would make your eyes bulge a bit, only you wouldn't let me say it!"

"You—you ass! Why didn't you say so before!" gasped Blake. "Cousin Ethel coming! Hurrah!"

"How could I say so before," demanded Tom Merry indignantly. "You bounders would keep on interrupting!"

"Rats! If you'd said Cousin Ethel was coming instead of jabbering a lot of rot about having had a good thumping—"

"You—you ass—"

"Anyway, I'm pleased to hear the news, now you have got it out at last! I suppose you bounders will be having tea in your study now, eh?"

"Well, yes, but—"

"Good!" said Blake, heartily. "We'll come along too, just to show there's no ill-feeling. Our study is still rather upside down. Thanks very much!"

And without waiting for a reply, the Fourth-Formers marched off with the Shell fellows to Tom Merry's cosy study in the Shell passage, where they all made a hearty tea together, the best of friends as usual after their little "argument."

CHAPTER 3.

D'Arcy's Tea.

FIVE minutes after the chums of the Fourth had left their study in company with the Shell fellows, with whom they had so cordially invited themselves to tea, the door of Study 6 was opened cautiously, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the fourth inmate of the study, looked in.

He gave a whistle of surprise and displeasure at the sight of the interior of the famous apartment.

He walked into the middle of the room, and glanced round him through his monocle, with an expression of extreme disfavour on his aristocratic countenance.

"Bai Jove!" he muttered, as his eye took in the broken furniture and ink-bespattered carpet. "Bai Jove! It looks as if there must have been an earthquake or a huwricane in my absence!"

He walked to his beloved mirror, and examined it minutely.

"Good!" he murmured, with a sigh of relief. "My miwwor has fortunately escaped the general destruction. I wondah where the boundahs are, though?" he added, glancing round the room again, as if he expected that they might

be hiding behind the furniture. "Havin' tea in Hall, I suppose. Pewhahs I had bettah go into Hall, too, bai Jove!"

And the swell of St. Jim's made his way with dignified tread to the Hall, where tea was almost over.

The juniors as a rule took advantage of their studies to have tea there at their own expense; but, of course, funds were not unlimited, and so periodical visits to Hall for tea were indulged in.

To D'Arcy's surprise, his chums were nowhere to be seen in Hall; but, once there, the swell of St. Jim's stayed to partake of the plain bread-and-butter and the tea which was provided.

He felt a little aggrieved, however, realising that his chums were probably feasting in luxury the while in some other fellow's study.

But this disquieting reflection was not allowed to occupy his mind for long.

He had seated himself next to a very skinny youth with an abnormally large head, and wearing a pair of immense spectacles, and this youth, who was none other than Skimpole, the eccentric genius of the School House, and a staunch upholder of Socialism, Determinism, and every other known "ism," immediately engaged the School House swell in close conversation.

"I have been closely studying the science of hypnotism lately," he began; "and, believe me, D'Arcy, this little known science has the most extraordinary fascination—"

"Yes, Skimmay, I know. It is a weally amazin' thing," agreed D'Arcy, trying to cut short the long-winded genius.

But it was in vain.

Skimpole had D'Arcy at his mercy for the time being, and he was fully aware of the fact.

He also knew very well that D'Arcy was too polite to be openly rude to him; and nothing short of rudeness or actual violence could stop Skimpole when he once got well under weigh on some one of his many harebrained ideas.

"This little known science has the most extraordinary fascination for all who possess more than normal brain power."

"Quite so, deah boy!" said D'Arcy at random. "Will you kindly pass me the buttah?"

"In connection with this art—for an art is is," continued Skimpole, warming to his subject, and totally disregarding D'Arcy's polite request—"I have discovered that I have the most amazing powers as a hypnotist!"

"Yaas. But will you pass the buttah, please, deah boy?"

"I have experimented in the art on previous occasions," continued Skimpole; "but I find that I did not approach the subject in quite the right way. Since then—"

"Will you kindly—"

"Since then, however, I have closely studied the methods adopted by Clifton Dane, of the Shell, who is, as you know, an accomplished hypnotist on the rare occasions when he can be prevailed upon—"

"Yaas, but the buttah—"

"Be prevailed upon to exercise his remarkable powers," continued Skimpole, unheeding. "I myself am now convinced—"

"Buttah please, deah boy!"

"Am now convinced that I am a hypnotist far superior even to Clifton Dane."

"Buttah!"

"Of course, this subject only interests those of superior brain power, as I think I remarked before."

"Yaas, wathah! But the buttah—"

"Now, you yourself, D'Arcy," went on Skimpole, blinking at the bored swell of St. Jim's through his enormous spectacles, "to what extent does this remarkable science interest you? I trust to an enormous extent."

"Yaas, wathah—I mean, no, it does not interest me in the slightest at pwsent, Skimmay, you ass!" roared D'Arcy, now thoroughly at the end of his patience. "I have asked you to pass the buttah half a dozen times."

"The butter? Oh, here you are, then! But I regret to observe," remarked Skimpole, shaking his head gravely—

"I regret to observe, by the very fact of your being more interested in anything so mundane as butter in preference to hypnotism, by your own admission, you clearly show that your brain power is extremely small—"

"Eh?"

"Your brain power is extremely small, I say. Surely you must, even with your weak brain, see that!"

"Weally, Skimpole—"

"I suppose, however, that you cannot be blamed for being little better than an idiot—"

"Look heah, Skimmay, you ass—"

"This undoubted fact must be attributed to the combined influence of hereditament and environy—I—mean, of

heredity and environment. A race of vicious and bloated aristocrats—"

"A—wace of what?"

"Of vicious and bloated aristocrats," repeated Skimpole firmly. "A race of vicious and bloated aristocrats, I say, must necessarily be—"

"Bai Jove, Skimmay!" exclaimed D'Arcy, jumping up from his place. "Come outside a moment, you feahful ass. I will demonstwat to you that awistocwats are neither vicious nor—nor bloated! I will pwocced to give you a feahful thwashin', in fact! Yaas, bai Jove!"

And D'Arcy's eye gleamed dangerously from behind his monocle.

Skimpole recoiled from the irate swell of St. Jim's.

"Really, D'Arcy," he exclaimed, blinking up at him through his enormous spectacles—"really D'Arcy, I must refuse to respond to such an invitation! As a sincere Socialist—"

"As a sincere Socialist, I am going to give you a feahful thwashin'! Come on!"

"Violence is no argument, D'Arcy."

"Bai Jove, I—"

"D'Arcy," sharply interrupted the voice of Kildare, who was presiding over tea, "stop that noise at once! Sit down, or go out!"

"Weally, Kildare—"

"Get out!" roared Kildare.

And the unfortunate swell of St. Jim's stopped to argue no more, but got out with what speed he might.

It was not wise to argue with the captain of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 4.

A Letter for D'Arcy.

AN hour later the chums of the Fourth Form were sitting quietly in Study No. 6, doing their preparation, when there came a sharp knock at the door.

"Don't come in!" growled Blake. "We're busy."

The knock, however, was repeated, and before Blake had time to address the knocker further, the door opened, and Binks, the School House pageboy, put his head into the study.

Blake glared at him, and Binks looked apologetic.

"If you please—" he began.

"Clear out!" said Blake. "We're busy, I tell you!"

"If you please," said Binks, "there's a letter for Master D'Arcy."

"A lettah for me?" said D'Arcy, looking up. "Good! Bwing it heah, if you please, deah boy."

"Rats! Why didn't Binks leave it in the rack?" growled Blake.

"Weally, Blake," said D'Arcy, turning his monocle upon Blake, with an air of surprise, "I take it as vewy kind of Binks to bwing the lettah up. Pway give me the lettah, Binks, deah boy."

"Here you are, sir."

"Thanks!"

D'Arcy felt in his pockets, and drew out a sixpence, which he gracefully presented to Binks.

Blake gave a grunt.

He put down the disturbance of the peace of the study entirely to the fact of Binks having relied on a tip from the swell of St. Jim's.

D'Arcy always behaved with courtesy and generosity to those who performed any service for him, however small, and this fact was not lost upon the various servants with whom he came into contact at the great school.

Blake could not help thinking, however, that it was somewhat unnecessary for Binks to have brought the letter up, and disturbed the study at their prep, instead of leaving it on the rack with the others.

Blake grinned as he pocketed the sixpence.

"Thank you, sir!" he said, and slipped out of the study, with a sly wink to himself, which was, however, not lost on Blake.

"You ass, Gussy!" he growled. "What did you want to give that kid a tanner for?"

"Weally, Blake," said Arthur Augustus, in genuine astonishment, looking up from examining the envelope of the letter, which he had not yet opened—"weally I am surprised at you! Suahly you would not wish me to be mean?"

"Don't be an ass, Gussy!" said Blake, looking at him severely. "You know I'm not mean. But that young ass only brought that letter up from the rack and disturbed us at prep, to get a tanner from you. He knows what a silly chump you are, you see."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Why," went on Blake, "you'll have somebody coming into the study every five minutes shortly, bringing some—"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 95.

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

thing of yours you don't want in here, if they think they'll get a tanner a time for doing it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake, I wefuse to attwibute Binks's kind action to such motives," said the swell of St. Jim's, with dignity. "I suppose I could not pwesent him with less than a tannah, anyway?"

"I nearly presented him with my boot!" growled Blake. "He's a good little ass really, though. I don't blame him for taking advantage of your dottiness."

"Weally—"

"That letter of yours," continued Blake calmly, "has cost one penny to come perhaps a hundred miles or more. To come up two flights of stairs it has cost sixpence!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove—"

"Why, you can send a letter from New Zealand to the hall letter-rack for a penny, and yet you pay sixpence to get it up from there!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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

"I don't want to do Binky out of his tips," went on Blake; "I don't suppose the poor kid has any too much cash. But I don't think he ought to be encouraged to bounce in and disturb us at prep, every time he feels he could do with a tanner."

"Ha, ha! No!"

"Weally, Blake, you are exaggewatin', you know—"

"Go hon!"

"But I will make an effort to be more discwiminatin' with my tips. And now, deah boys, will you please excuse me if I open this letter?"

"I don't see how you are going to read it unless you do open it," observed Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies! I take it that I have your permish to open this lettah now, deah boys?"

And D'Arcy hesitated a minute with his thumb under the flap, and looked inquiringly at his chums. He was always most punctilious in all matters of etiquette.

Blake looked at Digby solemnly.

"Shall we give him our permish, Dig?"

"Oh, I think we might! What do you say, Herries?"

"Weally, Dig!"

"Oh, I'm agreeable, if you are!" said Herries, after a moment's pause, during which he seemed to be turning the matter over in his mind. "As long as he doesn't make a row about it."

"I shall not make a wow about—"

"Well, then, Gussy," interrupted Blake, with owlish gravity, "we will agree to give you our permish to open your letter on condition that—"

"Wats, Blake! Pway do not wot! I shall certainly open the lettah!"

"Then what did you ask our permish for, you ass?"

"It is customawy," replied D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity, "for a gentleman who receives a lettah when in the company of othah gentlemen, to ask their permish, as a mattah of politeness, befoah openin' the lettah."

"But supposing we refused our permish?" asked Blake, with the air of one propounding a difficult conundrum.

"I should wefuse to take any notice of your wot, Blake."

"Then you'd open the letter all the same?"

"Certainly, deah boy."

"You ass! Then what's the use of asking permission to do something, when you have made up your mind beforehand to do it anyway?"

"It is merely a mattah of form, deah boy!"

"A matter of rats!" grunted Blake. "Get on with the opening of the letter, for goodness' sake!"

"Can you lend me your penknife, Blake?"

"You've got one of your own, haven't you?"

"Yaas, but— Can you lend me yours, please, Dig, deah boy?"

"No. Where's yours?"

"Hewwies, will you kindly lend me your penknife?"

"What for?"

"To open this lettah."

"Why don't you use your own?"

"You see, deah boy, I have heard that cuttin' papah makes knives vewy blunt, and spoils their edge, don't you know?"

"You—you ass! What about our penknives?" howled Blake. "What about our penknives being blunted, you dummy?"

"I wefuse to be alluded to as a dummay!"

"Well, lunatic then!"

"I wegard you as a wude ass, Blake."

"Go hon!"

"I suppose I shall have to use my own penknife aftah all."

And D'Arcy proceeded leisurely to slit the envelope with THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 95.

NEXT THURSDAY:

"THE CIRCUS AT ST. JIM'S."

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

a dainty, pearl-handled penknife, which he produced from his pocket.

Silence then reigned for a time in Study No. 6 as Blake, Digby, and Herries continued their interrupted preparation, while D'Arcy became absorbed in his letter.

After reading it through carefully, D'Arcy looked up and addressed his chums again.

"Bai Jove," he said, "this is wippin'!"

"Yes, isn't it?" said Blake.

"I was weterwin' to the contents of this lettah, Blake."

"Yes. When is she coming?" said Blake, with an air of great interest.

"When is she comin'? What do you mean, Blake?" And D'Arcy stared at his chum in undisguised astonishment.

Blake grinned and winked at Herries and Dig.

"Why, when is Cousin Ethel coming? Is it this week?"

"Cousin Ethel!"

"Yes, Cousin Ethel. I suppose that letter's to say she's coming down."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave a gasp.

"This is weally amazin', Blake! Are you a thought-veadah?"

"What-ho!" said Blake.

"It is vewy extwaordinawy! She is comin'—"

"Hold on a tick! Let's see if I can do any more," said Blake, wrinkling up his forehead as if making a portentous mental effort. "Cousin Ethel is coming to stay in the neighbourhood for—let's see—yes, a fortnight, about! Is that correct?"

"Yaas, wathah! But—"

"Hold on!" said Blake, gazing up at the ceiling with a rapt expression, and clutching hold of D'Arcy's wrist. "I've got another inspiration! She's going to stay very near here—in fact, she's going to be—yes, she's going to be in the same house! She's going to stay with Dr. and Mrs. Holmes! Am I right?"

D'Arcy fairly gasped.

"Suahly, Blake—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Dig and Herries, unable to contain their mirth any longer. "Ha, ha!"

"Why, what—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake looked at the two yelling juniors, wrathfully.

"You asses!" he said. "You've spoilt it all now!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Then a light suddenly dawned on the gasping swell of St. Jim's.

"Blake, you wottah, you don't mean to say you have been wottin'—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Blake, joining the other two in their shouts of mirth.

"You—you uttah wottah!"

"Ha, ha!" And the three juniors wiped their eyes and gasped.

To see the swell of St. Jim's gazing at Blake in absolute amazement, and almost in awe, was too much for their gravity.

"How did you find out, Blake?" demanded D'Arcy, when his chums' mirth had somewhat subsided.

He realised that Blake had been "getting at him," but he was still quite in the dark as to how he had gained his information as to Cousin Ethel's movements, of which he had had no knowledge himself until the arrival of the letter.

It never entered D'Arcy's head that Cousin Ethel could have written to Tom Merry before writing to him—D'Arcy, her own cousin.

By right of his relationship with the charming Ethel Cleveland, the girl-chum of the St. Jim's juniors, D'Arcy claimed priority among his chums in all matters in which she was concerned.

Cousin Ethel, however, was not so ready to recognise his priority as he was to claim it—in fact, she treated D'Arcy very much as she did the rest of her friends among the juniors.

"How did I find out?" grinned Blake. "Oh, Tom Merry told me!"

"Tom Merry?"

"Yes. He's had a letter from Cousin Ethel."

"Imposs," said the swell of St. Jim's, shaking his head decisively.

"Well, he's had one, anyway," said Blake, with a grin.

"It is imposs, deah boy! There must be some ewwor."

"Rats! There isn't. Why should there be?"

"Ethel would have w'ritten to me to say she was comin'."

"Well, hasn't she?"

"No, deah boy. This lettah is fwom my govannah. Cousin Ethel is stayin' at Eastwood just now, and my govannah mentions in this lettah that she is comin' to stay with Mrs. Holmes. I had not heard anythin' about it befoah."

"Too bad! But it doesn't matter, as long as we know."

"I wegard it as mattewin' considewably, Blake."



"Hallo, you chaps," said D'Arcy, "I see you are transfixed with silent admiration, dear boys."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall pwoceed to Studey No. 10 and interview the boundah!"

"Ha, ha! Don't be an ass, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass! I shall certainly pwoceed to Study No. 10 and interview the boundah! But first I will tell you what else my governah says in his weally wippin' lettah!"

"Good! Does he say, 'Please pay Arthur Augustus Montmorency Fitznoodle D'Arcy, or bearer, the sum of five pounds'?"

"Weally, Blake, you are a wude wottah! I wefuse to be called Montmowency de Fitznoodle D'Arcy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then it isn't a fiver?"

"No, it isn't a fivah, Blake! My governah says that there is a cub-huntin' fixture of the Sussex Vale at Hangah Dyke on Saturday, onlay four miles from St. Jim's. He is goin' to send the horses on overnight, and motah to the meet in the mornin', and he will have to pass the coll. on the way."

"My hat!"

"He says he has pwomised Ethel that he will take her with him—"

"By Jove!"

"And he thinks that I had better go too, to keep her company and look aftar her."

"You—you bounder!"

Blake and his chums looked at their chum enviously.

D'Arcy grinned.

"He has witten to the Head for permish., so that will be all wight. I considah my governah has played up in a weally wippin' mannah in the mattah. I wegard him as a sport."

Blake, Herries and Dig, grunted.

They felt rather aggrieved. Their aristocratic chum seemed as if he had all the luck. Blake, however, suppressed his feelings with an effort, and turned to D'Arcy with a pleasant smile.

"When is the meet, Gussy?" he asked carelessly.

"On Saturday, deah boy."

"Yes, you—er—yes, I know, old chap, but what time?"

"At seven-thirty in the mornin', deah boy."

"Jolly early!"

"Yaas, watah! It is a cub-huntin' meet, you know."

"Yes," said Blake absently, "of course." And the leader of the Fourth took on a thoughtful expression.

"Then when is Cousin Ethel coming here?" asked Digby.

"She is comin' back to Dr. Holmes on Saturday, aftar the cub-huntin', you know."

**NEXT
THURSDAY:**

"THE CIRCUS AT ST. JIM'S."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 95.
A Grand Tale of Tom Merry
& Co. By Martin Clifford.

"Good!" said Digby and Herries heartily. While Blake seemed lost in thought still.

D'Arcy turned his monocle on Dig and Herries, with a curious expression gleaming in his eyes.

"You seem jolly interested in her movements, Dig and Hewies," he said, a little stiffly.

Digby and Herries turned pink.

"Oh, rats to you, dummy!" growled Dig.

And Herries only grunted.

"Look heah—" began D'Arcy, pushing back his cuffs.

"I thought you were going to see Tom Merry—about his letter, you know," said Digby pointedly.

Bai Jove, yaas! I must go immediately! Thank you for reminding me, Dig, deah boy!"

"Not at all, dear boy," said Digby, with grave politeness.

And the swell of St. Jim's, after glancing at himself in the mirror, and giving his tie a deft pat which gave it just that set which was the envy and despair of all the other dandies at St. Jim's, hastened out of the study.

As he closed the door, Digby and Herries looked at one another, and gave vent to several chuckles.

CHAPTER 5.

Binks Again.

THE sound of the door closing behind D'Arcy caused Jack Blake to come out of his reverie.

"Hallo! Gussy gone?" he asked.

"Yes. Been asleep?" inquired Digby.

"Asleep! No, ass! I've been thinking!"

"Heavens! Hear that, Herries? He's been thinking!" exclaimed Digby, in mock alarm.

"Well, mind he doesn't burst something!" said Herries solemnly.

"Oh, rot! Look here, you chaps," said Blake, "we can't let Gussy go out on Saturday without being looked after, can we?"

"Rather not!"

"The meet's at seven-thirty, isn't it?"

"It is."

"And to-day's Thursday, isn't it?"

"It are."

"Well, I vote we turn up at Hanger Dyke on Saturday morning next at seven-thirty precisely," said Blake.

"Good!"

"Breakfast isn't till half-past eight, and Hanger Dyke's only four miles away, so we need not start back till after eight. That will give us time to see them move off and incidentally to see something of Cousin Ethel."

"Good for you, Blake! We'll do it!"

"Right-ho! Remember, though, that we shall have to get up early. We must start quite by seven."

"That's all right."

"Well, then," said Blake, "that being arranged, we might buzz along to Tom Merry's study now, and see what our tame lunatic is saying to them in there!"

"Ha, ha! Right!"

"Then come on!"

And Blake led the way out of Study 6 and along the corridor to the Shell passage, and stopped outside the door of the study tenanted by Tom Merry & Co.

The sound of a warm argument could be heard proceeding from within the study, and Blake and his chums grinned at one another as they recognised the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy raised high above the others in shrill protest.

Blake jerked his head towards the closed door.

"They're at it!" he grinned. "I suppose we'd better go in before that ass Gussy is eaten alive!"

"Ha, ha! Rather!"

Blake knocked at the door, opening it and walking in at the same moment, without waiting for an invitation.

Herries and Digby crowded in at his heels.

The three intruders were greeted with stares from the Shell fellows, which, however, appeared in no way to disturb them.

"Hallo, my children!" sang out Blake cheerily.

"Having a little chat?"

The Terrible Three continued to eye him in stony silence, but D'Arcy fixed his monocle in his eye and turned round on him.

"Weally, Blake," he said, "I wegard it as vewy wude to come burstin' into a gentleman's study without bein' invited to entah! Besides, you intewwupted me—"

"Go hon!" said Blake solemnly.

"Yaas; you intewwupted me as I was explainin' to Tom Mewwy that I considah that I ought to have been the first to know of Ethel's comin' to St. Jim's! I considah—"

"You ass!" interrupted Tom Merry, with a laugh. "How could I help it? Cousin Ethel wrote to me—"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 95.

"You must wemembah, Tom Mewwy, that I am Ethel's cousin."

"Yes, I do—to my sorrow. I do remember it, Gussy; but I don't see that I can help it."

"Ha, ha! No!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"You see, ass, Cousin Ethel just sent me a note to say that those white rabbits of hers which she asked my advice about were better, and she just added a P.S. to say that she would see us all again soon, as she was coming to stay with Mrs. Holmes for a whole fortnight."

"Nevertheless, I considah—"

"Oh, rats! I suppose you don't want to dictate to a lady whom she may write to?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Cousin Ethel can write to whom she likes, I suppose?"

"Weally, I should wufuse to dictate to a lady in any way whatevah, Tom Mewwy!"

"Well, it looks to me as if you are wanting to dictate to Cousin Ethel. What do you say, chaps?"

"It looks very like it indeed," assented Manners and Lowther together.

"Weally, if you put it like that, Tom Mewwy—"

"I do put it like that, Gussy."

"Then I will say no more about the mattah."

"Good! Then I suppose you will be going now?" said Tom Merry pointedly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good again! And I hope you will be taking your funny-looking friends at the door with you!"

"Certainly, Tom Mewwy!"

There was a growl from Blake & Co. at the door, while Lowther and Manners chuckled.

"Look here—" began Blake darkly.

"Oh, we can't just now, Blakey dear!" said Lowther.

"We've got our prep. to do still. Besides, it hurts our eyes!" he added humorously.

"I'll come and hurt your eyes some more in a minute!" growled Blake.

"Ha, ha! Come on, then!"

For a moment it looked as if the combat that had taken place in Study 6 such a short time before would be renewed.

But perhaps the still-stinging reminder the juniors had had from the prefects' canes influenced them.

At any rate, Blake restrained his desire to join battle with the Shell fellows there and then.

"Oh, come on, Gussy!" he growled impatiently. "We want to get out of this dog-kennel! You've talked quite enough of your silly rot to these Shell-fish! Come on out of it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Tom Merry & Co.

Blake grunted, and dragged the resisting swell of St. Jim's out of the study, and banged the door.

The Terrible Three heard the Fourth-Formers going down the passage, with D'Arcy's voice raised in shrill protest all the way.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Tom Merry. "Gussy is too rich! Here he's been slanging me because I've had a letter and he hasn't."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But what was that he was saying before Blake came in?" asked Manners.

"Some rot about cub-hunting or something," said Lowther lucidly.

"Yes, I wonder what the ass meant?" said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "If there's anything in it we ought to be in it, too. What?"

"Rather!"

"Well, let's go after the bounder and find out!"

"Right-ho!"

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE CIRCUS AT ST. JIM'S."

And the three Shell fellows jumped up and left the study at once. They were just entering the Fourth Form passage when they saw Binks, the page-boy, knock at the door of No. 6 and enter.

"Wonder what Binky wants?" muttered Tom Merry.

And the Terrible Three hastened down the passage.

At the sound of Binks's knock on the door of Study 6 Blake had given a grunt.

He and his chums had just settled down to their interrupted preparation again.

But when Binks's face, wearing a cheerful grin, appeared round the door Blake leapt to his feet with a yell.

"Blessed if that young ass Binks isn't back again!" he howled. "Well, if this doesn't take the biscuit!"

And Blake seized a ruler, and made for Binks with a most ferocious expression on his usually pleasant face.

Binks gave a yelp, and retreated in alarm.

"If you please, Master Blake—"

"Get out!" howled Blake, flourishing the ruler.

"If you please—"

"Get out, or—"

And Blake made a rush at the page-boy, who gave an affrighted gasp, and dodged round the table, nearly upsetting Herries, who was sitting at the table doing an exercise, on the way.

Herries gave a roar as a stream of ink trickled over his neatly-written exercise.

"You young ass!" he howled, leaping up.

And, without more ado, he joined Blake in giving chase to the dismayed page.

Binks fairly gasped.

"Elp!" he panted. "Elp! Master D'Arcy, 'elp me! I didn't do it a-purpose! 'Elp!"

D'Arcy adjusted his monocle, and surveyed the chase through it for a moment thoughtfully.

Digby was howling with laughter.

"Go it!" he gasped.

"Wait till I catch him!" panted Blake.

"Elp!"

"Go it! Ow! Yow! Row! Help!"

Digby shouted "Help!" in his turn now.

In passing the back of his chair in his headlong career, Blake had caught his coat on the knob, and the next minute Digby, Blake, and the chair were lying in a heap on the floor.

At this interesting moment the chums of the Shell arrived on the scene.

They stood in the doorway and grinned in at the Fourth-Formers.

The chase had ceased now, as Herries was too doubled up with laughter at his chums' mishap to pursue the gasping Binks further.

"Well, this is a good way of doing prep.!" grinned Tom Merry. "No wonder you were in a hurry to get back to you study and work!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Manners and Lowther.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who, having almost by a miracle escaped untouched by the whirlwind that had been raging in the study, was the calmest person in the room, turned his monocle upon the Terrible Three with a surprised stare.

"What do you boundahs want heak?" he asked. "And pway stop that beastly cacklin' you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Manners and Lowther, almost hysterically.

"We came to have yet another word with you, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "We haven't heard a word from you for nearly two minutes, you know!"

"Pway do not wot, Tom Mewwy! I want to get on with my pwep, you know!"

"You Fourth Form kids have a funny way of doing prep., if this is a fair example!" said Tom Merry, with another grin. "Just look at Blake and Dig at work!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake and Digby, having sorted themselves out from the chair, were sitting up on the floor and gazing at each other with feelings that seemed too deep for words.

Both looked considerably dishevelled. Digby had a big bruise on his forehead where some part of the chair had struck him, and Blake was tenderly rubbing his shin. All the other occupants of the study, even including Binks, were cackling like hyenas.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, upon my word, Dig," said Blake at last, in measured tones, "of all the blithering, idiotic—"

"Of all the fatheaded, senseless, blundering asses," said Dig, with equal emphasis, "I think you—"

"Of all the cuckoos—"

"Of all the blessed lunatics—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Just look at my forehead!"

"What about my shin, ass?"

"My forehead—"

"Blow your forehead! My shin—"

"Blow your shin! I'm hurt!"

"So am I," howled Blake. "What did you want to get in the light for?"

"What do you want to come blundering into me for, you mean?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Ha, ha! Go it, you cripples! I never knew prep. could be so interesting before."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake and Digby staggered up, still glaring at one another, while the rest of the juniors continued to shriek with laughter.

"It's all the fault of that young scoundrel," broke out Blake suddenly, pointing an accusing finger at Binks.

"What does he want to come bursting into our study again for, and disturbing us? Why, he was in here just now, drat him!"

"If you p-please, Master Blake, it's a m-message from the 'Ead this time, sir."

The whole study was electrified.

A message from the Head!

"A—a message ffrom the Head, Binks?" gasped D'Arcy.

"Good gwacious! Then why don't you delivah it at once, deah boy?"

"I—I'm just goin' to, sir. The 'Ead says 'e would like to see you in his study immediate, sir."

"Good gwacious!" gasped D'Arcy again, and sprang to his feet in feverish haste.

"Why didn't you say that you had a message from the Head before?" howled Blake. "Here, you've been up here at least five minutes, and I suppose the Head's waiting."

"P-please, you didn't give me no chance to say nothink, sir," stammered Binks, with some reason.

"You—you young ass!" said Blake unreasonably.

"Buck up, Gussy!" suggested Herries. "The Head will give it you a jolly sight worse if you keep him waiting much longer."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy paused with his hand on the door, and stared frigidly at Herries through his monocle.

"I shall wufuse to accept it a jollay sight worse, Hewwies," he said. "I—I mean, what do you wufer to when you say that I shall get it a jollay sight worse?"

"Why, the licking," said Herries, with a grin. "I suppose it's a licking, isn't it?"

"I wufuse to anticipate anythin' of the sort," replied the swell of St. Jim's, with dignity.

"Ha, ha! Better take an exercise-book with you, Gussy," said Digby. "They are useful things to have between you and the cane, you know."

"I wegard your suggestion as pwepost, Dig."

And the swell of St. Jim's marched out of the study, followed by the Terrible Three in a body, and at some distance by Binks also.

D'Arcy hastened along the corridor in a very perturbed state of mind. He was the soul of courtesy, and to have kept the Head waiting so long, although unconsciously, seemed to him dreadfully bad form.

To do him justice, the thought of the extra punishment he might conceivably gain thereby did not worry him at all.

He was more than half-way to the Head's sanctum, when he felt a touch on his shoulder, and turning round realised for the first time that the Terrible Three were following him.

"What do you fellahs want?" he asked, in a surprised and none too cordial tone. "You can't come in to the Head with me, you know."

"It's all right, Gussy. We don't hanker after doing that, anyway," said Tom Merry. "But I say, old man, what was that you said about going cub-hunting, or something? It was all rot, I suppose?"

At any other time D'Arcy would have regarded this artless question with the suspicion it deserved, but just now he was feeling rather worried and perturbed.

He answered hastily and without thinking.

"Wot? Of course it was not wot, Tom Mewwy! I am goin' cub-huntin' on Saturday—at least, I hope I am, to look aftah Cousin Ethel, you know."

"Oh, I see!" said Tom Merry, affecting a carelessness he was far from feeling. "And what time does the hunting begin?"

"Half-past seven, deah boy. But—"

"Ah, and where is the meet?"

"At Hangah Dyke. But I must go in to the doctah without delay. I wegard it as vewy bad form indeed to keep him waitin'."

"Oh, all right! Keep your hair on!"

D'Arcy turned and hastened along the corridor again, and as the Terrible Three, chuckling softly to themselves, went back towards their study again, they heard his "rat-tat" on the green-baize door of that much-dreaded apartment—the sanctum of the Head of St. Jim's.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 95.

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

CHAPTER 6.

An Interview with the Head.

RAT-TAT!

"Come in!"

The deep voice of Dr. Holmes came from within the study, and bade the swell of St. Jim's enter.

Arthur Augustus walked boldly into the Head's study. He could not call to mind any special reason for expecting a "rowing," except for his being so late; and that he was confident of being able to explain, "as one gentleman to another," as he said to himself.

The Head greeted him with a slight frown. Dr. Holmes was seated in his armchair, which was turned away from the paper-strewn desk.

The Head had evidently been waiting for D'Arcy's appearance.

"Ah, here you are, D'Arcy!" he said, a little testily, as Arthur Augustus presented himself. "I have been waiting for you for some time. Why did you not come at once? I am not accustomed to being kept waiting by juniors."

"Weally, sir—"

"It is now ten minutes since I sent the page-boy to your study," continued Dr. Holmes severely, looking at his watch. "I trust you were in your study quietly doing your preparation when the boy arrived."

"Yaas, wathah—I mean, yaas, certainly, sir."

D'Arcy did not think it necessary to add what a short time he had been "quietly doing his preparation" when Binks disturbed them for the second time. Had Dr. Holmes questioned him further, he would, of course, have told him the whole truth unhesitatingly.

"Then how was it you did not come at once, D'Arcy?"

"I twust, sir," said the swell of St. Jim's, with dignity—"I twust that you do not suspect me of bein' guilty of the extremely bad form of keepin' my head-mastah waitin' intentionally, sir."

"I trust not," said Dr. Holmes grimly.

"We had an unfortunate misundahstandin' with Binks in the study, sir, and I have only just learned that you wanted to see me, sir."

"Indeed! Then it is Binks's fault! I gave him the message some time ago to deliver to you immediately."

"Pway do not think that, sir," said Arthur Augustus, greatly distressed. "The whole fault wests with—with us—that is, sir, with—with me. You see, sir—"

"No, I do not see, D'Arcy. However—"

"Pway allow me to pwesent my pwofoundest apologies, sir. I assuah you—"

"That will do, D'Arcy. We will say no more of the matter."

"Thank you vewy much, sir."

Dr. Holmes cleared his throat, and his face assumed a more pleasant expression.

"I have here a letter from your father, Lord Eastwood, D'Arcy," he said, "in which he prefers a somewhat unusual request."

"Oh, yaas, sir! I have just heard fwom my gov—fwom my fathah, too."

"Ah, then you will know what I refer to."

"Yaas, wathah, sir! To the cub-huntin', sir, I pwe-sume."

"Yes, that is so, D'Arcy. Your respected father requests permission for you to go out—er—cub-chasing—er—that is, cub-hunting on Saturday morning."

"Yaas, sir?"

"Well, well," said the kind old doctor, with a smile, "it will be a somewhat irregular proceeding for a junior. But in consideration of the way Lord Eastwood puts the matter, and—and for other considerations, I am inclined to give my permission."

"You are vewy kind, sir!"

Lord Eastwood was a liberal subscriber to the various school funds, and he was held in high esteem by Dr. Holmes, who was far from wishing to offend him.

"His lordship says," pursued Dr. Holmes, glancing at an open letter which lay on his desk, "that he regards hunting as a manly and healthy sport, and one calculated to bring out and train a boy's most manly qualities, and to fit him for a strenuous after-life, such as that of a soldier, for instance. I think there is a great deal in what Lord Eastwood says. I believe you intend to be a soldier, do you not, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah, sir; I hope so."

"Ah, just so! Well, your noble father says he will make all arrangements for you, and will call for you in his motor-car about seven in the morning."

"Yaas, sir; he mentioned it to me."

"I understand that your charming cousin, Miss Ethel Cleveland, is to attend the—er—the—"

"The meet, sir? Yaas, wathah! I am to look aftah her, you know."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 95.

"Exactly!" said the Head, with a slight smile. "I hope you will manage all right."

"Pway wely on me, sir!"

"Very well. You must bring Ethel back safely, as she is going to stay with myself and Mrs. Holmes for a time, you know."

"Bai Jove, sir! How wippin'!"

The Head smiled again, and looked at D'Arcy with a twinkle in his eye.

"You knew that before I told you, I'll be bound," he said.

"Yaas, sir. You see—"

"I thought so," smiled the Head kindly. "Well, you may go on Saturday, D'Arcy. I will excuse your morning lessons. I hope you have a good—er—run. I think you call it, and—and a good—er—a good bag, D'Arcy."

"Thank you, sir," said D'Arcy, doing his best not to smile at the worthy Head's somewhat mixed terms.

The studious Head of St. Jim's had never done any hunting, and he had but the vaguest knowledge of the sport.

"You may go, D'Arcy," he said, "and pray take care of yourself, my boy."

"Yaas, wathah, sir, and thank you vewy much," said Arthur Augustus.

And he scuttled delightedly out of the Head's study and along to No. 6 to tell his chums that it was "all wight."

CHAPTER 7.

Early Risers.

AT a quarter-past six precisely on Saturday morning, the peaceful sounds of deep breathing, interspersed with an occasional snore, were suddenly broken in the Fourth Form dormitory at St. Jim's by a loud yawn.

"Yaw-aw-aw! Ugh!"

The yawn came from the bed occupied by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and that aristocratic junior shortly afterwards stretched his arms above his head, and yawned again:

"Yaw-aw! Yaw! Bai Jove!"

D'Arcy leaned out of bed and glanced at his big gold watch which was hanging by his bedside.

"Bai Jove! A quartah-past six!"

He scrambled hastily out of bed.

"It would nevah do to keep the governah waitin'!" he murmured. "Besides, it would be imposs. to be late for the meet!"

"Hallo, Gus," sang out a sleepy voice, "getting up good and early, aren't you?"

"Yaas, wathah, Blake, deah boy," said D'Arcy, turning to where Jack Blake was sitting up in bed, blinking at him with eyes still heavy with sleep. "I'm goin' cubbin', you see!"

"So you are, by Jove!" said Blake. "Still, it's a beastly nuisance to have to get up so early!"

"I don't mind gettin' up early for cub-huntin', deah boy, though it would be a howwid gwind for anythin' else!"

"Yes, and so it is for cub-hunting, too!" growled Blake.

"I wepeat that I don't mind it for cub-huntin', Blake."

"No; but I do," grumbled Blake, tumbling out of bed.

D'Arcy groped for his monocle, and turned it on Blake with a frigid stare.

"What do you mean, Blake?" he asked coldly.

"What I say, ass!"

"Weally—"

"Here, Digby, get up, you bounder!" said Blake, going over to Digby's bed and giving him a shake. "Time to get up, you slacker!"

"Tain't risin'-bell yet," mumbled Digby, turning over on his other side and composing himself to further slumber.

"Rats!" said Blake. "Up you get!"

"Gerrout!"

"Look heah, Blake, why are you gettin' up?" put in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rather excitedly. "And why are you twyin' to wouse Digby?"

"We want to get up!" said Blake shortly, calmly immersing a sponge in a water-jug. "Now, Dig, up you get!"

Blake squeezed a stream of icy water over Digby's head, and brought him out of bed with a run.

"Wow!" yelled Digby, falling in a heap on the floor, entangled in his bed-clothes. "You—you fatheaded ass, Blake!"

"Ha, ha! Time to get up, old chap! Gussy's up already!"

"You—you ass! I'm wet!"

"Ha, ha! I suppose you're going to have a tub anyway?"

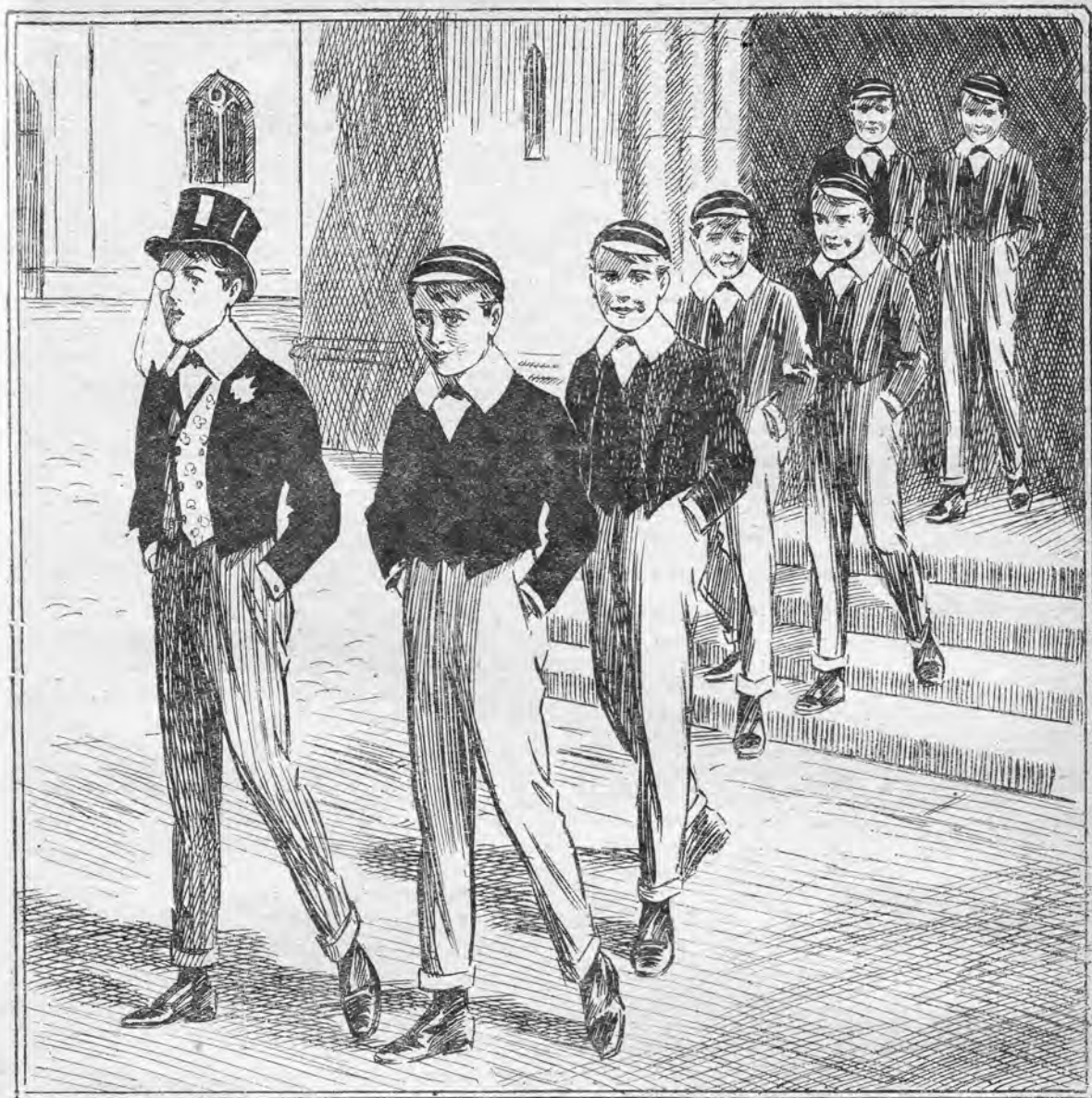
"Yes; but not in my pyjamas, fathead! You—you gave me a shock!"

"Ha, ha! Never mind! I must wake Herries next."

"Look heah, Blake," broke in Arthur Augustus decidedly,

"I demand to know why you are wisin' so early?"

"I suppose we can get up when we like, can't we?"



The seven juniors, grinning to themselves, marched out of the study and across the quad to the New House, bent on inviting themselves to Figgins & Co.'s little tea-party.

"It's a free country," added Digby.
 "Yaas, but I must wequest you to inform me why you are wisin' so early this mornin'!"
 "Why, to look after you, of course, ass!"
 "I shall wefuse to be looked aftah, Blake."
 "You can't go out as early as this without your keepers, you know you can't, Gus," said Blake reprovingly. "You might be kidnapped, or—or something."
 "Rather!" said Digby.
 "Pway don't be so widiculous, Blake! I object to your gettin' up to look aftah me!"
 "Rats, Gussy! We're coming, anyhow! Herries!"
 "I pwotest!"
 "Oh, scat! Herries, you lazy bounder, get up!"
 "Tain't rising-bell!" growled Herries, half asleep.
 "Ha, ha! Just what you said, Dig," grinned Blake.
 "Lend a hand here!"
 "Right-ho!"
 Digby and Blake grasped Herries, and yanked him out of bed, first pulling the bedclothes right off him.
 Herries took the floor with a bump which caused him to become wide awake in a moment.
 "Ow!" he roared. "What are you up to, you utter asses!"

"It's all right, Herries. It's time to get up!"
 "It isn't all right!" howled the indignant Herries. "I've bumped myself, you dangerous lunatics!"
 "Ha, ha! What did you want to do that for?"
 "Ow! I'm hurt!"
 "Never mind! Get up!"
 And Herries, with more than one expressive grunt, thought he might as well, and began to dress himself in no very amiable frame of mind.
 Arthur Augustus D'Arcy took no further notice of the three conspirators, but went on with his dressing in haughty silence.
 Certain other fellows in the dormitory, however, who had been awakened by the noise Blake had made in waking Herries and Digby, made up for D'Arcy's silence by making a good many free remarks on the subject of early risers in general, and of the four chums in particular.
 "Sure, and what are you four silly gossoons after doin'?" inquired Reilly, the Irish junior. "It's meself was woke up by the fearful noise and the gabbling of yez!"
 "Rats to you, Belfast! Go to sleep!"
 "Sure, an' that's just what I can't do at all, at all!"
 "Then stay awake, at all, at all!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE CIRCUS AT ST. JIM'S."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 95.
A Grand Tale of Tom Merry
& Co. By Martin Clifford.

The Irish junior, who could scarcely have been said to be awake, gave a grunt, and turned over and went to sleep again on the instant.

From another bed came a grumbling voice now.

"Why can't you chaps get up in the middle of the night quietly?" he asked. "Blessed if I know what you want to make this ghastly, awful row for? I suppose you want to keep the whole dorm. from sleeping?"

The voice belonged to Mellish, the cad of the Fourth Form, and the chums of Study 6 were disposed to take very little notice of it.

Mellish was the most ill-natured boy in the Fourth, and never had any consideration for anyone but himself.

"Some of us have got a hard day's work in front of us," he continued. "We can't all slack in class. We aren't all Form-masters' favourites, you know!"

"Shut up, Mellish!" said Blake sharply. "If you say another word, I'll come and squeeze a sponge down your neck!"

"Just the sort of thing a beast like you—Ow! Wow! You—you beast, Blake! Ow! Ugh! I'm all wet!"

Blake had been as good as his word.

With lightning-like rapidity he had seized a wet sponge and sprung over to Mellish's bed, and carried out his threat fully.

"Perhaps that'll teach you not to make so many caddish remarks, Mellish!" he said grimly. "If you say much more we'll chuck you in the bath!"

And Blake walked back to his own bed, leaving the cad of the Fourth growling to himself, and muttering some of the things he would like to do to the leader of Study 6.

Blake, Herries, and Digby were soon dressed, and ready to go out.

But not so Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

He was always scrupulously careful over his toilet, and this morning he expended extra thought over it for the occasion.

"Aren't you nearly ready, Gus," said Blake, when he was ready to go, looking very fit and handsome in his well-fitting Norfolk coat and knickers. "It's twenty-past, you know."

"No, Blake, I am not nearly ready," responded the swell of St. Jim's. "This huntin'-stock is not wight yet for any means."

"Shall I tie it for you, then?"

"Certainly not, deah boy, thank you. I can tie it bettah myself, you know. But I am apt to make a mistake when I am huwried."

"Well, you'd better hurry now, or Lord Eastwood will leave you behind. I don't suppose he'll wait long for you."

"I should wufuse to be left behind!"

"That wouldn't do much good if the motor had already gone without you," grinned Digby.

"No, bai Jove! I nevah thought of that, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Where's your pink coat and all your other finery, Gussy?" said Digby suddenly, noticing that his elegant chum was donning a pair of light-coloured riding-breeches, and a tweed riding-coat with a full shirt and a pronounced waist. "I thought you were going to out-Peel John Peel, in the matter of costume, anyway."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You suahly do not think that I would go cub-huntin' in pink, Dig?" said D'Arcy, in tones of withering scorn.

Digby turned red.

He was the son of a sporting baronet, and he ought to have known that it is not until the fox-hunting season proper begins that sportsmen may come out in their full war-paint of pink coats, white leathers, and hunting-tops. As a matter of fact, Digby did know this quite well, but in his impulse to chaff the swell of St. Jim's about his elegant costume, he had overlooked the fact.

"You see, deah boy," pursued D'Arcy, kindly condescending to explain, "dawning cub-huntin' a fellah may come out in wat-catchah's costume!"

"I know that, ass!" said Digby ungratefully.

But Herries pricked up his ears now.

"What's that about rat-catchin'?" he asked.

"I was just explainin' to Dig that one may go cub-huntin' in wat-catchah's costume, Hewwies."

"In what?" said Herries, staring.

"Wat-catchah's costume, deah boy!"

"Wat-catcher's costume?" repeated Herries blankly.

"What does the ass mean?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Hewwies! Suahly you know what wat-catchah's costume is?"

"I suppose I do. But what has that got to do with it?"

"Everythin', deah boy!"

"You don't go huntin' in rat-catcher's costume, I suppose?"

"Not exactly huntin', deah boy. 'Cubbin', you know."

"You go cubbin' in rat-catcher's costume! Off your nut, Gussy!" said Herries, in amazement.

"Pway do not be absurd, Hewwies! Of course you go cubbin' in wat-catchah's costume!"

"Me? I don't go cub-hunting at all."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Hewwies, you are weally vewy dense. I mean, of course, that any fellah may go cubbin' in wat-catchah's costume. This is wat-catchah's costume, deah boy."

And D'Arcy indicated his own neat riding-clothes.

"Is that what you call rat-catcher's costume?" asked Herries, in surprise.

"Yaah, wathah, deah boy!"

"I should like to see any ass catching rats in that," said Herries contemptuously. "More suitable for a tailor's dummy than a rat-catcher, I should think!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake and Digby.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"I jolly well know you wouldn't go rattin' with my dog Towser in those clothes," pursued Herries, warning to his subject. "Towser wouldn't like them. He'd jolly soon take a piece out of the breeches, and out of you as well, probably. Towser hates fancy clothes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Besides," went on Herries argumentatively, "those aren't rat-catching clothes at all! I find an old pair of flannel trousers and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I tell you this is wat-catchah's costume!"

"Rats!" said Herries obstinately. "What I say is—"

"Oh, come away, for goodness' sake!" laughed Blake, dragging Herries to the dormitory door. "You two are enough to make a cat grin."

"What I say is—" began Herries again, rather excitedly.

"Oh, rats to what you say! Come on! It's time we were off! And Gussy will never be dressed if he stays arguing with you!"

And Blake and Digby dragged the protesting Herries off between them.

D'Arcy sighed, and proceeded with his toilet. He made a mental resolve, however, to take the first opportunity of trying to explain again to Herries that ordinary riding-clothes—the mufti, as it were, of hunting—are known as rat-catcher's costume in the world of sport.

CHAPTER 8.

Forestalled!

BLAKE, Herries, and Digby went downstairs chuckling. "That ass Gussy is bound to be late!" grinned Blake. "I shouldn't be surprised if Lord Eastwood doesn't really leave him behind now."

"I wish he would!" chuckled Digby. "I should like to see Gus's face when he discovered that the car had gone without him! It wouldn't really matter, as he could bicycle quite easily."

"Well, as I say, I should think it quite probable that he will have to cycle," said Blake. "He hasn't got that hunting stock tied to his satisfaction yet, and I'm jolly sure he won't start till he has, whatever happens."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The three chums walked across the old quad. in the morning sunshine.

It was a beautiful autumn morning, and the dew lay heavy on the grass of the playing-fields. Wisps of mist still hung in the air, though the sun was gradually dispersing them.

As Blake & Co. came within sight of the cycle-house Herries suddenly uttered an exclamation.

"My hat! There's somebody else up, then!"

And he pointed to the open door of the cycle-shed.

It was wide open.

"Phew!" said Digby. "I wonder what boulder can be up at this time? Why, it isn't seven yet!"

The sound as of bicycles being shifted about came from within the shed.

"Perhaps it's someone come to lift the grids," whispered Blake.

"Well, how did he get the key, then?" replied Digby, pointing to the key which was in the door, with its metal tag hanging down in plain view.

"Umph!" said Blake.

"Perhaps it's—" began Herries, starting to propound another brilliant suggestion as to the identity of the person or persons unknown within the shed, when a voice—a well-known voice—was heard proceeding from the interior.

"Mind out, Lowther, you ass! You took all the skin off my shin with your rotten pedal that time!"

Blake & Co. looked at each other with sickly smiles. They had all recognised Tom Merry's voice instantly.

So the Shell fellows had forestalled them! Tom Merry emerged from the cycle-shed looking rather flushed and dusty, and wheeling his machine with him.

He stopped and stared as he saw the three Fourth-Formers, all looking rather nonplussed.

"Hallo, you Fourth Form kids!" he said. "Where have you sprung from, eh?"

"Oh, hallo!" said Blake, with a sickly grin. "We've just—just come out for—for a stroll, you know!"

Tom Merry glanced at Blake suspiciously.

"Then what are you blushing for?" he demanded.

Blake's grin became more sickly than ever.

"I'm not blushing!" he said, with a forced assumption of indignation, and growing redder than ever. "What do you mean, Tom Merry?"

"What I say!" said Tom, with a grin.

"I'm not blushing, am I, chaps?" said Blake hotly, turning to Digby and Herries.

And Digby and Herries looked at his scarlet face and grinned.

Tom Merry burst into a roar.

"You—you ass, Blake!" he said. "You're as red as a turkey-cock!"

Blake grinned.

"Rats!" he said. "Now, what are you Shellfish up to this morning at this unearthly hour, eh?"

"What are you up to, you mean!"

"What are you?"

"What are you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Digby and Herries.

"Understudying gramophones, you two?" asked Monty Lowther, emerging from the shed with his bicycle.

"Like a pair of blessed parrots!" grunted Manners, who followed Lowther out. "Why, Lowther and I could hardly hear ourselves arguing in there!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, what are these Fourth Form kids doing up at this hour?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Is that a conundrum?" asked Lowther pleasantly.

"No, ass, but—"

"What I say is, what are these Shell bounders doing up at this hour?" said Blake, turning to his own followers.

"Look here, Blake—"

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"Chuck it!" he said. "Confess, Blake, that you got up to go to the meet at Hanger Dyke!"

"Confess that you did, too!"

"Well, we did! We wanted to see Gussy there, and—"

"Exactly! So did we! We meant to see Gussy and—and someone else."

"Well, then— 'Hallo!' Tom Merry broke off suddenly as three figures came into view, evidently making for the cycle-house.

"Let 'em all come!" said Blake resignedly.

The three figures approached with an air of exaggerated carelessness, while six School House fellows continued to stare at them grimly.

"Hallo, you chaps!" sang out one of the new-comers, a tall, lanky youth, with a rugged, good-natured face. "Having a committee meeting or something?"

The School House juniors continued to regard the three with silent disfavour.

Figgins & Co.—for the new-comers were none other than those three famous New House juniors—walked calmly on.

They came up to the group, nodded coolly, and disappeared into the cycle-shed, whence came the sounds of the shifting of machines and not a little argument.

The cycle-shed was none too large for the number of machines it was called upon to hold.

Outside the shed the Fourth-Formers stared at the Shell fellows, who stared back.

"Well?" said Blake, with a sniff.

"Well?" echoed Tom Merry.

"Well?"

"Well?"

"What are you going to do, ass?" said Blake impatiently.

"I'm going to the meet," said Tom Merry emphatically; "and I'm going now! What are you going to do, Manners?"

"Going to the meet!"

"And you, Lowther?"

"Going to the meet!"

"When?"

"Now!" said Manners and Lowther together, with a grin.

"Ha, ha! Then come on!" said Tom Merry, mounting his machine. "We— Hallo!"

Parp! Parp!

Parp! Parp!

"A motor!" said Blake. "Lord Eastwood, for a cert.!"

"Yes, it's just seven," said Herries, looking at his watch.

"And that ass Gussy hasn't come down yet," added Digby.

"By Jove, no!"

Parp! Parp!

"His lordship seems to be in a hurry if Gussy isn't!" grinned Tom Merry. "I vote we go down and see Eth—and see the car, you know!"

And Tom Merry dashed off in the direction of the school gates, followed by Manners and Lowther.

The chums of the Fourth were looking at one another irresolutely when Figgins & Co. reappeared from the cycle-shed, dragging their machines with them.

"Hallo!" said Figgins, staring after the scorching forms of the Shell fellows. "Where are those loafers off to?"

Parp! Parp!

Figgins started.

"The motor, by gum!" he exclaimed. "Come on, chaps!"

And mounting his cycle, he scorched off after Tom Merry & Co., with Kerr and Fatty Wynn, his partners in the Co., following him closely.

Blake & Co. looked at each other a little grimly.

"Well?" said Digby.

Blake sniffed.

"Well? What do you mean by 'well, ass?' he said.

"What are you going to do? The others have gone!"

"Well?" said Blake in his turn.

"They've gone down to the motor!"

"I know, ass!"

"And—and to see Cousin Ethel!"

"Yes!"

"Well?"

"Well?"

"Well, what are you going to do?" asked Digby again.

"We aren't going to stick here like stuffed dummies, I suppose?"

"I dunno!" said Blake helplessly.

Digby sniffed.

"Fine leader you are, I must say! What about Gussy?"

"Why, we can't let him be left behind, I suppose?" said Blake slowly. "He's in our study."

"That's so."

"If we go and get him, though, we shall miss talking to Cousin Ethel. Lord Eastwood will drive off directly Gussy comes."

"If not before!" grinned Herries.

"That's so."

"Well," said Blake argumentatively. "there's no need for us all to go and fetch that ass Gussy, I suppose?"

"Certainly not!" said Digby and Herries together.

"So won't you just run in and fetch him out, Dig?" finished Blake persuasively.

"No, I won't!" said Digby promptly.

Blake frowned.

Then his face assumed a pleasant expression again, and he turned to Herries with rather a forced smile.

"Will you go, Herry, old man?"

"Rats!" said Herries.

"You're the leader of Study 6—at least, you're always telling us so—and you're responsible for Gussy," said Digby grimly. "Do your duty, Blake! Ta-ta! Come on, Herries!"

And Digby and Herries jumped on their cycles and scorched off after the others in the direction of the school gates.

Parp! Parp!

Blake gave a groan.

"While I'm fetching Gussy all those bounders will be talking to Cousin Ethel!" he muttered savagely. "I've a jolly good mind to let the young ass be left behind!"

But all the same Blake set off wheeling his bicycle towards the School House.

Parp! Parp!

"By Jove!" he muttered. "I must hurry up!"

And he jumped on his machine, and rode over to the School House door.

CHAPTER 9.

The Fourth Form Dormitory Puts its Foot Down.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY was almost ready. He stood in front of his little looking-glass by his bedside, and craned his neck anxiously from side to side, so as to get a view of as much of his person as possible in the small mirror.

He was fully dressed, and looked very natty and neat in his smart riding clothes.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured. "I wathah think I shall do now. Perhaps I had better tie my stock again, though. I can discern a cwease which had no business to be theah!"

Parp! Parp!

Parp! Parp!

The motor-horn was plainly audible in the Fourth Form dormitory; so much so, in fact, that more than one junior,

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 95.

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

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE CIRCUS AT ST. JIM'S."

lying between waking and sleeping, grunted discontentedly, and wished the disturber of the peace "further."

But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was too deeply immersed in the task of titivating to pay any attention to any outside matters whatsoever.

The motor-horn might blow till it cracked, it would not hurry the aristocratic swell of St. Jim's over his toilet.

"Bai Jove," he murmured, "I— Good gwacious! What's the matter?"

The startled exclamation fell from D'Arcy's lips as the dormitory door was suddenly flung open with terrific violence, and Jack Blake dashed in, panting and red with the exertion of rushing upstairs.

Without pausing for a moment, Blake made a dive at the elegant swell of St. Jim's, and grabbed him by the arm with a fierce grip.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave a howl
"Ow, Blake! Ow-wow! You—you wottah!"

"Come on!" muttered Blake savagely, dragging him by main force in the direction of the door.

"Ow! Help!" yelled D'Arcy.

"Come on!"

"Help! The wottah's mad!"

"You're late. Come on!"

"Help!"

There was a roar from the dormitory.

Half the slumbering juniors had been galvanised into instant wakefulness by Blake's tornado-like entry, and now the rest were also thoroughly disturbed.

A dozen juniors sat bolt upright in bed, or prepared to leap out to avenge their disturbed slumbers. The dormitory resounded with furious and indignant protests.

"Shut up!"

"Chuck them out!"

"Drown 'em!"

"Bung 'em out on their necks!"

"Give the bounders socks!"

D'Arcy struggled furiously, but the grip of the sturdy Yorkshire lad was on his arm like a vice, and he was dragged slowly but surely along to the door, protesting and calling on all and sundry for aid.

He was not likely to get much aid, though, from the exasperated members of the Fourth Form dormitory—at least, not the aid he required.

With a yell of wrath, the outraged juniors descended on the combatants, and grasped them in the remorseless grip of many pairs of hands.

Blake kept hold of D'Arcy with one hand, and defended himself with the other valiantly.

More than one Fourth-Former got one of Blake's right-handers, and rolled on the floor, wondering what had hit him.

D'Arcy made but a feeble resistance.

He was so dazed by the overwhelming suddenness of the whole occurrence, and so much pulled and dragged about, that he was almost helpless.

The expression of utter bewilderment on his face was almost idiotic.

The two, in the centre of a crowd of excited and exasperated juniors, were hustled towards the door, and finally propelled out of it with a vigorous united shove from many hands.

They staggered out into the corridor, holding on to each other for support, and buffed against the opposite wall, and sat down with a bump.

They both emitted a gasp like escaping steam.

"Phe-e-e-ew!"

The crowd blocking the dormitory door grinned delightedly.

"Gasp up, you bounders!" it shouted.

"Phew!" Blake gasped again dazedly.

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

"Faith, and it's as much row as ye like that ye can make out there!" grinned Reilly.

"Rather!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway assist me to wise!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I—I feel all in a fluttah, you wottahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on, then, Gussy!" said Reilly, stepping out from the throng, with a grin and holding out his hand to the fallen swell. "Up you get, now, bedad!"

Reilly winked one eye at the grinning crowd, but D'Arcy did not observe that.

He stretched out his hand and grasped the Irish lad's, and began slowly and with many pants to pull himself up off the ground.

Just as he was in a critical position of balance, Reilly gave a fearful tug, and brought D'Arcy sprawling headlong over on his face.

"Ow-wow!" yelled the unlucky swell of St. Jim's. "You uttah wottah, Weilly!"

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

"Faith, an' it's groggy ye are on ye're pins!" grinned Reilly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you wottah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors yelled with laughter as Arthur Augustus staggered up. Both he and Blake looked extremely dusty and dishevelled, and they were truly laughable objects.

"Oh, come on, you—you hopeless imbecile!" growled Blake, jumping to his feet and grabbing his chum by the arm. "How much longer are you going to be a free comic show for those cackling idiots?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Blake could stand it no longer. Disregarding his chum's protests and his oft-expressed determination to return and give the whole of the Fourth Form dormitory a "feahful thwashing," as he expressed it, and paying no attention to the shouts of derision which followed him from the crowd, he hastened down the corridor, dragging D'Arcy with him by the arm.

"You fatheaded dummy!" he said fiercely. "Don't you know that Lord Eastwood has been waiting about ten minutes for you already? You—you howling ass!"

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy, in dismay.

"Yes, you—you lunatic! I expect he's gone by now, too."

"Bai Jove! Do you weally, Blake?"

"Of course! Do you think he'll wait till nightfall for a fatheaded tailor's dummy?"

"By Jove! Then I can't go to the meet!"

"No, of course not!" said Blake, with a slight grin. He was not at all sure that Lord Eastwood had gone yet. In fact, he suspected that the crowd of juniors who were, no doubt, surrounding his car at the present moment, talking to Cousin Ethel—at the thought Blake ground his teeth—would restrain his lordship's impatience as long as possible.

His suspicions were confirmed the next minute, when the harsh, insistent sound of the motor-horn came faintly from the direction of the school gates.

Parp! Parp!

Parp! Parp!

D'Arcy gave a start.

"Bai Jove! What was that, Blake?"

Blake grinned.

"Sounded like a motor-horn— didn't it, Gussy? Or was it a bumble bee, do you think?"

"Pway don't talk wot, Blake! I am convinced it was a motah-horn."

"Go hon!"

"Yaas, wathah! And I should say that it is vewy likely to be the governah in his Daimlah."

"Well, considering that that horn has been blowing steadily for nearly a quarter of an hour, I should say it was quite possible—not to say probable," grinned Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You ass!" continued Blake. "You've kept your governor waiting a fearful time. Blessed if I'd have waited, if I'd have been him!"

"Well, I am suah he can wait a little longah, then, deah boy."

"Wait a little longer?" said Blake, staring. "What on earth do you mean, ass?"

"Pway do not make use of that oppwobious expvession, Blake! I mean that my governah can wait a little longah."

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Tom Merry gazed after Cousin Ethel admiringly, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, screwing his monocle into his eye, gazed at the hero of the Shell with a peculiar expression on his aristocratic features.

while I change my stock and have a good brush down, and—"

"Rats!" said Blake promptly. "He's not going to wait another moment! You're going to him at once!"

"But considah, deah boy—"

"Rats! Come on!"

"It will be bad form to appeah in this untidy state, Blake. Besides, Cousin Ethel—"

"It will be worse form to keep your governor waiting any longer, and I am sure Cousin Ethel would rather see you looking like a badly made fifth of November guy than stay at the gates any longer being bored by the piffle those chaps will be talking."

"What chaps do you wefer to, Blake? I twust you would not chawactewise Lord Eastwood's conversation as piffle?"

"Ass! I mean Tom Merry & Co., and Figgins, and that lot."

"Bai Jove! You don't mean to say they are all up and talkin' to Ethel?" almost shouted D'Arcy.

"Rather!" said Blake, with a grin.

"The—the wottahs!" gasped D'Arcy. "Let us wun down to the gates. We'll run like—like anythin'."

"Ha, ha! Come on, then!"

And the two juniors took to their heels, and ran "like anythin'."

CHAPTER 10.

Waiting for D'Arcy.

DOWN at the big gates of St. Jim's, Lord Eastwood's big motor-car was the centre of quite a little crowd of juniors.

Eight of them swarmed round the car, in which his lordship sat impatiently drumming his heel on the floor, with Ethel Cleveland, the girl friend of the St. Jim's juniors, by his side.

Lord Conway, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's elder brother, sat in the driver's seat of the big Daimler, with the chauffeur by his side.

Ethel Cleveland was leaning over the side of the car, chatting animatedly with one or other of the boys, especially with one.

That one was the long-legged Figgins, chief of the famous New House Co. His homely, rugged face seemed quite lit up with happiness as he talked to Cousin Ethel. He did not say much, it was true—somehow, he never did seem able to say much to Cousin Ethel—but she kept up the conversation unflaggingly.

The juniors were all known to Lord Eastwood and his son as friends of D'Arcy's, and the boys talked and asked questions freely.

In fact, nobody seemed to mind the delay at all, with the possible exception of Lord Eastwood.

Lord Conway was engaged in explaining some point about the car to Kerr and Digby, when Lord Eastwood's voice interrupted.

"I think we had better drive on," he observed. "It is past a quarter-past seven now. It will do that young laggard Arthur good to be left behind for once."

Lord Conway smiled, and started the engine on the switch, to the delight of Kerr and Digby.

Cousin Ethel, however, who had overheard Lord Eastwood's observation, put in a word.

"Oh, do wait another minute or two, uncle!" she exclaimed, laying her hand on Lord Eastwood's arm. "I am sure Arthur does not intend to keep you waiting. But he's—he's rather careful of his dress, you know, uncle."

Lord Eastwood tried to frown, but smiled instead.

"What do you say, Conway," he said. "Shall we wait any longer for the young rascal?"

"I should give the young ass another five minutes," said Lord Conway, smiling at Ethel. "We can get to Hanger Dyke in ten minutes, if necessary."

Lord Eastwood patted Cousin Ethel's hand.

"Well, well," he said, "he shall have another five minutes, then, and not a second more."

It was easy to see that Cousin Ethel could sway the noble lord, great statesman though he was, just as she chose.

"Thank you, uncle," she said sweetly. "Ah," she added suddenly, "here he is at last!"

Two figures came in sight, running as hard as they could go from the school towards the gates.

"Blake's got the ass at last!" breathed Digby, with a sigh of relief. He had been afraid that his chum would be left behind, in spite of Blake's efforts, though, as he muttered to himself, "It would jolly well serve the ass right!"

Figgins looked at the rapidly approaching juniors, and gave a growl.

"What's the matter, Figgins?" asked Cousin Ethel, following the New House junior's gaze.

Figgins turned red.

"Oh—er—nothing!" he stammered. "I—I was only—er—thinking—er—er—thinking—"

"Yes?" prompted Cousin Ethel sweetly. "What were you thinking?"

"I was just—er—thinking—er—thinking, you know—er—"

"Yes?"

"I—I was thinking," stammered Figgins, turning a fiery red. "I was—er—thinking—that—that Gussy might have stayed away a bit longer—er—that is—"

"Really, Figgins," said Cousin Ethel severely, "you wished Arthur to stay away still longer than he has done! Why, he would have been left behind!"

"Well—er—yes, but—"

"Surely you would not like Arthur to be left behind, Figgins?" said Cousin Ethel, in a shocked tone.

"Well—no, but—that is—"

"Really, Figgins, I am surprised at you!"

"Of course, you know, I did not mean that Cousin Ethel!" exclaimed Figgins desperately. "I—I only meant—"

"Well, what did you mean, Figgins?" asked Cousin Ethel demurely.

"I—I—" Figgins grew redder than ever. "You—you see, the—the car would have been here longer—and—"

Figgins broke off in confusion.

Cousin Ethel laughed and blushed slightly.

"Oh, I see!" she said. "Well, I'll forgive you this time. Oh, here you are, Arthur!" she broke off as D'Arcy came panting up. "What do you mean by being so late, you bad boy? We have been waiting ever so long!"

"So sorry, Ethel dear girl," gasped Arthur Augustus; "but I hope you have not had a vewy howwid time waitin' heah!"

And D'Arcy glanced slightly in the direction of Figgins.

Ethel stared hard at her cousin for a moment, but she could read nothing from his face. So she merely replied, with a slight blush:

"No; of course I have not had a horrid time at all."

Blake came up and, lifting his cap calmly, shoved Figgins aside, and entered into conversation with Cousin Ethel, who did not appear to observe his action.

Blake intended to have as much of Cousin Ethel's company as he could during the few moments remaining before the car departed.

"Really, Arthur," began Lord Eastwood, with a frown, "it seems that unpunctuality and discourtesy are included in the list of your faults—"

"Weally, sir—"

"I regard it as discourteous in the extreme to keep us all waiting like this. Jump in, now!"

"Weally, sir, you must allow me to explain that—"

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NEXT

THURSDAY:

"THE CIRCUS AT ST. JIM'S."

"Not a word! Jump in!"

"But I must explain—"

"Will you kindly get into the car!" thundered Lord Eastwood.

"But—"

Lord Conway grinned in spite of himself.

"You young ass!" he whispered. "Get in, and don't argue!"

Arthur glanced at his noble father's face, and thought the advice good.

He hopped into the car, and Lord Conway let in the clutch and the big Daimler glided away, almost without a sound.

The juniors left behind grabbed their bicycles, jumped on, and pedalled after the car as hard as they could.

Jack Blake, having left his machine by accident up at the School House, leapt on to Herries's step, nearly upsetting that worthy, machine and all.

"You—you ass!" gasped Herries wobbling unsteadily.

"What on earth did you do that for?"

"Left my grid up at the school," said Blake calmly.

"It's all right, old son. Put it on now!"

Herries gave a gasp, which seemed to intimate that in his opinion it was far from being "all right."

However, he spurred on after the others at a good pace, in spite of his double load.

The big Daimler had leapt into a thirty-mile-an-hour gait almost at once, and was already out of sight, but the eight cyclists bowed along merrily enough.

They were later than they had intended to be at starting, but they hoped to get to Hanger Dyke in time to see something of the meet, all the same.

As Tom Merry cheerfully remarked:

"They only had to do four miles in ten minutes, and they would be all right."

CHAPTER 11.

The Meet.

THE meet at Hanger Dyke was well attended, for a cub-hunting meet. All the keenest hunting-people in the county seemed to have turned out, as Hanger Dyke had a reputation of harbouring good foxes, and plenty of them.

Lord Eastwood's party arrived but a very few minutes late, thanks to the swiftness of the big Daimler, and they found their horses awaiting them, in charge of two grooms.

They were four splendid mounts.

Lord Eastwood, who was a bit of a heavy-weight, had a big weight-carrying grey, which looked as though it could gallop for ever; as, indeed, to all intents and purposes, it could.

Lord Conway, who was quite a light-weight, got up on to a wild-looking, thorough-bred chestnut—a real flyer, by the look of it.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's mount was his own horse, The Abbot, a bright bay, somewhat wild and playful in his ways, but a real good little hunter. The Abbot had been presented to D'Arcy by Lord Eastwood the previous Christmas as a four-year-old, and the junior was very fond of him, though he had not hunted him much as yet. But he knew he had got a splendid horse in him.

Cousin Ethel rode a beautiful little bay mare, with a perfect temper and manners. Cousin Ethel was a splendid horsewoman, and her eyes shone with pleasure as she patted Ethelfreda's neck. She had often ridden the mare before. In fact, Lord Eastwood kept it principally for her use, and had named it after her.

Ethel and Ethelfreda were very fond of one another, and the girl's eyes sparkled in anticipation of a splendid morning's hunting on her favourite.

The girl rode round the little green in front of Hanger Dyke with Arthur Augustus, and the two, who were well-known to the followers of the "Sussex Vale," were greeted on all side by nods and smiles of recognition.

"Bai Jove! You know, Ethel, this is weally rippin'!" exclaimed D'Arcy, gazing round at the animated scene in delight.

D'Arcy was never so happy as when he was hunting.

He affected to be foppish in many ways, if not actually effeminate, but in reality he was no mean athlete. Running, cycling, swimming, etc., all claimed him as a devotee, but it was on a horse that D'Arcy was seen to the best advantage.

Directly he was mounted, his usual careless, languid manner seemed to vanish on the instant, and gave place to the alert, resourceful air of the true horse-master.

Ever since his legs were long enough to grip a saddle, horses and horsemanship had been D'Arcy's greatest delight.

He and his pretty cousin made their way through the

throng of well-mounted folk to where the master, Major Pepperton, was sitting on his horse, chatting with Tom Wills, the huntsman, the beautifully-marked hounds standing or lying on the turf around them.

"Ha, Miss Cleveland!" said Major Pepperton, with a jovial laugh. "How goes it—eh? Glad to see you out with us, I'm sure! And you, young D'Arcy? All ready for the fray, I see! That's the style!"

And the jovial master raised his cap and rode off to speak to Lord Eastwood. Tom Wills touched his cap, and gave the two a cheery nod.

"Goin' to have a good run to-day, Tom?" says D'Arcy, reining in The Abbot, who is beginning to look at the hounds out of the corner of his eyes.

"Hope so, sir, I'm sure," says Tom, with a grin, cracking his hunting-crop smartly as one of the hounds shows a tendency to wander off by himself a little way. "Hi, Joyful there, come back, will ye?"

Cousin Ethel's eyes dance, and she gives Tom a bright smile.

"That's splendid, Tom!" she cries. "I know you're always certain to give us a run when you say that."

Tom grins knowingly, and joins in D'Arcy's laugh at this very feminine observation.

"Ay, well, miss, you know too much, you do," he says laughingly.

"But there will be a run, won't there?" persists Cousin Ethel.

"I hope so, miss, as I says," says Tom evasively, "and I do hear tell there's a power o' foxes in Hanger Dyke this season. But there, ye never can tell, you know, miss," he adds sententiously.

"Cautious as ever, Tom!" laughs Ethel. "I hope we get a rattling gallop!"

"So do I, bai dove!" puts in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy fervently.

"Ah, you young folk must remember it's nobbut cubbin'," says Tom, shaking his head. "No ten mile gallops wi' the cubs, mind! We're out to kill 'em as yet, ye know!"

Ethel gave a little toss of the head, and kindly Tom Wills saw he had said the wrong thing, so he hastened to change the subject.

"And what do you think of the young entry, now, Master D'Arcy, sir?" he inquired.

D'Arcy cast his eye approvingly over the hounds moving restlessly round him under the watchful supervision of the two whips.

"Jollay good!" he said, with enthusiasm.

At this moment the nine St. Jim's juniors who had just arrived and stacked their cycles against a tree, marched up in a body.

They looked at their chum as he sat gracefully on his horse, with admiration and envy. Most of them there would have given a good deal to be allowed to change places with him.

Cousin Ethel nodded and smiled at the juniors, while Tom Wills touched his cap and grinned.

"Here you are again," said Cousin Ethel. "How quick you've been! You will be in time to see us move off, after all."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Cousin Ethel, who was in the highest spirits, engaged the group of juniors in talk, with the exception of Tom Merry.

The hero of the Shell at St. Jim's wore a thoughtful look on his usually placid brow.

He went up to Arthur Augustus, and took firm hold of his stirrup-leather, and gazed up into his face with an anxious expression.

D'Arcy looked down at him a little uneasily.

"Pway what is the mattah, Tom Mewwy?" he asked.

"What are you scowlin' at me like that for?"

"Scowling? I wasn't scowling, ass—I mean Gussy, old chap," said Tom Merry. "I was just thinking—"

He paused a moment.

"Well?" said D'Arcy a trifle impatiently, "what were you thinkin', deah boy?"

"I was thinking that—that you are not looking very well this morning," said Tom Merry seriously.

"Eh?"

"You are looking a bit pale, I think. Don't you feel it?"

"Don't I feel pale, deah boy? Weally, I—"

"I—I mean, don't you feel—er—run down, sort of?" said Tom Merry hastily, and a little vaguely.

"Certainly not, Tom Merry."

"I mean, don't you feel a—sort of lassitude, you know, a—a weariness of—of brain, and—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

D'Arcy fixed his monocle in his eye, and gazed at the leader of the Shell in utter astonishment.

"Well, a feeling of nervous depression, then!" continued Tom Merry, with a vague remembrance of some advertisement of a quack medicine he had seen in some magazine.

"Certainly not! I—"

"Sure you are not suffering from—from insomnia, or—or anything?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I wegard that as wank wot, you know. Why should I be suffewin' fwom insomnia or anythin'?"

"Well, you know you are—er—looking a little pale, you know," explained Tom Merry, rather feebly.

"Wats!"

"I feel sure you are not feeling well, Gussy!"

"My deah ass, I—"

"I feel certain that it would be better for you not to hunt to-day!"

"Not hunt! Why, good gwacious, Tom Mewwy, I—"

"I am convinced you would be better in bed, old man!"

"Well, I nevah!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's, utterly flabbergasted.

"You see, I could take your place, and your horse," pursued Tom Merry blandly. "I should be very pleased to, really."

Arthur Augustus glared down at the author of this calm proposition with a withering glare.

"You uttah ass!" he said indignantly.

"Don't you think it's a good idea, then, Gussy?" said Tom Merry, in a tone of pained surprise.

"I wegard the suggestion with contempt."

"Go hon!"

"And I think you are a cheeky boundah!"

"Rats!"

And Tom Merry, grinning, joined the group round Cousin Ethel.

At this moment there was a stir among the crowd of riders.

The huntsman, at a signal from the master, moved off, with the pack at his heels through the throng.

"Hounds, gentlemen, please! Hounds, please!" cried the whips, and way was made for the pack.

It was a pretty sight.

An air of bustle at once became apparent among the riders who, a moment before, had been sitting at ease on their horses, or chatting in groups.

The horses, too, began to show their excitement. More than one young horse began to plunge and buck, and Lord Conway's chestnut was all over the place.

D'Arcy and Cousin Ethel, whose horses were also growing restive in the general excitement, waved their hands to the group of juniors.

"Good-bye!"

"Ta-ta, deah boys!"

The juniors waved their hats in reply, and the two riders dashed off at a gallop after the rest of the field, leaving the juniors staring after them in admiration and envy.

"Must be jolly fine to hunt," said Lowther, with a note of envy in his voice, which was only natural.

"Rather!" said Blake. "I've done a bit of it myself in the holidays, sometimes at home in Yorkshire, and it's fine."

"I've done a bit, too," said Digby. "It's the finest sport on the face of the earth."

"Oh, I don't know, Dig," said Herries, in a tone of remonstrance. "It must be jolly fine, I know; but there's ridding, you know! You haven't forgotten ridding, I suppose, Dig?"

Digby gave a snort.

"You frabjous ass—"

"Look here—"

"You silly josses—"

"Look here, I'll—"

"Fancy comparing ridding to hunting!" Digby put a world of scorn in his voice.

But Herries did not seem convinced.

"Well, I say ridding's jolly good sport," he said obstinately.

"Of course it is! But—"

"There's nothing I like better than a day's ridding with Towser," continued Herries argumentatively.

Digby gave a snort.

"I don't believe that brute Towser could catch a mouse, much less a rat!"

Herries glared at Dig.

"You ass, Dig!" he said warmly. "Towser's a ripping ratter!"

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

In Herries' eyes, his bulldog Towser was everything that was ripping.

The Fourth-Former's faith in his favourite's powers was extremely touching, and caused his chums great amusement.

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ANSWERS

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THURSDAY:

"THE CIRCUS AT ST. JIM'S."

To them, and, in fact, to practically everyone but his devoted master, Towser seemed a most ordinary and uninteresting bulldog, except, perhaps, that he was more than ordinarily bad-tempered.

To Herries, however, Towser was one of the wonders of the age.

Any disparagement of his favourite's powers invariably drew Herries, and this fact was not, of course, overlooked by his chums.

"Why, whoever heard of anyone going ratting with a bulldog?" grinned Blake. "Might just as well take a French poodle!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes! but you've never been ratting with my dog Towser!" said Herries proudly. "He's a nailer for rats, is Towser!"

"First bulldog I ever heard of that was, then," grinned Lowther.

"Ah, they're ordinary bulldogs you're thinking of, Lowther," explained Herries. "You've never been ratting with my dog Towser."

"Ha, ha, ha! And you don't catch me going, either, old man!" grinned Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up that cackling!" growled Herries crossly. "Like a lot of giddy ganders, you are! Blessed if I know why you're all so jealous of poor, harmless old Towser!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors, still cackling, sorted out their cycles, and rode off towards St. Jim's.

Blake rode on Figgins's step this time, and during the course of the ride back, addressed a good many remarks to the New House junior.

The replies he got, however, were so absentminded that he finally gave up all attempt at conversation in disgust.

The truth of the matter was that Figgins was so occupied with pleasant thoughts—thoughts of Cousin Ethel and of how nice she looked on horseback, in her smart riding-habit, that he was scarcely aware of what was going on around him.

He rode back to St. Jim's that morning as one in a dream.

This fact did not escape the notice of the other juniors, and not a few sarcastic remarks were made as to the way Figgins was steering his bicycle.

"Asleep, Figg, or is it only that your reason's given way at last?" inquired Monty Lowther, with heavy sarcasm, as Figgins's front tyre actually touched Lowther's back one.

Figgins turned his eyes mechanically on Lowther's rather excited face.

"All right, old chap!" he murmured, and became immersed in his thoughts again.

Lowther looked at him very expressively for a moment, while Blake watched him with a grin.

He then snorted loudly, and shrugged his shoulders, and pedalled on.

But all this was lost upon Figgins.

He neither replied to, nor even seemed to hear any of the remarks levelled at him during the ride.

He was feeling so strangely happy that he did not seem to care what was said to him.

CHAPTER 12.

A Fine Run.

COUSIN ETHEL and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy were having a splendid morning's sport.

Hanger Dyke had once more justified its reputation as a fox-holding covert, and the number of cubs scampering about was almost bewildering.

After hustling one or two of the less courageous sort round about the covert, amidst considerable excitement, hounds at last got on the scent of a bold fellow, who made tracks for the open country.

Now came the run the two young riders had hoped for so ardently.

Away went the pack, streaming across country with a burning scent, and away after them went the field, scampering and galloping, the young horses mad with excitement, and as keen as their riders to get the best places in the first rush.

The cousins got well away, and side by side galloped up to and over the first obstacle, a low hedge. This brought them into a big, open field, across which the pack were streaming.

The big field was divided from the next by a post-and-rails of quite a formidable size, and as D'Arcy raced along by Cousin Ethel's side, he shouted to her to let him give her a lead.

Cousin Ethel nodded, and slackened up a little. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy started The Abbot, who seemed inclined to dash at the place haphazard in his excitement, and collecting

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE CIRCUS AT ST. JIM'S."

A Grand Tale of Tom Merry
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him thoroughly, put him full at the big post-and-rails, scorning a place where the top rail had been brought down by Lord Conway's flying chestnut.

The Abbot took off slightly early, and hit the top rail a sharp rap, but cleverly avoided a fall.

He had misjudged the jump somewhat, as even old and experienced hunters will at the beginning of the season.

D'Arcy was jerked forward in the saddle, but he quickly got back, and, reining in somewhat, turned in the saddle to see how Cousin Ethel would fare.

He hoped that, seeing that he had nearly had a fall, she would pull off to the left, and take the place where the top rail was down.

But such a thing, apparently, never occurred to Cousin Ethel.

She gathered up her reins, and with perfect coolness put Ethelfreda at the exact place D'Arcy had jumped.

Ethelfreda did not hesitate.

She took the leap perfectly, better than The Abbot had done, and rose over the top without touching anything!

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus admiringly, as Ethel galloped alongside him, her cheeks flushed and her eyes sparkling with excitement and happiness. "Bai Jove, Ethel, that was a weally wippin' jump, you know! I shall ask you to give me a lead o'v the next place, deah girl!"

Cousin Ethel smiled, and her cheeks flushed with pleasure. But she shook her head.

"Oh, no; I'd rather have a lead from you, Arthur."

"Wight-ho, deah girl!" said Arthur Augustus, looking pleased.

And the two galloped on together.

As they drew away from the post-and-rails, however, the swell of St. Jim's looked over his shoulder, and gave a chuckle.

"What is it, Arthur?" asked Cousin Ethel.

"I was just noticing that they are neatly all goin' o'v the broken part," replied D'Arcy, with a grin. "There's quite a crowd waitin' their turn to go o'v it, you know."

Cousin Ethel smiled.

That meant that the field would be still farther behind them, then.

The two were going very well indeed.

They were lying about a hundred and fifty yards behind the first fighters—Wills, Lord Conway, and perhaps half a dozen others, who were keeping well up with the pack—and some two hundred yards behind them came the rest of the field, stringing out as they made desperate endeavours to overtake the leaders.

The nearest horseman to the two cousins was Lord Eastwood, who was pounding away on his big grey like a house afire.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked over his shoulder, and made a grimace.

"The governah's comin' up like—like anythin'," he said to Cousin Ethel, "but the othah's are stwingin' out hopelessly," he added, after another quick look back.

"We mustn't let them catch us," said Cousin Ethel, with a silvery laugh.

"Wathah not, but—"

"But what Arthur?"

"I was only thinkin' that the pace is too hot to last, deah girl," said D'Arcy, a little anxiously. "The Abbot cannot keep it up like this much longer, you know."

Cousin Ethel glanced at D'Arcy's horse.

The Abbot was pounding along bravely, but he was beginning to show signs of distress, the girl thought.

Her own mount was going as well as ever, and gradually getting away from the other. But, then, Ethelfreda had over a stone less to carry, and was built on lighter lines than The Abbot, who was not quite built for prolonged speed bursts.

Ethel glanced over her shoulder, and saw that Lord Eastwood was getting steadily nearer.

For all that, she pulled in slightly so that Ethelfreda fell back level with The Abbot again.

She was not the sort of girl to over-distress a horse even in the keen rivalry of the hunting-field.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy noticed Ethel's action at once.

He could see that her horse could get right away from The Abbot if she would let it.

"You go on, Ethel, deah girl," he shouted. "I'm goin' to ease The Abbot up a bit. But please don't wait for me, you know!"

Cousin Ethel nodded, and smiled to show that she heard, but she did not forge ahead. She continued to keep Ethelfreda back nearly level with The Abbot.

A big, black hedge loomed up in front of them, and Cousin Ethel gave a gasp as she saw Lord Conway's chestnut, which was now leading the whole field, crash through the top of it.

She knew that if the top of the hedge had been as stiff as it looked, her cousin would have had a terrible fall.

One after the other the leaders went over the jump, all of them taking it in the same place, as their horses were beginning to blow by now.

All got over safely with the exception of the master, whose big bay blundered in landing, and pitched his gallant rider out of the saddle.

"Oh!" exclaimed Cousin Ethel, catching her breath sharply.

"It's all wight!" exclaimed D'Arcy, who had watched the incident also. "He's up again!"

And so he was.

The stout old major was used to tosses, and he had learnt that golden rule in the hunting-field—never to let go of your reins when you fall—by heart.

Though he had come quite a heavy cropper, he had kept tight hold of his reins, and he and the bay scrambled up together, winded, but unhurt.

Ethel smiled with relief as she saw the major on his feet again, and she shot ahead of her cousin to take the jump.

Ethelfreda took the jump as if she had only just started to gallop, and The Abbot came after her scarcely less gamely.

The master gave a shout of delight and encouragement as the two flew by him as he stood at his horse's head, getting ready to remount.

The next second he was in the saddle and in hot pursuit of them, riding almost neck and neck with Lord Eastwood.

But the end of the chase was in sight.

The fox had turned left-handed, and was making for a spinney which bordered the field. The pack made desperate efforts to overtake him before he could reach the haven of refuge, but they were just baffled.

The fox slipped into the spinney, and then went to ground just in time to save his brush.

It had been a splendid run!

There was a general dismounting and stretching of limbs as horseman after horseman came up, expressing their delight at such a good run.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy swung himself from his saddle, and ran over to assist Cousin Ethel to dismount.

But before he could reach her side, a dark, handsome young man, who had been conspicuous in the forefront of the run on a magnificent black horse, had raised his cap gracefully, and offered his assistance.

D'Arcy fumbled for his monocle, and stuck it in his eye, and gazed at the intruder with deadly coldness.

But before he had time to speak, Cousin Ethel coldly, and with an uncomfortable blush, refused the proffered assistance of the dark young man, and half-turned her horse so that D'Arcy could help her.

The dark young man, who had a decidedly foreign appearance, scowled momentarily, and stood irresolute.

D'Arcy stepped forward, and touched him on the shoulder.

"Look heah, sir—" he began, with a dangerous light glimmering in his eye.

He saw at a glance that the man's attentions were distasteful to Cousin Ethel.

The dark young man turned round on him sharply.

"Well, Master D'Arcy?" he said, with a sneer.

Arthur Augustus gave a start as he saw the young man's face turned full towards him.

He recognised the dark face with its haughty, sneering expression.

It was Algarotti, the young Italian who had challenged the St. Jim's junior to a steeplechase last year, and who had been beaten after having tried to win by foul means.

"Algarotti! Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

He was astounded at the young Italian's nerve in thus thrusting himself upon Cousin Ethel after the exposure of his foul play in last year's steeplechase.

But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy never allowed any emotion to sway him for very long.

He quickly recovered himself, and drew himself up with chilly dignity.

"Look heah, Mr. Algawotti—" he began frigidly. But Cousin Ethel interrupted him hastily. She was looking much distressed at this meeting between the two old rivals, and wished to get rid of Algarotti as soon as possible.

"Please don't go on, Arthur," she said, speaking quickly and bending down from her horse to lay her hand on her cousin's arm.

D'Arcy stopped speaking at once, and Cousin Ethel turned to Algarotti coldly.

"My cousin will help me down, thank you, Mr. Algarotti," she said, and turned to her cousin again.

Algarotti ground his teeth, and there was an angry flash in his dark eyes.

For a moment he hesitated, but seeing that the incident

was beginning to attract some little attention, he took off his cap with a low bow and returned with quick strides to where his horse was standing in a lather of sweat.

He mounted immediately, and rode off at a quick trot, followed by more than one pair of curious eyes.

D'Arcy gazed after him through his monocle with an expression of indignation on his aristocratic countenance.

"What an uttah wottah that chap is!" he exclaimed, with more heat than was usual with him.

"Yes. But never mind him, Arthur," said Ethel hurriedly. "Help me down, will you please!"

Arthur Augustus needed no second bidding.

He helped his cousin to dismount with his usual politeness and grace. But he could not dismiss Algarotti from his mind altogether, even at his fair cousin's bidding.

The field—or such of them as the run had not weeded out—were coming up rapidly now.

Lord Eastwood climbed out of his saddle, and came across to the cousins with a smile on his usually grave face.

"Fine run, wasn't it, youngsters?" he exclaimed. "Another half-mile and I should have caught you, I think."

"Yaas, wathah, govannah!"

Cousin Ethel smiled. "You might not have done, though, you know, uncle," she said roguishly. "Ethelfreda has heaps left in her yet."

Lord Eastwood laughed. "Oh, yes, I should!" he said. "Look at old Greywing; he hasn't turned a hair!"

And, indeed, the big grey, though breathing heavily, looked game for another half hour's run.

"Rattling sport, wasn't it?" chimed in Lord Conway, coming up with his reins on his arm, his blood chestnut following with drooping head and heaving sides. "One of the best cubbing runs I ever remember."

And the young man mopped his heated brow with a silk handkerchief.

"By the by," he added, "seen Cleveland?"

"No," said Ethel eagerly. "Is he out to-day? I have not seen him yet."

Lord Conway laughed. "He was with me nearly all the way," he said. "I suppose you didn't recognise him because he was on a new horse. He was on that roan, you know."

"Bai Jove, you know, I nevah wecognised his back!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Nor did I. Fancy not recognising my own brother, even if he was in front and riding a new horse," said Ethel.

"He turned up rather late, and missed the meet, you know," explained Lord Conway.

Captain Cleveland was Cousin Ethel's elder brother, and a great friend of D'Arcy's.

It was he who had gained permission from Dr. Holmes for D'Arcy to ride against Algarotti last year.

He walked up as they were still discussing him.

"Hallo, Ethel!" he cried. "How do, Lord Eastwood? And you, Arthur? How did you get on? Not far behind, I'll bet!"

"Wathah not, Captain Cleveland. We were lying just behind you and Conway, you know."

"That's good! Well, that was a run! Reynard has gone to ground, and Wills is going to leave him there. He's earned it, too, by Jove!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, I'm so glad!" said Cousin Ethel. "That's the worst part of hunting—killing foxes! I'm so glad this one has escaped!"

"Yes, I've no doubt he'll give us more than one good run during the season," said Lord Eastwood. "He who fights and runs away, lives to fight another day, you know."

"That's so, sir. This fellow will be a famous fox, if he can give a run like that as a cub," said Captain Cleveland.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Lord Conway. "Where's Wills off to now, I wonder?"

The huntsman, after a short consultation with the master, who was now mounted again, collected his hounds, and moved off towards a wood half a mile over to the right.

"They're going to draw Nott's Cover," observed Captain Cleveland. "I expect Wills wants to run into a cub or two to buck the hounds up a bit after their, from their point of view, unsuccessful run."

Cousin Ethel looked a little unhappy, but the whole party mounted again, and rode slowly after the pack.

Cousin Ethel was riding with Lord Conway, and D'Arcy had fallen slightly behind, when Captain Cleveland joined him.

"I say, Arthur," he said, "I've something to tell you that I think will interest you."

Arthur Augustus pricked up his ears at once.

"Pwaw go on, deah boy!" he said eagerly.

"Well, some of us fellows, members of the Hunt, proposed

to have a bit of a steeplechase in an amateur sort of way amongst ourselves, you know."

"Bai Jove!"

"Lord Eastwood tells me you are a full member of the Hunt now, so there's no reason why you shouldn't join in, if you can get leave. You're pretty useful on a horse, and I am sure all the fellows would be glad for you to come into it, begad!"

D'Arcy's eyes shone.

"Bai Jove, you are a good fellah, you know, Captain Cleveland!" he said enthusiastically. "It will be wippin'!"

Captain Cleveland smiled.

"It's to come off next Saturday. Subscribe what you like towards a pot for the winner, y'know. Idea started with a bet between Johnson and young Carter. Lot of us wanted to join in, so we arranged a regular steeplechase, begad!"

"Wippin'!"

"Regular hunting season will be beginning soon, y'see; that's why we fixed next Saturday."

"Bai Jove! I'll be there if it's at all poss., deah boy!"

"Better ask your governor first, y'know. Get round him, and all that."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You know how to put it to him, of course. Splendid thing for muscle and nerve, etcetera, y'know!"

"You can rely on me to say the pwopah thing."

"Yes, I can that, begad! Thought I'd just mention it to you, y'know."

"Yaas, wathah! But, by the by, have you awanged the course yet?"

"Oh, yes; that's all settled! It's the same course you rode over in your match with that young puppy Algarotti last year. Stiffish course, too, begad!"

"Yaas; but I know it quite well by now."

"Ah, that's an advantage you have over most of us! And, I say, I expect that young puppy Algarotti will be ridin', too, you know. But you won't object to that, of course?"

"Of course not, deah boy! I should wegard it as extremely unsportin' to object, you know."

"Quite right, my boy. Then that's settled. Hallo! What have they put up now?"

And Captain Cleveland dashed forward on his roan as the hounds burst into a chorus of glorious music.

CHAPTER 13.

The Return of the Hunters.

BUT there was not very much more done by the Sussex Vale that day. The great run they had had satisfied everybody, seeing that it had been one of the best cub-hunting runs in the whole record of the pack.

Wills basted a couple of cubs out of Nott's Cover, one of which he ran into at once. The other, after some good boundwork, also paid the penalty.

After that, having satisfactorily blooded hounds, Wills set out for home.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Cousin Ethel rode back to St. Jim's together, Lord Eastwood, Captain Cleveland, and Lord Conway returning direct to Eastwood House, which was nearer for them now than St. Jim's.

Lord Eastwood had arranged for a groom to be waiting at the old college to take the cousins' horses back to Eastwood.

Arthur Augustus enjoyed that ride home to the full. Although Ethel was his cousin, it was not very often that he had her "all to himself."

She had a habit, which was inexplicable to D'Arcy, of paying as much attention to the other juniors as she did to her own cousin when she was at St. Jim's.

D'Arcy told her about the steeplechase, and how he had made up his mind to participate in it, if it was at all possible, and Cousin Ethel promised to help his cause on with Dr. Holmes as much as she could.

D'Arcy knew that her help in that direction might be very valuable, for the girl had a good deal of influence over the kind-hearted old Head of St. Jim's.

The two rode into the gates of St. Jim's in high spirits after their fine morning's sport, just as St. Jim's was coming out from dinner.

Tom Merry, who was one of the first out, gave a whoop when he saw them, and rushed up at once.

"So you are back!" he cried breathlessly, taking off his cap to Cousin Ethel. "Blessed if I'm not jolly glad to see you safe and sound again! All right, Cousin Ethel?"

Cousin Ethel gave a silvery laugh.

"You talk as if we had been to the North Pole or somewhere," she said. "Yes, thank you; we are both all right!"

"Did you have good sport?"

"Splendid!"

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THURSDAY: "THE CIRCUS AT ST. JIM'S."

"Yaas, wathah! Wippin'!"

"Catch anything, Gus?" broke in a cheery voice suddenly. And Wally, D'Arcy's younger brother, swung off his cap, and nodded easily to Cousin Ethel.

Wally D'Arcy was the exact opposite of his dandified elder brother. He was the inkiest and most daredevil of all the Third Form fags, and caused Arthur Augustus no end of worry with his extremely free and easy manners. For all that, he was just as much a D'Arcy at heart as was his major, and no one could help liking him.

Arthur Augustus surveyed him through his monocle with considerable disfavour on this occasion.

His collar and his fingers were inky, as usual, and a smear of jam on one cheek proclaimed to all and sundry that he had been partaking of jam-tarts in the near past.

"Weally, Wally, I pwotest against your absurd question no less than against your extremely untidy appearance!" he said stiffly. "I—"

"Oh, scat! Don't you begin, Gus!" exclaimed the scamp of the Third Form, in no wise impressed. "Have a bully time, Cousin Ethel?"

Cousin Ethel laughed.

"Rather, Wally! We had—or—an extremely bully time! A splendid run!"

"How long?" asked Wally, who knew as much, or so he declared, at any rate, about hunting as either of his brothers.

"Over half an hour of the best!" replied Cousin Ethel, still smiling.

"Huh! Jolly ripping! Wish I had been there! So I ought to have been, too!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Oh, that's enough, Gus! You know I ought to have been there to look after you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

"And I should have been there, too, if that dummy of a brother of mine had told me anything about it!" pursued Wally, with emphasis. "Blessed if I know why I should have a waxwork for a brother!"

"Look heah, Wally," said Arthur Augustus, in measured tones, "wemind me to give you a feahful thwashin' this aftahnoon! The pwesence of a lady westwains me fwom doin' so now, and also for expwessin' my feelin's at your feahful wudeness!"

"And also from a black eye or two!" grinned Wally. "Come off it, Gus! So-long! See you later, Cousin Ethel!"

And, with a cool nod, the Third-Former raised his cap and ran off to join his friend Curly Gibson, whistling with paralysing shrillness as he went.

Arthur Augustus gazed after him with a helplessly horrified expression, while Tom Merry burst out laughing.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he roared. "Young Wally is the limit, Gussy!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cousin Ethel was laughing, too.

"He certainly is irrepressible," she said. "But there is Jenkins, Lord Eastwood's groom."

Jenkins came up, and touched his hat respectfully.

Arthur Augustus swung off The Abbot, but before he could offer to assist his cousin to dismount, Tom Merry had sprung forward, pushing Jenkins on one side.

D'Arcy favoured Tom Merry with an expressive stare, but the hero of the Shell did not appear to notice it.

He gave Cousin Ethel his hand, and she jumped lightly to the ground.

"Thank you!" she said, with a charming smile. "I really must run in now!"

And she tripped across the grass to the Head's private house, holding up her long habit as she went.

Tom Merry gazed after her admiringly, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gazed at Tom Merry, but scarcely admiringly.

"I wegard you as possessin' feahful check, Tom Mewwy!" he said severely.

Tom Merry looked at him with an innocent expression.

"You don't say so, Gus!" he observed.

"Yaas, I do though! I am looking aftah Cousin Ethel to-day. She has been entrusted to me entirely, you know."

"Well, have you any objection to my looking after her, too?" inquired Tom Merry, in feigned surprise.

Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle more firmly into his eye and gazed at the hero of the Shell with a peculiar expression on his aristocratic features.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I wegard that question as unnecessary! Of course I have a great objection to your lookin' aftah her, too!"

"But surely it does not hurt her?" said Tom Merry innocently. "I was only just glancing after her as she went over to Dr. Holmes's house."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, you know I do not wefer to your lookin' atah Cousin Ethel in a stwictly litewal sense! I was wewefwin' to your helpin' her down fwom her mount, you know!"

"Oh," said Tom calmly, "is that it, Why don't you say what you mean, then?"

"Weally, I—"

"Blessed if you know what you mean yourself half the time!" said Tom Merry argumentatively, skillfully leading the conversation away from the point in question.

"I pwotest! I—"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy! I never knew such a jolly long-winded chap as you are! Always jawing, you are!"

Arthur Augustus was prevented from making an immediate and crushing retort by his just indignation, and by the time he was capable of speech again Tom Merry had walked off to join Manners and Lowther, who had just sauntered out of the School House arm-in-arm.

The aggrieved swell of St. Jim's, therefore, had to content himself with an indignant glare after the Shell fellow's retreating form, as he was much too dignified to shout.

Still in a state of simmering wrath, therefore, he turned to Jenkins, the groom, to whom he gracefully delivered up The Abbot, at the same time tipping the groom five shillings, with his usual generosity. Then, as Jenkins mounted The Abbot and rode off leading Ethelfreda, the swell of St. Jim's walked somewhat stiffly over towards his House.

CHAPTER 14.

Cousin Ethel Refuses an Invitation.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY was sitting alone in Study 6 in the Fourth Form passage, having pleaded that he was too tired to play the usual football, when his chums came noisily in from their game.

"Hallo, Gus!" was Blake's greeting. "Got tea ready?" D'Arcy started.

As a matter of fact, he had been lost in a brown study, and had forgotten all about tea.

"No, deah boy," he replied a little quietly. "As a mattah of fact, I—"

"As a matter of fact, you were too beastly slack!" finished Digby for him.

"Nothin' of the sort, deah boy! I was just thinkin'—"

"What with?" Blake asked interestedly.

"Weally, Blake, pway do not be absurd! I was thinkin' that we might pewhaps ask Cousin Ethel in to tea to-day. She enjoys tea in the studay, you know."

"Good for you, Gus!" exclaimed Blake, Herries, and Digby in chorus.

"The only thing is—I was wondewin' whethah she would not be too fatigued atah huntin', you know! Huntin' fags a chap like anythin'!"

"Well, why didn't you run in and ask her, ass?" inquired Blake. "You have had all the afternoon to do it."

"Wats! I have only just finished changin', deah boy!"

"If you didn't dress like a tailor's dummy you'd have been changed a couple of hours ago!" growled Digby.

"Weally, Dig, I wufuse to be chawactewised as a tailah's dunmay under any circs."

"Well, a giddy fashion-plate, then!" said Dig.

"I wegard bein' compared to a giddy fashion-plate as equally oppwobious, Dig!"

"Oh, rats!" said Digby. "Well, one of us had better go down to the Head's house and see if Cousin Ethel can come, as this dummy hasn't done so."

"Right-ho! I'll run round directly I'm changed," said Blake.

"Rats! I'll go when I'm changed!" said Herries. "I sha'n't be a minute."

"Much better let me go!" said Digby. "I could do it much better, you know."

"What do you mean, ass?" demanded Blake.

"Yes! Don't talk rot!" said Herries.

"Oh, scat! I tell you I—"

"Rats! I ought to—"

"I'm the one to—"

Blake, Herries, and Digby were becoming excited when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's drawing voice broke in upon their somewhat warm argument:

"Weally, you fellahs, I can see no weason for your absurd arguin'. Of course, I am the one to go and ask Cousin Ethel, as I am her cousin, you know."

The other three looked at the swell of St. Jim's grimly. They were tired of hearing that, as he was Ethel's cousin, he should do everything.

Had Blake given the slightest signal just then Arthur Augustus would have been bumped before he had time to turn round.

Blake breathed hard through his nose; but he did not give the signal.

As a matter of fact, he saw that in this case they would know quicker if Cousin Ethel were coming if D'Arcy were to run to ask her, as he was already changed.

And it was important to know this quickly, so that preparations could be made for receiving the guest in proper style.

"Of course, that's all rot, Gussy!" he said. "But—" "Weally, Blake, I object to my wemarks bein' chawactewised as wot! I—"

"But, all the same," continued Blake, taking not the slightest heed of the interruption—"all the same, I suppose you'd better go. You're the only one who's changed."

"Yaas; and I'm the only one who's Ethel's cousin, too, deah boy!"

"Oh, scat to that!"

"Weally—"

"Get along, if you're going!"

"I am certainly goin', but—"

"Scat! Get on!"

"But I—"

"Git!"

"I—I pwotest—"

"Scoot!"

"I—I—"

"Bunk!" howled Blake, seizing the inopportune as D'Arcy edged towards the door, protesting—or trying to—all the way. "Bunk! Or I'll sling this at you, sure as eggs are hen-fruit!"

"Weally, deah boy—"

And D'Arcy, with a shudder, skipped out of the study and closed the door hastily.

"Thought that would do the trick!" grinned Blake. "You may kick Gussy, black his eye, and jump on him, and he will only 'pwotest'—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But offer to spoil his clothes, and he gives in at once!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's the nature of the baste, I suppose," remarked Digby.

"He can't help it. Coming to change, you chaps?"

"Rather! We'd better buck up, too, if Cousin Ethel's coming to tea."

"Then come on!"

"Right-ho!"

And the three juniors ran off to the dormitory to change their muddy football-clothes for more civilised garments.

Meantime, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was knocking at the door of the Head's house.

He asked for Miss Cleveland, and in a few moments Ethel herself appeared, looking fresh and charming after her day in the open air.

"Well, Arthur, how are you feeling? Stiff?"

"Weally, Ethel, I'm all wight, you know! I was goin' to inquire atah you."

"Oh, I'm feeling very well, thank you, Arthur!"

"Good, deah girl! Then you will be able to come to tea in the studay, I suppose?"

Ethel laughed softly.

"Well, as a matter of fact, Arthur—" she began.

But D'Arcy, having jumped to a conclusion, went rattling on:

"It will be all weady in half an hour, you know; so if you say you aren't too tired to come, deah girl—"

"Oh, no, I am not too tired! But—"

"Good! Then it will be all wight! In half an hour—"

"Yes, but—"

"In half an hour we shall be weady to weceive you."

"Wait a minute, Arthur!" laughed Cousin Ethel. "You are going along a bit too fast!"

"Why, what—"

"You see, I can't come."

"Eh?" exclaimed D'Arcy, startled out of his habitual politeness.

"I'm afraid I can't come," repeated Cousin Ethel, with a smile.

D'Arcy's face fell.

"Weally, deah girl—"

"I'm awfully sorry, Arthur; but I've got another engagement."

"Another engagement?"

"Yes, I'm so sorry! But I'll come another afternoon. I shall be here for some time, you know," said Cousin Ethel comfortingly.

"Ye-e-as!"

D'Arcy looked very disconsolate.

"Couldn't you come atah the engagement, deah girl?" he asked.

"Well, I'm afraid not," said the girl, smiling. "You see, I'm going to tea with Fig—with the New House juniors!"

"Oh!"

D'Arcy's face fell more than ever.

"You were too late, you know, Arthur," added Cousin Ethel playfully. "Figgins came across and asked me ten minutes ago."

"Oh!"

D'Arcy seemed incapable of any other utterance except this one exclamation.

He was struggling with internal indignation and dismay. Cousin Ethel seemed to guess something of what he felt.

"Well, good-bye for the present, Arthur," she said sweetly. "Thank you so much for taking care of me out hunting to-day. I've had a jolly day."

"Good-bye, dear girl! So have I!" replied Arthur Augustus, with feeling.

Ethel's last words had pleased him very much; but he walked away with a shade on his aristocratic brow, in spite of that.

Cousin Ethel going to tea in the New House—and she his cousin! It was maddening to think of.

Then there was that bounder Figgins!

D'Arcy felt sure Cousin Ethel would be bored by him and his studymates. For were they not New House juniors? And how they would crow, too, if they got to know that they had forestalled D'Arcy's invitation by ten minutes.

D'Arcy returned to his study wrapt in thought.

He seated himself in the armchair, rested his head on his hands, and thought.

He was still thinking when his three chums, looking clean and fresh from their rub-down and change, burst noisily into the room.

They stared hard at the swell of St. Jim's.

"Well," said Blake, "is she coming?"

"No, dear boy," said D'Arcy despondently, "she can't!"

The faces of the Fourth-Formers fell inches.

"Rotten!" said Blake. "I just met Tom Merry in the passage, too, and asked him and Manners and Lowther to come along to tea as Cousin Ethel was coming."

"Yaas, wathah! It's vewy wotten! And, what's worse, she's goin' out to tea somewheah else!"

"Somewhere else?" exclaimed Blake indignantly.

"Yaas! To apothah studay!"

"Another study?" howled Blake, Digby, and Herries in chorus.

"Yaas!"

"Well, whose, duffer?" shouted Blake.

"Can't you guess, dear boy?"

"Figgins?" howled Blake. "Figgins. I'll bet!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The long-legged bounder!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The—the cheeky loafer!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The—the howling villain!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake's indignation knew no bounds.

He called Figgins all the things he could think of, and added a few more that Dig and Herries suggested.

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, usually so polite, agreed to everything his incensed chum said.

It was when Blake had stopped, from lack of breath and fresh epithets, in his tirade against the lanky chief of the New House juniors, that Herries, who, with Digby, had fully shared their chums' indignation, first thought of his brilliant idea.

Herries was not very brilliant as a rule, but he had been known to have some ideas sometimes that even his studymates admitted were good.

And this proved to be one of them.

"I say," he remarked slowly, "why shouldn't we let the Terrible Three come to tea, anyhow?"

Blake glared at him.

"No letting about it, ass!" he said snappishly. "They've been asked, and you bet they'll jolly-well come."

"All right, old man," said Herries, with exasperating composure. "Keep your wig on! What I meant to say was, they'll expect to have tea with Cousin Ethel—won't they?"

Blake gave a howl.

"Of course they will, you duffer! But how can they, if Cousin Ethel isn't coming?"

"I don't see why not," said Herries stolidly.

Blake stared at his chum helplessly, and Digby and D'Arcy stared too.

"Off his rooker, I suppose!" murmured Digby. "Clean off! Poor old Herries! I've seen this coming for years."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, don't be asses!" said Herries impatiently. "You see what I mean, I suppose?"

"I see a silly, babbling ass!" retorted Blake rudely.

"Oh, scart! The Shell-fish want to have tea with Cousin Ethel, and so do we. We've promised the Shell-fish that they shall, so it's up to us to keep our word. That's what I say."

Blake took a deep breath.

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NEXT THURSDAY:

"THE CIRCUS AT ST. JIM'S."

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"Yes, that's what you say," he said, with heavy sarcasm; "but the question is—what, in the name of all that's dotty, do you mean?"

"What I say," said Herries obstinately.

Blake gave a groan.

"Oh, hold me up, somebody! This is a bit too thick, even for Herries!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, don't be such asses! What I mean, of course, is why shouldn't we and the Shell-fish drop in—accidentally, of course—to tea with Figgy?"

Blake started, and stared at Herries earnestly. He was beginning to tumble.

"There'd be a scrap," he objected feebly.

"Not if Cousin Ethel was there."

"Bai Jove, no!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"You see, if Cousin Ethel was there, Figgy & Co. would be bound to welcome us with a sweet smile."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Digby. "Good for you, Herry, old man!"

Blake leaped up, and rushed at Herries, dealing him a terrific smack on the back.

"Ow!" roared Herries wrathfully. "You—you ass!"

"Ripping!" shouted Blake. "Herries, old man, I take back every word I've just said about you. You're a genius! Napoleon was a fool to you!"

In the exuberance of his spirits, Blake slapped the indignant and protesting Herries on the back about a dozen times.

Herries gave an anguished howl.

"Ow! You ass! You've broken my back!"

"You're a hero!"

"Ow-wow! Stop it, you lunatic!"

"You're a blessed infant prodigy!"

"Yow-wo! My back!"

"You're—you're a giddy artist!"

But Herries could stand it no more.

With a yell, he leaped up, and, dodging the outstretched hands of his chums, entrenched himself behind the armchair.

"Pax, you lunatics!" he shouted. "Blessed if I tell such a lot of silly asses any more of my good wheezes."

"We only want to congratulate you, old chap."

"Congratulate be blowed! Why, my blessed back's almost broken!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Rat-a-tat-tat!

It was a loud knock at the study door.

"Come in!" shouted Blake.

The door opened immediately, and Tom Merry & Co. filed into the room.

They all had on clean collars, their hair was nicely brushed, and they looked as grave as a trio of owls.

"Please we've come," announced Tom Merry.

"Good!" said Blake, with a grin.

The Terrible Three looked round the study in surprise.

It did not look as if the occupants were expecting a lady to tea in a few minutes.

As a matter of fact, it looked more untidy than usual, which was saying a great deal.

There was no sign of tea on the table, either, the principal place on the board being occupied by a muddy football.

All these things the Terrible Three noticed during a prolonged glance round the room.

Blake was watching them, with a grin, but the Shell fellows, as guests, were too polite to make any mention of what was in their minds. Besides, it was plain to the Fourth-Formers what their thoughts were.

"Oh, by the bye, I forgot to tell you that the tea is to be held in Figgy's study, instead of here," remarked Blake carelessly, at last.

"In Figgy's study?" said Tom Merry, in surprise. "Why, you said Cousin Ethel was coming here to tea!"

"Ye-e-es; but it's—it's been altered. I—I meant Figgy's study, you know."

Tom Merry looked at Blake curiously.

"Oh!" he said.

"You see, Cousin Ethel is going there, and—"

"Oh, I see! All right."

"Of course, if you've set your hearts on having tea here, we can let you do it, you know," said Digby, in the tone of one making a great concession. "The only thing is that Cousin Ethel won't be here—nor shall we."

"Ass!"

"Still, we can order some things to be sent up here for your tea from Dame Taggles's, on our way to the New House, if you like."

"You ass, Dig! We're coming to the New House with you bounders."

"What-ho!" assented Manners and Lowther.

"Well, come on, then!" said Blake. "I should think

Cousin Ethel will be there by now. Are your faces all clean?"

"Go on, ass!"

"Are your hairs nicely brushed?"

"Shut up and lead on!"

"Then come on!"

And the seven juniors, grinning to themselves, marched out of the study and across the quad. to the New House, bent on inviting themselves to Figgins & Co.'s little tea-party.

CHAPTER 15.

Figgins' Tea-Party.

THE inside of Figgins & Co.'s study in the New House presented a cosy scene.

There was a pleasant fire in the grate, and a pleasant smell of cooking pervaded the atmosphere of the little room.

The table was very daintily decked out with a white cloth and gleaming knives and forks.

Quite a lot of the crockery matched, and the majority of the knives were equipped with handles—a state of affairs seldom found in junior studies.

But Figgins had evidently resolved to do the thing well. He had ransacked the junior studies in the New House for the necessary crockery and cutlery, and had even taken the liberty of borrowing a few things from some of the senior studies which he had found temporarily unoccupied.

The provision of the eatables had been left to Fatty Wynn, so it can be imagined that there was both quality and quantity in that direction.

Fatty Wynn was a connoisseur in all matters relating to food of any kind, and he always laid out the study funds to the best advantage.

As a chef, too, Fatty was unrivalled at St. Jim's. Cooking was a labour of love to him, and, as he frequently remarked to his studymates, "he could cook all day and every day, if somebody would provide the stuff."

At the present time he was just putting the finishing artistic brown tint to a dish of succulent-looking sausages.

Kerr was engaged in making the tea, while Figgins was hovering about here and there like an anxious hen, putting the finishing touches to the general arrangement, and keeping up a lively chatter with Cousin Ethel.

Cousin Ethel, of course, occupied the seat of honour in the study. She sat on one side of the fire, in the only armchair, with two or three cushions—bagged by Figgins from Knox's study, by the way—piled up at her back.

All was cheerful and comfortable within the snug little study.

Kerr had just announced that the tea was made, and Fatty Wynn had just delivered himself of the opinion that the sausages were "done to a turn," when there came a knock at the study door—a loud, double knock, as if the knocker had a right to come in, and was only knocking as a matter of politeness.

Figgins frowned.

"Come in!" he called.

The door opened wide, and discovered the seven School House juniors standing outside in a body, looking spruce and cheerful.

Blake advanced into the study with a cheerful smile.

"So you're here already, Cousin Ethel?" he said affably.

"Good! We've come, you see, Figgy."

Figgins stared at the new-comers speechlessly, as did Kerr and Fatty Wynn also.

"We're a bit late, I'm afraid," went on Blake apologetically, "but I hope you'll excuse us. You haven't started yet, I see."

Figgins remained speechless, being apparently temporarily paralysed.

The seven juniors greeted Cousin Ethel in turn, and crowded into the study, Herries, the last to enter, carefully shutting the door after him.

Cousin Ethel looked a little puzzled at this influx of visitors.

Why hadn't Figgins told her the others were coming, she wondered.

But she looked pleased to see them, all the same.

"Good-afternoon!" she said, with a pleasant smile. "This is a pleasant surprise! Figgins didn't tell me you were coming, but I'm so glad to see you. The more the merrier!"

The intruding juniors grinned.

They knew they were safe now.

If Cousin Ethel said she was glad to see them, they were all right, for with Figgins Cousin Ethel's lightest wish was law.

"Just so! The more the merrier!" said Blake blandly.

"That's what we always say—don't we, Figgy?"

"M-m-m!" mumbled Figgins, nearly choking.

"Eh?" said Blake innocently. "That's right, isn't it?"

"M-m-m—er—ye-es! That—that's all right, old man,"

stuttered Figgins. But the furious glance which he levelled at Blake from behind Cousin Ethel's back belied his words.

But Blake did not seem to notice the glance.

"Good!" he exclaimed heartily. "Where shall we sit, old man?"

Figgins seemed to be struggling to get his breath. Cousin Ethel turned and looked at him curiously.

"Oh—er—anywhere—anywhere you can find room! I—I'll just run and raise a few more chairs."

And Figgins, making a choking sound in his throat, rushed out of the room.

Cousin Ethel looked after him with something of alarm in her eyes.

"Is Figgins unwell, I wonder?" she said. "He seems to be a little queer in his manner, doesn't he?"

"Oh—er—no, he—he's often taken like that!" stammered Kerr hastily. "He—he'll be all right in a minute!"

"I see," said Cousin Ethel quietly; but there was a merry gleam in her eye. She had probably a much better idea of the true state of affairs than any of the juniors thought.

Figgins came back, looking rather red in the face, but calm, bringing four chairs with him.

"S-sit down, you chaps," said the lanky New House junior, with an effort.

"Thanks awfully, old man! Sure we aren't crowding you out?" said Tom Merry, gravely preparing to take his seat in the chair next to Cousin Ethel, which Figgins had intended for himself.

"N-n-no, that's all right, Tom Merry."

"Sure? Because we'll clear out and come some other time if you say the word, Figgy!" went on Tom Merry innocently.

Figgins began to choke again, but before he could say anything, Cousin Ethel broke out reproachfully:

"Oh, don't go now you've all given us this pleasant surprise by coming, Tom Merry! I'm sure Figgins wouldn't like that!"

Figgins turned scarlet under the influence of his mingled feelings.

"G-g-good, gracious, no!" he exclaimed. "C-c-certainly not!"

"Good! Then we'll stay with pleasure, won't we, chaps?"

"Rather!" exclaimed the "chaps" enthusiastically.

The seven School House juniors took the seven chairs, and sat down comfortably. Cousin Ethel became engaged in a conversation with Blake, who sat on the further side of her.

Figgins, seeing that his fair guest's attention was thus engaged, took the opportunity of shaking his fist frenziedly at Tom Merry, and dancing silently in his rage.

Tom Merry sat and smiled at him blandly, reducing Figgins almost to the point of lunacy.

He was still shaking his fist at the leader of the Shell, when Cousin Ethel suddenly turned her head and caught him in the act.

She stared at him in open-eyed astonishment.

"Why, Figgins, whatever are you doing?" she exclaimed severely.

Figgins' blood froze in his veins. He contorted his face into a ghastly apology for a grin.

"I—I—I—" he stammered, and then stopped helplessly.

It was the resourceful Kerr who came to his rescue.

Had it not been for the presence of Cousin Ethel, Kerr would have hurled himself at the intruders, numerous though they were, and made a desperate effort to throw them out of the study, so great was his indignation at their intrusion. But politeness for their fair guest, of course, forbade anything of the sort.

But Kerr thought it only right that Tom Merry should have the real feelings of the study demonstrated to him—if, indeed, they needed any demonstration. So he was entirely in accord with Figgins in his furious gestures, and came to his help with ready resource.

"It's Sandow," he explained. "He's just showing us a Sandow exercise, Cousin Ethel."

"Oh!"

Cousin Ethel struggled between a laugh and a frown.

"Ye-es, that's it, of course," stammered Figgins, recovering himself somewhat as a result of this timely aid, and clutching at Kerr's suggested explanation like a drowning man at a straw. "It—it goes like this, you see. One, two, one, two!"

And Figgins stretched out his right arm, with the fist clenched, and brought it feebly back to his shoulder again two or three times. There was a suppressed chuckle from the juniors, and Cousin Ethel laughed outright.

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"I see," she said mischievously. "How interesting!"
 "Yes, awfully, isn't it?" agreed Tom Merry. "Do you mind showing us again, Figgy?"

Figgins smiled a sickly smile.

"Oh, c-certainly! One, two—one, two!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors, able to control their merriment no longer. "Ha, ha!"

Cousin Ethel's silvery laugh joined in, and the whole study rang with merriment.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins was the only one who did not laugh. Even his chums, Kerr and Fatty Wynn, could not restrain their grins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins' sickly smile remained fixed on his face. He felt that his reason would give way if something didn't happen soon.

Cousin Ethel took pity on him at last.

When the merriment had subsided somewhat, she changed the subject.

"Suppose we have tea now?" she suggested. "It's all ready, I think!"

"Good!"

The suggestion was welcomed by all, and especially by the unhappy Figgins. It brought a certain amount of relief to him, but even then he was by no means happy.

All the chairs in the room were occupied by the visitors, and if the New House chums had any time at all to sit down in the intervals of looking after their guests, they had to sit on the window-sill, or the coal-locker.

To Fatty Wynn, this seemed particularly hard.

Fortunately, Fatty having laid in the provisions for the tea, there was sufficient to go round, though he had only been catering for four. But he had borne in mind, when purchasing the stores, that he himself was to be one of the four—consequently, he had left a liberal margin over, "in case of accidents," as he had himself explained.

Figgins and Kerr hardly ate anything, but Fatty Wynn soon left off waiting on the visitors to supply his own wants, leaving his two chums to "do the polite," and, incidentally, to prevent him eating more than they considered the state of the table would warrant.

"Stow it, Fatty!" whispered Figgins anxiously in his ear, as the fat junior grabbed his third pork-pie and retired to the window-sill to devour it.

"M-m-m! I am stowing it, Figgy!"

"Go steady, I mean, you cormorant! Try and manage with only enough grub for two to-day!"

"That's all very well—"

"We mustn't let Cousin Ethel, or those School House rotters see that there isn't enough."

"I don't see why not—"

"Well, I do," said Figgins decisively.

"That's all very well, but I'm hungry."

"Look here, I'll stand you another feed after for you, if you'll give this one a chance."

"Of course, if you put it like that, Figgy—" said Fatty, with a sigh.

Figgins left him sitting on the window-sill, having finished his pork-pie, gazing at the good things on the table hungrily.

Tom Merry looked at him and chuckled. He guessed what his whispered colloquy with Figgins had been about.

"You'll be interested to hear, dear boys, that I am going to go in for a steeplechase next Saturday," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"What!" exclaimed several voices together.

"Yaas. The Hunt are gettin' up one, you know, and I am goin' to enter."

"Anybody else going in for it?" asked Lowther facetiously.

"Weally, Lowthah, I am hardly likely to wide a steeplechase by myself, you ass!"

"Well, you'd be sure of winning it then, you know, Gussy—if you didn't fall off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I regard you as an ass, Lowthah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Have you got permission yet, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry, hastening to intervene, as the swell of St. Jim's was beginning to look indignant.

"No, but I am goin' to do so, dear boy."

"Suppose the Head refuses to give it you?" suggested Digby.

"Weally, Dig., the Head would not be likely to wefuse me permish, if I put it to him as an old sport, I suppose."

"Ha, ha! Of course not."

"Besides, I shall get wound the governah, you know, and he will get permish, for me."

"I think you'll get permission all right, Arthur," said Cousin Ethel, with a smile. "I'm going to speak to Dr. Holmes if he hesitates to give it, you know."

"Yaas, wathah! Be suah and put it to him as one gentleman to another, dear girl!"

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"Cousin Ethel isn't a gentleman, Gussy," grinned Lowther, "so how can she?"

"You ass, Lowthah! I mean, of course, as one gentleman to another!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally—"

"You see, the Head isn't a gentlewoman, either, Gussy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah, I regard your remarks as fivivulous!"

"Ha, ha! Never mind, Gussy! We know what you mean, so don't make it worse by trying to explain!"

"I should wefuse to make it worse!"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy! You will be sure to get permission all right if Cousin Ethel asks for you!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Of course, if you are riding in this affair, we shall have to come and look after you," said Blake, in a tone of resignation.

"I shall wefuse to be looked after by a lot of wottahs."

"All the same, you can bet we'll come. What time is the donkey-race to be held?"

"Pway do not be absurd, Blake! The steeplechase is going to be in the afternoon, I believe."

"Good! You'll be there, I suppose, Cousin Ethel?"

"Oh, yes, I mean to be there!" said Cousin Ethel, with enthusiasm.

"Yaas, of course!" said Arthur Augustus proudly.

"You see, my brother is riding in the race," went on Ethel slyly.

Arthur Augustus's face fell a little.

He had imagined that Ethel was coming especially to see him ride. But he brightened up again, as he said cheerfully:

"Yaas, wathah! And I should like to see Captain Cleveland win."

"So should I, if you don't," replied Cousin Ethel, with a sweet smile.

And Arthur Augustus beamed.

The tea-party broke up then, as it was almost time for the School House juniors to get back to their own quarters.

The visiting juniors thanked Figgins & Co. effusively for an enjoyable tea, and Figgins & Co. received their thanks rather ungracefully.

The visitors had enjoyed that tea considerably more than their hosts.

Cousin Ethel rewarded the hospitable New House juniors, however, by promising to stay another quarter of an hour, to their great delight.

Tom Merry & Co. were satisfied, though, as they crowded out of the study, after wishing Cousin Ethel and Figgins & Co. good-night. They felt that they had not been so badly forestalled, after all.

CHAPTER 16.

The Steeplechase.

THE next Saturday, the day of the steeplechase, dawned bright and clear.

Everything had turned out well for the swell of St. Jim's.

He had successfully performed the operation known as "getting round" Lord Eastwood, and on application from that nobleman Dr. Holmes had readily given his permission for D'Arcy to ride in the steeplechase, on condition that his father took all responsibility.

Quite a crowd of St. Jim's fellows turned up on the course to see their schoolfellow distinguish himself, and among the number were, of course, all D'Arcy's special friends.

Cousin Ethel was also there, looking very fresh and pretty on her brother's coach.

Being such a keen horsewoman herself, she took the keenest interest in such affairs.

A round dozen riders faced the starter, among them being Lord Conway, Captain Cleveland, young Algarotti, Captain Bayliss, a friend of Captain Cleveland, the Master himself, stout old Major Pepperton, and a number of other good sportsmen and hard riders, and, of course, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy himself.

The course, which was practically the same as that used by Arthur Augustus in his match against Algarotti the previous year, was a long and severe one, and the riders started steadily, keeping their horses well in hand.

The going was almost perfect, the ground soft without being too heavy, though Arthur Augustus quickly saw that his light weight was going to be an advantage in some of the more marshy places.

He was riding his own horse, The Abbot, and he found his experience of the course from last year's ride over it, though it had been gained on a different horse—Badger—very valuable in helping him choose the best places at his jumps.

The lead was quickly assumed by Algarotti on his magnificent black, and Lord Conway on his thoroughbred chestnut; the two racing almost neck and neck.

D'Arcy contented himself with fifth place, keeping away a little to the left, clear of the ruck, and choosing his own places at his fences with splendid judgment.

The ranks of the riders were very quickly thinned out, as Algarotti and Lord Conway were setting a rattling pace. Lord Conway's chestnut blundered badly at the second fence, a made-up hurdle, with a wide ditch in front, and very nearly came down altogether.

The young nobleman, however, dragged him up, and he managed to keep his feet, though his blunder gave Algarotti, whose black was simply flying his jumps, the lead by several lengths.

Two of the field were put out of the race at the same place, but the remainder went bucketing on, being weeded out steadily as the chase went flying on, leaving fence after fence behind them.

Three more sportsmen were out of it before Major Pepperton's big bay, who had found the pace too hot for him with the weight he had to carry ever since the start, pecked badly at the water-jump, and sent the gallant major flying in a graceful arc over his head.

To the relief of the spectators, the Master scrambled up again, puffing and spluttering, and shaking his fist after the flying form of his bay, who went galloping after the chase, determined not to be out of it himself, even if his master was.

The position of the race now was, Algarotti still keeping the lead, though the pace was beginning to tell on his black. Lord Conway five lengths behind, and going well. Arthur Augustus had crept up to third place, and was still having all he could do to keep The Abbot steady, so anxious was he to challenge the leaders at once.

Close behind D'Arcy came Captain Cleveland, on his roan, and young Jim Smith, a sporting farmer's son, on his grey, the two keeping nearly neck and neck.

Captain Bayliss lay sixth and last, but his bay mare still had plenty left in her, as her easy, untired stride plainly showed.

The winning-post was almost in view now, with but half a dozen more jumps to negotiate.

The first of these was a post-and-rails, and Lord Conway's flying chestnut caught the top bar of it with an echoing crash, and horse and rider turned a flying somersault into the next field.

There was a gasp of dismay from the little group of spectators who had gathered at this point; but their dismay was speedily turned to astonishment as Lord Conway coolly arose from the ground, where he had been fortunately thrown clear of his horse, and dragging the dazed and trembling but unscratched chestnut to its feet, remounted, and rode off in hot pursuit of the chase.

Both horse and rider were almost miraculously undamaged. From a spectator's point of view, anyhow, the fall had looked to be a real crumpler, but as is often the case, it had not turned out anything like as bad as it looked.

At the next fence Captain Cleveland fell heavily, and was forced to abandon the race, as his roan had strained itself rather badly.

The rest continued their wild career, leaving the gallant captain bemoaning in round terms his hard fate at thus being put out of a good race almost in sight of goal.

Arthur Augustus had now let The Abbot out a bit, and he had closed in with Algarotti, and was racing neck and neck with the big black.

Owing to the terrific pace which he had cut out, the black, magnificent horse as he was, had begun to tire.

His rider, the Italian, who had ridden up till now with splendid judgment and nerve, began to lose his head as he saw The Abbot's distended nostrils creeping up yard by yard till they were level with the black's.

Then the Italian, who was a merciless if skilful rider, began to ply whip and spur cruelly, and the black leapt forward frenziedly.

Together they approached the last jump but one, riding exactly abreast.

But Arthur Augustus knew that he had his man beaten. He knew that, goaded as he was by his cruel rider, the black must be thoroughly upset, and it would be a miracle if he negotiated the last two fences in his usual splendid, smashing style.

And Algarotti seemed to know it too.

At any rate, as the swell of St. Jim's coolly collected The Abbot, and steadied him for the jump, the Italian deliberately pulled right over to the left, in a foul attempt to cross The Abbot's path, and bring him down at the jump.

And the Italian's dastardly attempt almost succeeded.

The black bumped into The Abbot, and for a moment D'Arcy's game mount faltered, and the swell of St. Jim's felt that he must come down.

"You—you uttah, foul-widing wottah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, pale with indignation.

Algarotti uttered a mocking laugh. He felt that he had cheated the St. Jim's junior, whom he hated so bitterly, out of a well-earned victory at the last moment.

For himself he was quite reckless of the consequences of his foul act.

But he had reckoned without The Abbot.

Arthur Augustus leaned forward and touched his horse with the spur, and The Abbot positively bounded forward.

In spite of being bored away to the left by the big black, the good little horse leaped desperately at the fence.

He took it sideways, and brushed through the top, and D'Arcy felt that he could not stand up on the other side.

But he did!

He landed with a grunt, awkwardly, it is true, but he managed to stand up.

In spite of having been bumped and bored, and put off his jump in the most foul manner, the little horse had made a wonderful leap.

Arthur Augustus leaned over and patted his neck as he quieted him down again, ready for the last jump.

He heard a terrific crash behind him, and, glancing hastily over his shoulder, saw that Algarotti had charged full into the fence, his exhausted horse being unable to rise at it at all.

The Italian was flung off headlong, and lay on the turf, stunned, while the black stood by him, trembling and exhausted.

Algarotti's foul trick had failed!

The juniors of St. Jim's and the other spectators, including Cousin Ethel, cheered wildly as they saw D'Arcy's colours leading.

With a rush and a mighty spring, The Abbot was well over the last jump, and he cantered down the home stretch and past the post, with Captain Bayliss, young Jim Smith, on his grey, and Lord Conway, on his unbeaten chestnut, following him in the order named, an easy winner.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had won!

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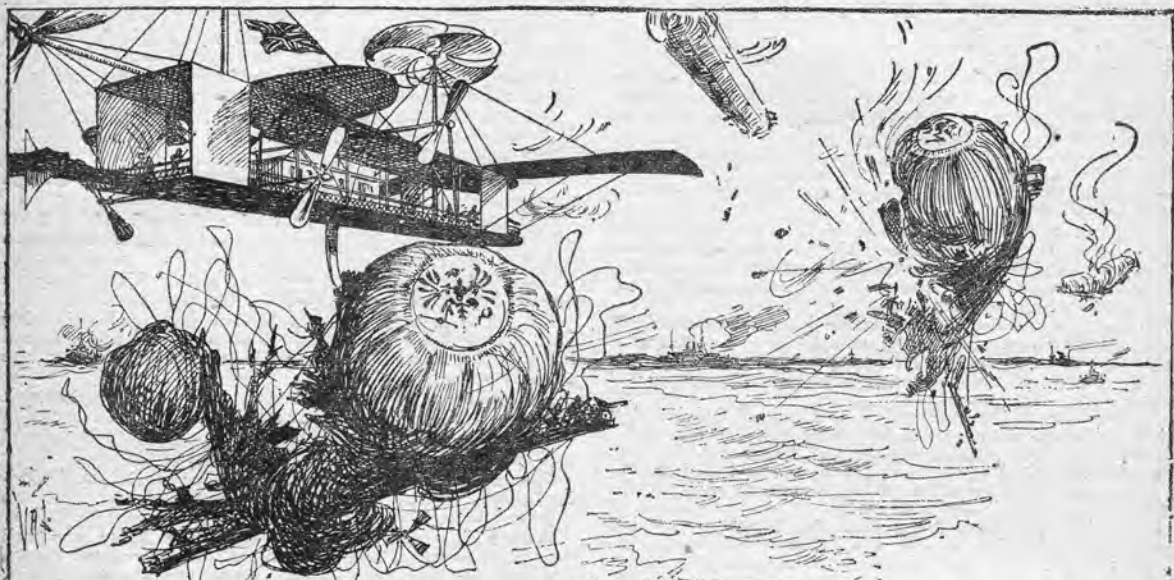
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The Gold-master.

"I'm afraid we've made asses of ourselves!" said Sam gloomily.

"My dear lads," exclaimed Harrington, laying a hand warmly on their shoulders, "don't think I'm anything but grateful! I thank you most heartily for what you've done, and the trouble you've taken to warn me. As for making asses of yourselves, that's nonsense. You've acted most smartly over the affair—obtained some very secret and carefully-guarded information. I might easily have been caught napping. Now, will you tell me how you came across this news, which not ten people in Europe know? You must have overheard it somewhere in the Erzfeldt district, I think."

"It was, sir," said Stephen; and he repeated all that had passed in the little bierhaus on the Erzfeldt Road.

Harrington listened carefully, and nodded.

"You're a sharp pair, you two, as everybody knows," he said. "You let very little slip through your fingers. Well, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 95.

I knew something of Tarlenheim, and in another three days I knew all there is to know. I have my own ways of obtaining that sort of information."

"I shouldn't think Old Nick himself could beat you, sir," said Sam admiringly. "How on earth you could know all this is beyond my understanding. Why, you lick the secret service at their own game!"

"And a precious black, ugly game it is, as it's played just at present!" put in John Carfax.

"My methods are simpler than you think, perhaps," said Harrington; "but it would hardly do to explain them to you. Don't fear but that I can look after myself, however."

"You'll have this Tarlenheim arrested, sir?" queried Stephen curiously.

"Arrested? Oh, no," said Harrington softly. "People like Tarlenheim come to grief of their own accord—at least, when they direct their attention to my business. I shall not interfere with Mr. Arthur Mylton at all. He will have a free hand to carry out his little plan."

The boys wondered what he meant; but Harrington rose from his seat and threw away his cigarette.

"Come," he said, "we needn't discuss that any more. I promise you you shall see the end of it yourselves, if you will stay the night with me. It is a small matter. Supper will be ready in ten minutes, and before we go in I want to show you my ten days' work since we met last."

He led the way down the long corridor, as on the night of the first visit, unlocked the huge, baize-covered steel door, and took his guests past the chemical and electrical laboratories to the stone cellars underground. Holding a lantern up, he bade them look round.

Case upon case of gold ingots, ready for fastening up, stood upon the shelves, with their ends open. The dull red glow of the metal shone in the lantern's light.

There seemed no end to it. It was a perfect dream of gold, stretching from shelf to shelf far down the partitions of the cellars.

"How many millions would you set that down as?" said Harrington, with a smile. "Half of it goes to the Treasury to-morrow. Yes, there is power in gold. You may have heard, perhaps, that much of the ruin wrought by the German invasion is already repaired. The starving are fed,

NEXT
TUESDAY:

"THE CIRCUS AT ST. JIM'S."

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

the poor are clothed, and the homeless housed. All that is wanted, I shall supply."

"My word! Your life is worth guarding, sir, if it were for nothing else," said Sam, awestruck; "and to think this was iron and lead and sulphides not many days ago! You must have worked hard."

"It is as easy to turn out much as little."

"Aren't you afraid of robbery, with all this?" said Stephen, staring at the rows of gleaming cases.

"The robbers would come to a very sudden end, even though there was nobody on guard," said Harrington, smiling drily. "By the way, keep close to me, and do not stray away, or you may court disaster. Touch nothing with your hands."

"What's that purring noise?" said Sam, listening intently. "It sounds like a huge cat somewhere."

"That is one of my principal electric dynamos. It is in another part of the building. The mill-wheel works it," said Harrington. "Have you seen enough? Shall we go to supper? Walk behind me, and follow in my footsteps till we are clear of the cellar."

Tarlenheim Meets His End.

Harrington Carfax led the way out of the workshops and into the living part of the building again. An excellent repast had been set out in another room, and Sam, Stephen, and John Carfax made such a meal as they had not met with since leaving England. Everything was of the best, and Harrington, though not supping, presided.

During the meal, he heard the story of the Condor's cruise from his brother's lips. Much of it was already known to Harrington, even down to the smallest details. He praised the work of the boys warmly.

"I told you the youngsters would do you credit, John," he said at last, and then glanced at his watch. "By the way, time draws on. Would you like to see my little arrangements for Tarlenheim's comfort, or would you prefer to go to bed?"

"We'd rather see it through," said Sam earnestly, thinking of the millions in the cellars. "You aren't going to run any risks, sir, are you?"

Harrington laughed, and showed them upstairs. He led the way to a rather bare, plainly-furnished room on the west side, approached by passages that ran curiously crookedly, and in which a small iron bedstead rested in an alcove that just fitted it.

There was a single window, high up, and shuttered with what looked rather like bullet-proof plates, but Harrington only smiled when asked if they were so.

"This is my bed-room," he said. "I care only for the simplest kind, though other parts of the house may strike you as more luxurious. There are two doors, you see. Here is a roomy cupboard," he added, throwing it open. "Tarlenheim spent the greater part of last night in here."

"What!" said Stephen.

"Yes. Hoping to observe me, no doubt. He was disappointed, poor man, for I did not come to bed at all, being very busy. Naturally, he does not know I am aware he was there. He must have got very cramped."

"Where is he now, sir?" asked Sam, for it seemed there was nothing the little scientist could not answer.

"I sent him into Southampton with the motor. He will not be back before midnight," replied Harrington. "About one o'clock, when the house is locked up, he will make his way into this room. He will not enter the cupboard," added Harrington, locking the door of it; "nor will it be necessary, for I shall already be in bed."

"What then, sir?" said Stephen.

"He will enter very quietly by that door," said Harrington, pointing to the farther one, "and he will then proceed to carry out the instructions which he has from his chief, the time being now ripe for them."

Stephen shivered slightly.

"Will he use a pistol, then, sir, or blow the place up with a bomb, or—"

"None of these things," returned the scientist. "He will hold by the more old-fashioned, quieter, and much nicer weapon, the knife. And I will now prepare his victim for him. He must not be disappointed," added Harrington gently.

He disappeared, and presently returned, carrying something in his arms. It was a lay figure, such as artists use, just Harrington's size, and enveloped in pyjamas. He pulled down the sheets, and laid it in the bed. Stephen laughed aloud, and Sam grinned.

"I am glad you find it a laughing matter," said Harrington. "I fear our friend Tarlenheim will not. This, I think, will be his last exploit. A sad loss to the world!"

The scientist bent down, reached under the mattress, and busied himself for some time. What he was doing they could hardly see. Sam touched the lay figure on the chest.

"Why, it feels like metal!" he said.

"I do not wonder at that," Harrington replied. He rose, arranged the figure carefully, pulled the clothes over, fixed to the dummy's head a small, well-made wig which exactly matched his own hair, and drew the turned-back sheet partly over it.

"How's that?" he said.

"It looks exactly as you do when you're asleep," said John Carfax, with a nod.

"Tarlenheim has seen me asleep, as he thought. He will recognise me here," replied his brother. He bent down and reached towards the wall below the head of the bed. Something gave a metallic click, as if a switch had been snapped into its place. The scientist rose again, and half opened the window shutters.

"Now," he said, with a keen look at the boys, "it is time for me to efface myself. I must be seen no more till this small affair is over. Come this way."

He led them out of the room and up a narrow, back staircase, into a small, left-hand apartment. A ventilator was let into the wall of it, near the floor, and putting their eyes to this, as Harrington bade them, they found they were looking through the ventilator's slats into the bed-room they had recently left. The aperture opened near the bed-chamber's ceiling.

"Since you have come so far to bring me this news," said Harrington, "doubtless you will wish to see Tarlenheim appear and fulfil his mission."

The curiosity of the boys was aroused to its highest pitch by Harrington's strange proceedings, and they agreed eagerly, wondering what would happen.

"I shall be glad of you as witnesses," said Harrington. "I will call you when I have need of you. Till then, all I ask is that you remain here perfectly quiet."

He disappeared silently, nor did the boys know where he or John Carfax had gone. The silence and darkness became oppressive.

"Isn't he a rum sort?" whispered Stephen. "Much more so even than his brother. Those eyes of his are just like needle-points of steel. I'd be sorry to be his enemy. I wonder what they'll do with the man when they've got him?"

"I've only one thing to say," replied Sam. "There's a single person before all others whose shoes I shouldn't like to be in to-night, an' that's this assassin Tarlenheim."

"I feel rather that way myself. What's this queer sort of noise you can just hear? Put your ear to the floor."

"It's only the big dynamo, worked by the water-wheel," said Sam. "It vibrates slightly all over the house. Better not talk any more. We were to keep silent. Harrington's boss here."

The quietness of the house, save for that subdued hum, and the inky darkness, made things seem more weird than ever. Slowly the time dragged on, the boys sitting by the wall and waiting patiently. The minutes seemed like hours.

There was room at the ventilator for both to watch at once, and they could see the room below, faintly lighted by a ray of the moon straggling through the half-opened shutters. The prone figure in the bed, looking strangely natural, could just be made out.

Would the midnight visitor come alone? What would happen to him? Would he stab the dummy in the bed, and so give proof of his vile intention? Was he, after all, villain enough to murder a sleeping man?

Would he come at all?

At last, silently as a shadow, a dark form stole through the farther door, opening it softly. Sam nudged his brother, and both followed it with their eyes.

It paused, and looked towards the bed. Creeping slowly forward, it halted again. The moon's ray lit up a sallow, seamed face. Then a knife gleamed for a moment in the stranger's hand.

"Is this Tarlenheim?" breathed Stephen, his heart beating fast.

The man advanced stealthily towards the bed, bending over the figure, and the knife was raised to strike.

Then the blow fell. It did not penetrate. Sharply it rang upon the breast of the prostrate figure. There was a loud, spluttering buzzing, a blinding blue spark of intense brilliance started from the point of the knife, and the blade went all to molten metal. Without sound or cry, the would-be murderer fell by the bedside, a twisted, blackened shape.

He had come by night to slay the high priest of science, and science had slain him!

The Penalty.

Sam and Stephen were too astounded to utter a word. They had expected to see the midnight visitor seized and arrested when taken in the very act of the crime. But to see him struck lifeless by the side of his intended victim, they had never dreamed of, and they were aghast at the sudden tragedy.

"Good heavens!" muttered Sam. "Isn't it fearful?"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 95.

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

"Harrington has let him meet his fate," whispered Stephen, with a shiver. "John Carfax was right in saying he was a man of iron, if ever there was one."

The young scouts needed no telling that it was an electric current, and one of fearful power, that had struck the assassin dead. The blazing blue spark that leaped from the knife when it touched the figure in the bed told them that. They remained for some time in almost scared silence, realising what manner of man their host was.

Harrington's voice, calling softly up the staircase, broke upon their ears.

"Villiers! Come down, my lads, both of you! This way!"

For a few moments the boys felt very little inclined to go. Their nerves were strong and steady, but the sudden end to the tragic drama had shaken them badly. They heard the call again, and obeyed.

Harrington Carfax stood at the foot of the stairs, a little lamp in his hand, and his brother stood beside him. Neither of the men said a word, but led the way into Harrington's bed-room.

The moonbeams were still straggling in through the shutters, and the dead man lay beside the bed, a blackened, twisted shape. Stephen, used as he was to death in most forms, turned away his head.

"He has paid the penalty," said Harrington, glancing at the thing which had been Tarlenheim. "If every murderer met the same fate, there would be little need of courts of justice. Do not go near the bed, my lads, if you value your lives."

He touched a tiny bell-push in the wall, and in an incredibly short time Harrington's two assistants, whom Sam had seen on his last visit, answered the call. They seemed to spring from nowhere. The Gold-master pointed to the spy's body.

"Lay that on the bed in the Red Room," he said, "and lock the door upon it. It will remain till I communicate with the authorities."

The lifeless clay was borne out, and the boys breathed more freely. Harrington, approaching the bed alone, put his hand to the wall just behind its head, as before, and the click of a switch was heard.

"Now you can approach safely," he said. "I suppose you understand how this thing was brought about?"

He threw the sheets off, disclosing the dummy, and turning back the garment that covered it, he showed that the chest was enveloped with a thin casing of sheet-steel. From this an insulated wire led away beneath the bolster.

He kicked away the mat beside the bed, and showed another plate of steel beneath it, which he pointed out to the boys.

"You see," he said, "it's simple enough. This mat is a conductor, and the plate beneath it is connected by a wire to my electric dynamos in another part of the house. The other wire is attached to the dummy. When the spy, standing on this mat, brought his knife in contact with the steel round the dummy's breast, he completed the circuit, and a current of three thousand volts passed through his body, killing him instantly. But I hardly need explain this to you, no doubt. The current is now switched off, and there is no further danger. I prepared this trap in order that Tarlenheim, if he carried out his plan, might meet with his just reward. It is the simplest way."

Sam drew a long breath, and glanced at his brother. John Carfax picked up the spy's knife. It was bent and twisted by the fierce shock that had passed through it, and the point, owing to some impurity in the steel, had absolutely melted, showing the awful power of the current.

Harrington quietly thrust the dummy into the large cupboard in the wall, and turned the key upon it.

"So ends that incident," he said, with perfect calmness. "Why, Stephen, you look ill," added their host, glancing at him. The boy's face was white and drawn.

"It was awful!" gasped Stephen.

Harrington looked at him curiously.

"I—I thought you were going to arrest him, or something," muttered Stephen, "but this—"

"Why so? Has any wrong been done?"

"No—I suppose not," said Sam haltingly, for his brother did not reply.

The Gold-master turned towards him.

"Have you any doubts?" said Harrington gravely. "I should be sorry that any honest man should think me to blame for this. What did this man deserve if he had killed me while I slept, and been captured afterwards? What, then, would have been his fate?"

"Hanging!" said Stephen, "sure enough."

"Well, then, was it not justice that he should meet his end from the very blow by which he would have committed the murder?"

"You're right, sir," said Sam, with a breath of relief, "nothing could be more just."

"Yes, he got his deserts," said Stephen, with a nod, "it was only—I felt—"

"We were rather knocked over by it at first, sir," said Sam; "but of course what you did was just enough, and we see that. I know, too, that nothing could have happened better, considering all things. We hope you don't think we should dream of questioning what you do, sir; you know far better than we do."

"Why, yes," said Stephen, "it was a bit of a shock, sir, that's all."

"Say no more," said Harrington, "you are quite welcome to know that no other way would have served so well. I was not even certain that this spy would do the deed to-night, so I prepared for him. When meeting with members of a secret service such as this, one has to deal with them as best one can, you know. There will be an inquiry, of course; but it is not well, for many reasons, that this business should make a public stir."

"Everybody would side with you, sir, in any case!" cried Stephen.

"Oh, yes, I wasn't thinking of myself. But I needed you as witnesses, or I should not have asked you to be present."

"I would rather a hundred murderers were struck dead than that the Gold-master should lose his life," said Stephen impulsively.

"Don't think us squeamish, sir. Why, your death would take the bread from the mouths of a million starving men. We know what you've done for the poor who were ruined by the German invasion. And that's not counting your personality, sir; for my part, if you'd no secret to lose at all, I'd fight for you as long as I could raise my arm."

The boy's enthusiasm touched the great scientist, and he smiled and laid his hand on Stephen's shoulder.

"You have seen what my enemies come to," he said; "it is not myself that I defend, but my work. I never dared to use this great secret of mine till I knew that it could do good to my fellow-men, and perhaps save my country. And now let it rest, for you are all dead-beat, and we must get some sleep. I will show you to your room, and then turn in myself."

"In that bed, sir?" exclaimed Stephen.

"Yes, in that bed," returned Harrington, laughing gently. "You didn't think it would affect my nerves?"

(Another long instalment of this thrilling serial next Thursday.)

How Do You Do?



"THE CIRCUS AT ST. JIM'S."

Many merry doings have taken place at the old college, but the best fun of all occurs when a travelling circus pitches its tents within reach of the juniors.

Tom Merry & Co. vote "The Circus at St. Jim's" an unqualified success. Let me know what you think.