

'THE SWELL ^{of the} CIRCUS!'

The

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VOL. 4.

Grand long
Complete
Tale

A Tale of the Terrible Three.

by
MARTIN
CLIFFORD.



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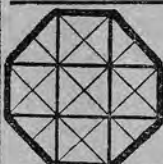
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By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1. Trouble at St. Jim's.

MORNING school was over at St. Jim's. It was a fine, clear day, cold and invigorating, and, as a rule, there would have been a rush of juniors into the quadrangle the moment the welcome hour of dismissal came. And Tom Merry & Co. would probably have been the first to rush out and rejoice in their new freedom.

But this morning was not as usual.

The boys left the Form-rooms quietly, and went out into the passages or the quad with serious looks and lowered voices.

They gathered in groups and talked, with grave faces, in the quad, or hung about the passages discussing some all-absorbing topic in low tones.

And Tom Merry & Co., instead of rushing out among the first, did not appear in the quadrangle at all.

There was evidently "something on" at St. Jim's—something which had quite disturbed the even tenor of life at the old school.

Tom Merry left the Shell Form-room with serious looks, and went up to his study in the School House. Manners and Lowther, his chums, followed him.

The three of them went without a word or a smile.

In the study they stopped, and looked at one another, and Tom Merry spoke at last.

"Well, what do you chaps think of it?"

"Rotten!" said Monty Lowther.

"Very rotten!" said Manners.

"What's going to be done?"

"I don't know."

"Ask us another."

"Poor old Gussy!"

"Yes, rather; it's rough!"

"I passed the word to Blake to come here," said Tom Merry. "I think we ought to put our heads together, and think of something."

"Yes, rather."

There was a sound of footsteps in the passage, and Blake, Herries, and Digby of the Fourth Form came in. The three chums of Study No. 6 were silent and worried, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—who usually made a fourth with them—was not there.

Where was he? That was a question which no one in St. Jim's could have answered.

Tom Merry nodded to the new arrivals.

"Well?" he said.

"Well?" said Blake.

"Well?" said Herries and Digby together.

"What do you think of it?"

"Rotten!" said Blake, with a shake of the head.

"We had already reached that important conclusion," remarked Monty Lowther. "Taking for granted that the whole thing is rotten, what's to be done?"

"That's the question," said Manners. "Something's got to be done."

Blake nodded.

"I know that; but what?"

"There's the rub."

"We must do something for Gussy."

"Good!—but what?"

There was silence.

A DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

No. 107 (New Series.)

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In the curious and unprecedented pass that affairs had come to in the School House at St. Jim's, the juniors were all agreed that something must be done; but the question, as to precisely what, remained unanswered.

There was a sound of a kick at the door, and it flew open again, and a long-legged junior presented himself.

It was Figgins of the New House. Behind him appeared Kerr and Fatty Wynn, both looking as serious as Figgins himself; and Figgins was looking as serious as any of the School House juniors.

As a rule, relations were strained between the New House and the School House, and a visit from Figgins & Co. to Tom Merry's quarters meant trouble.

But on the present occasion there was nothing hostile in the looks of Figgins & Co., and Tom Merry did not make a movement to place himself upon the defensive.

He simply glanced at the New House juniors, and nodded.

It was evident that House rows were "off."

"I say," said Figgins awkwardly, "we're awfully sorry about—about what's happened."

"Thanks, old chap."

"It's rotten."

"The opinion seems to be unanimous on that point," remarked Monty Lowther.

"Don't be funny, old chap, at a time like this."

"Who's being funny?"

"Well, nobody," said Blake; "but I thought you were trying to be."

"Look here——"

"Shut up, Lowther!" said Tom Merry.

"But——"

"Order!"

"We gave you a look in, because we thought something ought to be done," said Figgins.

"Exactly," said Kerr.

"That's the idea," observed Fatty Wynn. "D'Arcy's gone. He may get into any sort of scrape—may have to go without meals, and that sort of thing. It's awful."

Even in the serious solemnity of the meeting, the juniors could not help a grin at the gravity with which Fatty Wynn expressed his uneasiness.

To go without a meal was one of the most awful things that could happen to Fatty Wynn, and he would have felt sorry for his worst enemy in such a dreadful plight.

"Well," said Tom Merry, "I was thinking that we ought to hold a meeting on the subject, and come to some sort of a decision."

"Good!"

A handsome, sturdy lad looked in at the door. It was Harry Noble, of the Shell—otherwise known as Kangaroo, from the land of his birth.

"I say, are you chaps going to do anything about this affair of Gussy's?" he asked. "I think something ought to be done."

"Come in; we're just consulting."

Kangaroo came in. He was looking unusually serious. There was a cloud upon all St. Jim's, and the cloud was darkest upon the fellows who had known and liked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—the junior who was in trouble.

Tom Merry glanced over the meeting.

"Well, we'd better decide what's to be done, because the sooner it's done, the better," he remarked. "You all know how the case stands."

"Yes; it's rotten."

"Agreed!" said Monty Lowther.

"Look here——"

"Gussy was a witness of D'Arcy's minor, or somebody, chucking tar over Mr. Selby, the master of the Third—a worm who deserved all he got, by the way."

"Hear, hear!"

"Gussy very properly refused to give the name of the chap, regarding that as sneaking, which is barred."

"Hear, hear!"

"The Head ordered him to give the name, and then Gussy ought to have given in; but then, if he thought he was bound to stick it out, it was a fault on the right side."

"What-ho!"

"Therefore we must all agree that Gussy was quite right in the matter, from his point of view; and the Head was quite right, too, to order him a flogging for being insubordinate. They were both right."

"Good!" said Lowther. "This reminds me of Gilbert and Sullivan:

"And you'll agree, so I expect,
That he was right, to so object;
And I am right, and you are right,
And everything is quite correct."

"Shut up, Lowther!"

"Rats!"

"Order! order!"

"To get on with the washing," resumed Tom Merry, with an admonishing glance at Monty Lowther, "Gussy thought that THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 107.

a flogging would be derogatory to his dignity. He somehow unlocked the door of the punishment-room, and bolted before he could be flogged."

"Just like Gussy!"

"And we were all called together in hall to witness the blessed flogging, and it never came off—jolly good thing, too."

"Hear, hear!"

"Quite so. But Gussy has bolted, and I wonder whether the Head will ever allow him to come back to St. Jim's."

"Oh, he must."

"Then Gussy will have to take the flogging."

"That's better than leaving St. Jim's."

"But at present Gussy is out in the wide world alone," said Tom Merry. "He's had all the morning to get clear. I know that Kildare and the prefects have been out looking for him since, but they haven't come in yet."

"I don't suppose they will find him. He's had hours."

"He must be found," said Tom Merry. "I suppose it comes to that: Gussy will have to be found, and saved from making an ass of himself."

"Hear, hear!"

"It's better for him to be brought back, even to be flogged, than to be expelled from St. Jim's."

"Oh, yes, rather."

"Of course, if the Head knew that it was Gussy's own brother who tarred Selby, he would understand better, and I think he would let Gussy off the flogging. But we can't tell him. Young Wally wanted to own up, but Gussy forbade him."

"Just like Gussy!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Now, Gussy's got to be found, and brought back, and I think we've got to do it. No good leaving a thing like that to the seniors," said Tom Merry, with a shake of the head.

And the juniors all shook their heads solemnly, too.

"No good at all!" said Kangaroo.

"Then," said Tom Merry, coming to the point at last, "what price asking the Head for permission to go out and look for Gussy?"

"Good!"

"He'll refuse," said Manners.

"Well, we shan't be any worse off if he does; but he mayn't."

"Let's go in a body and see, anyway," said Blake.

"It's a jolly good idea," remarked Herries. "If we get leave to go out, we can take my bulldog, Towser, and he will pick up the trail in no time. What are you sniffing about, Blake?"

"I suppose a chap can sniff if he likes," said Blake. "Let's get to the Head, and never mind Towser."

"But Towser——"

"Blow Towser!"

"Come on," said Tom Merry.

And the juniors crowded out of the study. As they went downstairs, they paused at the sight of a fag standing in the recess of a window. It was Wally D'Arcy—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's minor.

Wally was as untidy and inky-fingered as usual, but his usually careless brow was lined with thought. He did not see the juniors; he was evidently buried deeply in reflection. The trouble that had come upon his brother—caused unintentionally by himself—evidently weighed heavily upon D'Arcy's minor's mind.

"Cheer up, kid," said Tom Merry kindly. "We're going to find Gussy; and it will all come out right somehow."

Wally started.

"Hallo! I say, this is rotten!"

"Passed unanimously," said Monty Lowther.

"Shut up, Lowther!"

"I don't know where Gussy's gone," said Wally. "He wouldn't go home, because the governor would send him back like a shot. Awful strong on discipline, the governor! Gussy's gone out into the blessed wilderness, and he's about as fit to take care of himself as—Skimpole."

"We're going to look for him, if the Head will let us."

"I'm going to look for him anyway," said Wally. "But it's no good bringing him back, if he's going to have a flogging when he comes. I'm going to clear up that bizny."

Tom Merry started.

"You're going to owa up about chucking the tar over your form-master?"

"Yes."

"Gussy told you not to. Look here, the Head has sentenced the chap, as soon as he's found out, to be expelled. You'd better think twice about it."

Wally grinned.

"I've thought of a dodge."

"Oh; what's the dodge?"

"Come along to the Head's study, and you'll see."

"We're just going there."

Wally nodded, and joined the juniors as they made their way towards the dreaded apartment of the Head of St. Jim's. Tom Merry tapped at the door, and the deep voice of the Head bade him enter.

CHAPTER 2.

Wally's Dodge.

DR. HOLMES glanced at Tom Merry as he entered, and his face expressed surprise, growing stronger and stronger as the crowd of juniors followed him in. The crowd seemed quite enough to fill the study. Mr. Selby, the master of the Third Form, was with the Head, and he looked very sourly at the juniors—especially at Wally. There was no love lost between D'Arcy minor and his form-master.

"If you please, sir—" began Tom Merry.

"If you please, sir—" began Wally.

"Shut up, Wally!" whispered Blake.

Wally sniffed.

"What do you want, my boys?" asked the Head mildly.

"I want to speak about my major, sir," said Wally, taking the field with a triumphant glance at Tom Merry. "It's important, sir!"

"Oh! Go on, D'Arcy minor."

"I—I don't know whether I can speak out, sir," said Wally, with an altogether new bashfulness. "Arthur wouldn't tell you who chuckled the tar—ahem—who threw the tar over Mr. Selby, sir."

"Quite so."

"I—I could tell you, sir."

The Head's brow darkened. If there was anything he detested, it was "sneaking," or any sort of tale-bearing among the boys, and it was a thing he never dreamed of encouraging.

True, he had ordered Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to reveal the name of the perpetrator of the tarry "jape" upon Mr. Selby; but for a boy to offer willingly to betray another was revolting to the good doctor.

He looked very coldly at D'Arcy minor.

"Indeed!"

Mr. Selby looked eager. He had no scruples about benefiting by tale-bearing, and the remains of the tar that stuck in his ears and his hair still exasperated him. Mr. Selby would have given a very great deal to discover who the culprit really was.

He leaned forward a little towards Wally. He had never liked the fag, but he felt as if he could pat him on the shoulder now.

"You know the perpetrator of that outrage, D'Arcy minor?"

"Yes, sir."

"Were you on the spot at the time?"

"I wasn't far away, sir."

"Then you saw it done?"

"From beginning to end, sir."

"Indeed!" said the Head coldly. "You should have come forward with this statement—if at all—at a time when it would have saved your brother from unpleasant consequences."

"I didn't think of the dodge then, sir. I—I mean, I—"

"Who was it?" asked Mr. Selby.

Wally hesitated.

"You see, sir, it's called sneaking to give a chap away," he said. "What I mean is, that I know the chap, and Gussy, my major, had jolly good reasons for not owning up who it was. It was a chap he cared about a great deal."

"I see," said the Head.

"You must tell us the name now, D'Arcy minor," said Mr. Selby. "It is your duty to do so."

Wally still hesitated.

Tom Merry and Co. were looking at him in silence. A dim idea of Wally's "dodge" was dawning upon them, and they stood silent, dumbfounded by the colossal nerve of it.

"You see, sir, I—I—I'm afraid," murmured Wally.

"Afraid!" said Mr. Selby. "You mean that the boy might injure you? You need have no fear; he will be expelled from the school."

"Certainly," said the Head.

"Ye-es, sir; but—"

"But what? You imagine that his friends may punish you? My dear boy, if you do your duty to your form-master by revealing the name of the perpetrator of that infamous outrage, you can depend upon protection," said Mr. Selby. "You may rely upon it that I shall allow no harm to come to you."

"Oh, certainly!" said the Head restlessly.

Wally brightened up.

"Well, sir, I—I feel rather afraid; but—but if you promise me that I shan't be punished at all by anybody—"

"I promise you," said Mr. Selby at once.

"And you, sir?"

"Yes," said the Head.

"Thank you, sir."

"And now you need not have any further hesitation, D'Arcy minor," said the Third-Form master, leaning forward. "Tell me who the guilty party was?"

"It was I, sir!"

"Eh?"

"It was I, sir," said Wally.

Mr. Selby stared at him with wide-open eyes.

Tom Merry and Co. drew a deep breath, and waited for the thunderbolt.

The Head seemed dumbfounded. He looked blankly at the hero of the Third Form.

Mr. Selby found his voice at last.

"It was you—you, D'Arcy minor?"

"Yes, sir."

"You—you were guilty of that outrage?"

"It was a jape, sir."

"You hurled that tar over me?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you dare to admit it to me!" said Mr. Selby, his voice trembling with rage.

"Yes, sir; since you've promised—"

Mr. Selby started.

"Promised—promised what?"

"That I should not be punished, sir."

The Third-Form master gasped. Something like a smile glided over the face of the Head of St. Jim's.

Wally stood with an innocent smile upon his face.

CHAPTER 3.

An Unsuccessful Search.

MR. SELBY seemed to be troubled to find his breath. He gasped several times, like a fish out of water, his face growing more and more crimson as he realised how he had been tricked. He turned quite a furious countenance towards Dr. Holmes.

"Doctor, you see the culprit before you?"

"Apparently, Mr. Selby," said the Head quietly.

"He has owned up to his guilt."

"Undoubtedly."

"The sentence of expulsion still holds good, I suppose? D'Arcy minor will be expelled from the school?" exclaimed Mr. Selby heatedly.

The Head frowned.

"Impossible!"

"But, sir—"

"You forget the promise we have both just made to D'Arcy minor," said Dr. Holmes quietly. "I am afraid that D'Arcy minor purposely misled us, but a promise is a promise. Both of us have promised D'Arcy minor that he shall not be punished for the affair."

"But—but—"

"Our word is sacred."

"But—but it was a trick!"

"Possibly; but a promise is a promise."

Mr. Selby rose to his feet. He was in such a rage that he could hardly control himself, even in the presence of the doctor. He went to the door and left the study without another word. He could not trust himself to speak.

The Head looked curiously at D'Arcy minor.

He seemed to be struggling with a desire to laugh and

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the necessity of looking grave. The astounding impudence and nerve of Wally's dodge struck the reverend Head of St. Jim's as comical.

"So it was you, D'Arcy minor?"

"Yes, sir," said Wally meekly.

"You threw the tar over your form-master?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why did you do this, D'Arcy minor? You know that such an action was outrageous, and far beyond the limits of what you would call a jape!"

"He sent me in to be caned, for nothing, sir!"

"Ahem! I am afraid I cannot listen to any statement of that sort," said the Head hastily. "The matter may drop as you have my promise—a promise which I was certainly tricked into making."

Wally flushed red.

"I—I'm sorry, sir!" he exclaimed. "I—I don't mind if you take the promise back. I thought it was a good dodge, but I didn't mean to trick you, sir. I—I can stand the row."

Dr. Holmes smiled.

"Not at all, D'Arcy minor! I appreciate your feeling in the matter, but the promise holds good. But I understand more clearly now the painful position your brother was placed in, and if he returned to the school at once, I would pass over the flogging."

"That's what we came to you about, sir," said Tom Merry eagerly. "Will you let us go and look for him, sir?"

The Head smiled again.

"Mr. Raiton and several prefects are already searching for D'Arcy," he replied. "I hardly think you would be more likely to find him."

Tom Merry's face fell.

"I think we might have a chance, sir."

"I have no doubt he will shortly be found and brought back."

"We're very anxious about him, sir!"

"Yes; I can understand that," said the Head kindly. "However, I do not think he will be absent long; I have very little doubt that he will be here before nightfall."

"But—but if he isn't, sir?"

The Head did not reply for a moment.

"If he doesn't come back to-night, sir? We're awfully anxious!" said Blake.

"Well, if he is not here by to-morrow morning, I may consider your request," said the Head. "That is all I can say at present."

And he made a gesture of dismissal.

"Thank you, sir!"

The juniors retired from the study.

In the passage they paused, and looked at one another.

"I suppose we must wait," said Tom Merry.

"I suppose so," said Blake. "The Head's so decent that it would be rotten to buzz off without permission."

"To say nothing of the licking afterwards," remarked Manners.

"Oh, we'll wait," said Wally, and he walked away whistling. Tom Merry wrinkled his brows in thought.

"As a matter of fact, we have a clue to Gussy's trail," he remarked. "There's no need to say so. If Gussy's going to be found, I don't see why we can't have the job."

"Good!"

"You remember he said that if he left St. Jim's, he would try to find Tomsonio's Circus, and try the signor for a job," said Tom Merry, with a grin.

"Yes, rather," said Blake eagerly. "I suppose that's what he'll do, too. If we get permission to go to-morrow, we shall have to hunt up Tomsonio's Circus."

"That's the idea. We may find Gussy doing the rough rider act—the same as he did that time we were at the circus, to oblige the signor."

And the juniors went their way.

D'Arcy's declared intention of finding the circus, if possible, and offering his services to Signor Tomsonio, was indeed a clue.

But it was a clue that Tom Merry & Co. felt quite justified in keeping to themselves.

They did not desire to see Arthur Augustus marched home between two prefects, and they did desire to get leave to look for him themselves.

Therefore they kept still tongues, which, according to the proverb, showed wise heads.

The day wore away.

Kildare and several of the prefects were absent from the Sixth Form that afternoon. They were searching the highways and byways for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

But they found him not.

They came in tired and dusty to tea, without any news of the runaway.

Telegrams had been sent in various directions, but none of them had elicited a satisfactory reply.

Lord Eastwood, the noble "governor" of the swell of St. Jim's, wired back that he had received a telegram from his son saying that he was safe, but giving no address.

It was evident that D'Arcy, with his usual thoughtfulness for others, had taken care that his people at home should feel no anxiety on his account, as they certainly would have felt if they had been suddenly apprised from the school that the lad was missing.

With the coming and going of telegraph boys, and dusty prefects and masters, St. Jim's was kept in a state of excitement for the remainder of that day.

The fellows, when they were not in classes, collected in groups and discussed the matter. Almost everybody in the school was concerned for Arthur Augustus, and took the matter seriously.

Mellish, of the Fourth, who expressed the opinion in public that it mattered very little whether D'Arcy ever returned to St. Jim's, was ducked in the fountain for his pains; and after that he kept his opinions on the subject strictly to himself.

And the sun went down without news of Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry & Co. thought eagerly of the morrow. If Arthur Augustus did not appear at St. Jim's by dawn, the Head could hardly avoid giving them permission to go and look for the missing junior.

And with their usual confidence in their capabilities, they had not the slightest doubt that they would succeed where others had failed, and would bring the swell of St. Jim's back in triumph to the school.

But would they?

CHAPTER 4.

D'Arcy on the Tramp.

"**B**AI Jove!"

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth Form of St. Jim's, that made that remark.

He made it in a tired and somewhat exasperated tone.

Arthur Augustus was far from the scene he had adored.

He was tramping slowly along a country lane in Sussex, as the sun was sinking behind the trees, and shadows lengthened in the road.

Arthur Augustus was clad with his usual elegance—but his elegant attire showed sad signs of travel.

His trousers still displayed their accustomed crease, but they were dusty, and his boots were covered with mire.

His collar was decidedly soiled, and his necktie was just a little out of the straight. His brow was damp with perspiration, and he had pushed back his silk hat a little to relieve it.

For all of which reasons, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not looking quite as elegant as the fellows at St. Jim's were accustomed to seeing him look.

It was four or five hours since Arthur Augustus had alighted from the train at a station a considerable distance from St. Jim's.

Since then he had been on foot.

It was D'Arcy's intention to find Signor Tomsonio's Circus, and hold the signor to his word. The signor had declared, after seeing D'Arcy ride at St. Jim's, that if the junior ever wanted a job he had only to come to the circus. And Arthur Augustus, in the present time of distress, had remembered those carelessly-spoken words.

He knew the direction in which to look for the circus.

He had taken the train to the nearest point, and then he had started to track down the circus on foot.

He heard news of it at various places, and once he thought he had found it, when he came into a village in which every dead wall was flaring with multi-coloured posters.

But he was a day too late.

Tomsonio's Circus had been there the evening before, but had moved on the same night after the performance, and was supposed to be now at the next town, a distance of some six miles. There was no conveyance of any sort to be had in the village, and Arthur Augustus had started out to walk it as the evening came on.

He was already a little fatigued, and this long walk was beginning to tell upon him. And, as is not uncommon in the country districts of England, the signposts were far from sufficiently clear, and he was soon doubtful of his way.

He might be making for Little Burford, where the circus was supposed to be—or he might not. He tramped on in hope.

Now he had reached cross-roads, innocent of any trace of a signpost, and which road to take he did not know.

He paused at the corner and adjusted his eyeglass, and looked up and down each road in turn.

Long lanes, stretching away between trees and high hedges—and no sign. No wonder the tired and exasperated swell of St. Jim's ejaculated:

ANSWERS

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"Bai Jove!" Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, made the remark in a tired and somewhat exasperated tone as he tramped along a country lane.

"Bai Jove!"

What was to be done?

There was no one in sight, not even a tired labourer going home from his work—nothing living of any sort, except a cow in one of the fields.

"Bai Jove! This is wotten!"

Arthur Augustus sat down on the top rail of a fence, and reflected.

Upon the whole, it would perhaps have been wiser for him to have stayed in the last village for the night, and to have started out fresh in search of the circus in the morning.

But it was too late to think of that now.

So far as he could judge of the distance he had traversed, he was about half-way to Little Burford, without the faintest idea which road to take to finish the journey.

"Gweat Scott!" said D'Arcy, addressing the trees. "What's a fellow to do?"

There was nothing for it but to take a rest and then tramp on again—unless in the meantime some good Samaritan came by who could direct him. Arthur Augustus, with his monocle jammed in his eye, kept a look-out up and down the road.

He uttered an exclamation of relief at last.

"Bai Jove! Here's somebody, at any rate."

A battered bowler had had come in sight in the lane, and it dodged up and down over the hedge for some time, till its owner came into view.

D'Arcy's face fell a little as he saw him.

The stranger was evidently a tramp.

He was dressed in the seediest of clothes, and the battered bowler was not more dilapidated than the ancient patched trousers, the frowzy coat, or the red-spotted handkerchief.

But, after all, it was a human being, and tramp or not, he could doubtless direct Arthur Augustus on his way.

The swell of St. Jim's slipped from the fence, and slipped out into the lane. With his usual urbanity, he raised his hat to the tramp as he addressed him.

"Pway excuse me," he remarked, "but can you diwect me to Little Burford?"

The tramp stopped and stared at him. Probably he had never been addressed with so much politeness before, and perhaps that aroused his suspicion that the swell of St. Jim's was taking a rise out of him.

"Who are you getting at?" he inquired.

D'Arcy glanced at him through his monocle.

"I fail to comprehend you, deah boy," he remarked.

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE TERROR OF ST. JIM'S."

"Wot I said is, who yer getting at?" said the tramp aggressively.

"You really do not undahstand me. I asked you to direct me to Little Burford."

The tramp looked at him more attentively.

The seriousness of Arthur Augustus's face assured him that the mode of address was not intended as a joke; and something like a grin stole slowly over the stabbly, dirty countenance of the vagrant.

"I'm going there myself," he said after a pause.

"How extremely fortunate!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "Perhaps you would not object to my company on the road?"

The tramp grinned.

"Not at all, sir."

"Thank you very much."

And Arthur Augustus, greatly relieved to have found a guide on his way, fell into step beside the slouching tramp. The man looked at him curiously out of the corners of his narrow, cunning eyes.

"I am lookin' for Signor Tomsonio's Circus," Arthur Augustus remarked, as they went on. "Have you heard of it?"

"Oh yes, sir."

"Pewhaps you know it?"

"I know it well."

"Vewy good. Then pewhaps you can tell me for certain whether it is at Little Burford?" suggested Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, yes," said the tramp readily. "It's there; I know it fur a fact."

"That is extremely satisfactory."

"So you are goin' to the circus, sir?" asked the man, eyeing D'Arcy again, and evidently not knowing in the least what to make of him.

"Yaas, wathah! I'm joining it," explained D'Arcy.

The tramp stared.

"Joining it?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I don't quite catch on."

"I'm goin' to join it as a wuff widah," explained Arthur Augustus.

The tramp chuckled.

"I weally fail to see any cause for mewwiment," remarked the swell of St. Jim's, with a great deal of dignity.

"He, he, he!"

"Weally, my fiwend—"

"Oh, it's all right, sir," said the tramp, changing his tone.

"I'm sometimes taken like that, sir. I mean no 'arm, sir. I'm going to join the circus myself."

"Are you, weally?"

"I am, sir. I was brought up to the circus. Perhaps you've heard my name—Billy Bowers, sir, the famous acrobat."

"I am afraid I have nevah heard of it, but I weally know very little on the subject," said Arthur Augustus. "I am vewy pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. Bowers."

"Thank you, sir."

"I trust we shall both be successful at the circus."

"Oh, yes, sir. This way, sir."

The tramp stopped at a stile that gave admittance to a foot-path leading away through a dark and shadowy wood. D'Arcy glanced round.

"Do we have to leave the woad?" he asked.

"Oh, yes! This is a short cut, sir—it saves two miles."

"Bai Jove, that's worth savin'!"

And Arthur Augustus unsuspectingly followed the tramp over the stile.

They walked on, and the evening shadows grew darker and darker on the lonely and sombre path through the wood.

"Bai Jove, how far is Burford now?" asked Arthur Augustus, when the last gleam of daylight had disappeared, and they were tramping on in deep darkness.

"I'm not sure that I ain't missed the way," said Mr. Bowers thoughtfully. "It's a long time since I was in this part."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave a little gasp of dismay.

"Missed the way?"

"I'm afraid so, sir."

"Gweat Scott!"

The swell of St. Jim's did not utter a word of reproach. Mr. Bowers was guiding him, and if he had missed the way, well, D'Arcy was no worse off than he would have been without him. And Mr. Bowers had meant kindly, and the swell of St. Jim's would not have said a word to hurt his feelings.

"It's bad," said Mr. Bowers. "I don't see how we're to find the way agin in the dark; do you, sir?"

"Wathah not."

"I'm really sorry, sir."

"Oh, it's nothin'," said D'Arcy, though his heart was sinking.

"You couldn't help it, of course. Don't wowwy about it. But what's to be done?"

"There's only one thing to be done, sir," said Billy Bowers slowly.

"And what's that?"

"Camp out here."

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CHAPTER 5

Stranded.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY drew a deep breath. Camping out was one of the greatest delights of the juniors of St. Jim's—and camping out at night, especially, was peculiarly attractive. But then, of course, it was necessary to be prepared for camping-out. To camp-out with a travelling-bag and a silk hat was not quite so comfortable.

But there was evidently no help for it.

Arthur Augustus was almost dropping with fatigue, and he felt that he could hardly have walked another half-mile, even if Mr. Bowers had known the way.

"Bai Jove! I shall be glad of a west, anyway!" he remarked.

"We can get a lot of fern to sleep in," said Mr. Bowers; "and the night's mild, too—we sha'n't 'urt."

"Oh, no; that's all right!"

"Ere's a good place."

"Thank you, deah boy."

Arthur Augustus dropped wearily into a bank of fern. The weather was unusually mild for the early season of the year, and D'Arcy could have slept anywhere just then.

He put his silk hat carefully aside, and placed his bag under his head by way of a pillow, and reposed.

"Are you all right, sir?" asked Mr. Bowers's voice from the darkness.

"Yaas, wathah! How are you?"

"Oh, gorgeous!"

"I can lend you a wap if you like fwom my bag, to keep the chill off your head," said D'Arcy. "I have a silk wap."

"A silk what?"

"Wap."

"Oh, a wap! It's all right, sir; I'm comfy."

"Wighte!"

"Good-night, sir!"

"Goo—night!" murmured D'Arcy drowsily.

And he fell asleep.

He was fagged out. He had had an exciting day, and a very tiring one. He slept soundly, and his regular breathing soon showed that he was safe in the arms of Morpheus.

Then Mr. Bowers sat up in the grass.

Mr. Bowers did not seem at all sleepy. His light eyes were glittering in the darkness as he turned them towards the slumbering junior.

He waited patiently, with the patience of a man long practised in waiting patiently to carry out deeds of rascality with safety.

An hour passed, with hardly a sound in the deep wood.

There was a faint glimmer of silver on the trees as the moon sailed slowly up; but few of the rays penetrated to the dark footpath.

Mr. Bowers spoke at last.

"Are you asleep, sir?"

Only a regular, steady breathing responded.

"Are you awake, sir?"

Mr. Bowers repeated the words in a slightly louder tone. But there came no reply from Arthur Augustus. A gun fired close to him would hardly have awakened him out of that deep slumber.

Mr. Bowers rose silently. He bent over the swell of St. Jim's, and with the light, deft touch of the practised pick-pocket, went through his clothes, removing everything that he cared to take without disturbing the sleep of his victim.

Then he slipped the bag from under D'Arcy's head, pushing a mass of fern in its place, still without awakening the swell of St. Jim's.

Mr. Bowers rose quietly to his feet, the bag in his hands. All D'Arcy's possessions that were of any value had passed into his possession.

It was a haul such as Billy Bowers had seldom made.

With quiet steps and a subdued chuckle Mr. Bowers retreated down the woodland path, and Arthur Augustus was left alone.

He slept on.

The moon rose higher over the wood, and silver light streamed down on the trees, penetrating at last to the path.

The light fell on the sleeping lad's face.

Perhaps it awakened him. His eyes opened, and he stirred.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured.

He felt that the bag was no longer under his head. But he was too sleepy and tired to think about it. He was feeling cold, too.

He huddled up in the fern and fell asleep again.

The swell of St. Jim's did not awaken again until the morning sun was streaming down through the trees.

Then he sat up, yawning, and for the moment not having the faintest idea where he was. The remembrance of the previous day's experiences had quite gone from his mind.

He stared round him, amazed at not finding the familiar walls and beds of the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House at St. Jim's.

"Bai Jove!"

He rubbed his eyes. But recollection returned in a few

seconds, and he smiled. He remembered the camping-out with Mr. Billy Bowers in the wood.

He was feeling cold, and he rose to stretch his limbs and to restore the circulation by a little exercise.

He glanced round for Mr. Bowers. The tramp was not to be seen.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "I suppose he has gone to look for some steam to have his mornin' bath. I think I had better do the same."

The idea of a morning bath would probably have caused an explosion from Mr. Bowers, if that gentleman had been near enough to hear D'Arcy's conjecture. But he was at a good distance now—not taking a morning bath, either.

"Vewy thoughtless of me not to bwing a towel," murmured D'Arcy. "But, of course, I nevah foresaw campin'-out like this. Aftah all, I can use one of my handkerchiefs for a towel."

And he looked for his bag. Of course, it was not to be seen. D'Arcy searched among the fern for it, but no trace of it was to be discovered, and he gave it up at last in surprise and dismay.

He could not imagine in the least where the bag was. He distinctly remembered placing it under his head the previous night before he went to sleep. What had become of it was a mystery.

"Pewwaps Mr. Bowers could tell me," thought D'Arcy. "He may have moved it for some'thin'."

Which certainly was the case.

Arthur Augustus gave a look round once more, but there was no sign of the vagrant. Then D'Arcy shouted:

"Mr. Bowers! Mr. Bowers!"

The wood echoed back the shouting, but that was all.

D'Arcy began to feel uneasy.

"It's wathah wotten of him to leave me alone like this in a stwange place," he murmured. "I suppose I ought to remain here in case he weturns, and at the same time I feel that the pwopah capah would be to get some bwekkah somewhah."

He turned it over in his mind.

He wanted to get his breakfast, and then resume the search for Tomson's Circus; and it was too bad to have to waste time waiting for Mr. Bowers. But then, his bag—he could not go without that.

The sun was rising higher over the trees. Arthur Augustus felt for his watch, to ascertain what the time was.

No watch was there!

The swell of St. Jim's stared down at his beautiful waistcoat in blank amazement. There was no trace of either watch or chain.

The little metal sovereign purse on the chain had gone with it—and in it most of D'Arcy's available cash.

With a gasp of dismay the swell of St. Jim's ran his hands through his pockets. The terrible truth was dawning upon him now.

His pocket-book was gone, and his only banknote in it. His silver pencil, his card-case—all were gone—even his silk handkerchief.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus uttered the exclamation in utter dismay. He knew that he had been robbed in his sleep now, and that Mr. Bowers was gone for good, with his bag and his other possessions.

"Wobbed! Bai Jove! Wobbed! The wascal!"

Arthur Augustus stood quite still for some minutes, looking round him in a helpless way. All his possessions were gone—he was penniless!

The last thought that ever entered D'Arcy's mind was to suspect anybody of dishonesty. He was taken absolutely by surprise. And his position now was not an enviable one.

He had yet to find the circus, and he was penniless; he had not even a copper or two left to pay for his breakfast.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated again.

He thought of searching the wood for Mr. Bowers but the uselessness of it at once occurred to him. The tramp must have been gone for hours—he would not leave the robbery till near dawn. He might be twenty miles away by this time.

It was useless to linger there.

With a heavy heart Arthur Augustus D'Arcy started to tramp along the footpath. He did not know where it would lead him. He guessed that Mr. Bowers had deliberately led him out of his way in order to get him to camp out in the wood and make the robbery easier. Where he was now he had not the faintest idea. He tramped on steadily, as the sun rose higher, inward pangs warning him that he needed breakfast—which was precisely the thing unattainable.

CHAPTER 6.

A Friend in Need.

"GOOD-MORNING!"

Arthur Augustus started and looked up.

He had come to the end of the footpath, and a stile barred his way. On the top bar of the stile a youth was seated, with his feet on the step. He was a youth of about seventeen, dressed in corduroys, with a red neckerchief round

his throat, and a cap on the back of his untidy head. He was eating bread and cheese with great gusto. His fat, round face was very good-natured.

"Good-mornin'!" responded Arthur Augustus politely. He might be downhearted, but he was never wanting in courtesy.

"You're out early," said the stranger.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Sleeping out?" asked the other, noticing the fragments of grass and fern adhering to the junior's clothes.

"Yaas!"

"Same 'ere," said the stranger cheerily. "I was in a barn. Where were you?"

"On the g'round."

"Well, you were lucky it was a fine night. We're going to 'ave rain to-day."

"How do you know that?"

The stranger left off cutting the cheese with his pocket-knife, and pointed with that instrument towards the sky. It looked very blue and fair to the eyes of the swell of St. Jim's.

"I know the weather," said the youth, jabbing the blade of the pocket-knife into a chunk of cheese, and transferring it to his mouth by that method, which he apparently found quite satisfactory. "Trust me. I ain't bin on the road three years without learning the signs, cocky."

"Bai Jove! It looks very fine to me!"

"See that cloud yonder, over the downs?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That means rain."

"Bai Jove! I hope not. I have no umbwellah," said D'Arcy, looking distressed.

The other laughed.

"Who may you happen to be?" he asked. "How did you happen to get into them duds on the road?"

"They are my own clothes."

The other winked.

"No gammon?"

"I am not accustomed to navin' my word doubted," said D'Arcy, with dignity. "My name is Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, if you are cuivious to know."

At this reply the youth on the stile showed a strong disposition to fall off, so convulsed was he with merriment.

"Oh, dror it mild!" he ejaculated between his chuckles.

"That's too thick."

"I fail to compwehend you."

"He, he, he!"

"Weally—"

"My name's Adolphus Plantagent," remarked the youth on the stile, digging his teeth into another big chunk of cheese.

"Is it weally?"

"Yes; but I'm often called Jimmy Chucks," said the other.

"I'm oftener called Jimmy Chucks than Plantagent."

"I trust you do not mean these remarks for impertinence," said Arthur Augustus. "If you do, I am afraid I shall have no wesource but to administrah a feahful thwashin'."

"He, he, he!"

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Oh, it's all right!" said the youth, with a cheerful grin.

"You might as well tell me the truth; but, after all, it's safer to keep it up always."

"I fail to undahstand you."

"Of course you do. Your name is D'Arcy, mine's Plantagent," said Jimmy Chucks. "Them are your own clothes. You've lost your card at present, of course. I left my card-case at 'ome on the grand pianner, or I'd present you with one."

"I certainly have no cards with me at p'sent," said D'Arcy.

"I have been wobbed."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A howwid wascal has taken away all my things, includin' my watch and my money."

"Good!"

"I do not undahstand you."

"I mean the way you tell it," explained Jimmy Chucks. "If I weren't an old 'un on the road I should believe you myself."

"You uttah ass!"

"He, he, he!"

"I have a gweat mind to thwash you."

"He, he, he!"

Master Chucks chuckled explosively.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy eyed him wrathfully. It was evident that the youth on the stile did not believe a single word of his statement.

"I wegard you as a wottah," said D'Arcy at last.

"He, he, he!"

"I have been wobbed."

"He, he, he! You're going to the police about it instantly, of course?" suggested Master Chucks, grinning.

D'Arcy hesitated.

"Well, no. At p'sent it is my desire, for personal weasons, to avoid publicity."

Master Chucks exploded.

"You gwinnin' ass—"

"He, he, he!" roared Master Chucks. "That's too rich! It's really too rich! He, he, he!"

"You uttah duffah!"

"Oh, don't!" groaned Master Chucks. "You'll be the death of me. You have been robbed, and have pressin' reasons for not going to the police. So have we all. He, he, he!"

"Pway get off that stile, and let me pass," said D'Arcy wrathfully. "You are in the way."

"Oh, don't get wild, mate!" said Master Chucks, calming down a little. "I was only admirin' the way you did it."

"I wegard you as a beast. Pway let me pass."

"Had your breakfast?" asked Master Chucks, apparently not offended.

"No."

"Where are you going to get it? There ain't a 'ouse within a mile," said Master Chucks. "You must be new to this part."

"Yaas, that is twue."

D'Arcy hesitated. "As a mattah of fact, I have been wobbled of all my money, and shall not be able to have any bwakfast."

"My word!" grinned Master Chucks. "You do it well."

"You ass!"

"Ho, he, he! But look 'ere. Is it a fact that you are stony, and haven't the price of a bite?" asked Master Chucks, becoming more serious.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You're really on the rocks?"

"Yaas."

"Well, if you don't turn up your nose at bread and cheese, I've enough for two," said Master Chucks cheerfully.

D'Arcy glanced at the bread and cheese. He was very hungry, and it would have gone down very sweetly. But he shook his head.

"Thank you vewy much," he said, "but I could not eat with a chap who doubts my word."

Master Chucks stared.

"You're hungry?" he asked.

"Yaas."

"And you don't expect to get any grub?"

"No."

"Look 'ere, feed with me," said Master Chucks hospitably. "Don't be a dummy, you know. I know what it is to be hungry on the road. It takes the sperrit out of yer. You must be new to the business."

"Bai Jove, yaas!"

"I'm sorry I chipped you," said Jimmy Chucks, looking very curiously at the swell of St. Jim's. "I take it all back. Now tuck in."

Arthur Augustus did not wait for a second invitation. He accepted the bread and cheese, and began to eat with a good appetite, sitting down on the top bar of the stile beside the ragged Master Chucks.

The youthful vagrant looked at him several times as he ate. The quiet and dainty way in which D'Arcy consumed his food contrasted very much with the manner of Master Chucks, but the latter did not seem to mind.

Arthur Augustus was hungry, but he finished his meal before Jimmy Chucks showed any inclination to leave off eating.

"Thank you vewy much," said the swell of St. Jim's, at last. "I wegard you as an awfl'y decent chap."

Jimmy Chucks grinned.

"Won't you 'ave some more?" he asked.

"No, thank you."

"There's 'eaps, you know."

"Yaas, wathah; but I have eaten enough. Thank you vewy much. I am vewy gwateful indeed for your kindness, as otherwise I should have had no bwekkah."

Arthur Augustus slipped from the stile.

"Where are you going?" asked Jimmy Chucks.

"I am looking for a place called Little Burford."

"It's five or six mile from 'ere," said Jimmy. "You keep on till you come to the cross-roads, and take the one opposite the dead tree."

"Thanks awfl'y!"

"Sure you won't 'ave another bite?"

"Quite sure, thank you!"

"Right yar!" said Jimmy Chucks. "You're going?"

"Yaas. Good-bye, and thank you vewy much indeed. I hope I shall have the pleasure of meetin' you in the future, and returnin' your hospitality."

"He, he, he!"

"Wealdy, deah boy—"

"Oh, come off, you know," said Jimmy, with a wink. "I'll tell you wot, mate. You might tell me what the little gime is."

"The what?"

"The gime."

Arthur Augustus looked distressed.

"I would, with pleasure, deah boy; but I do not know what a gime is. Is it an English word?"

Jimmy Chucks stared at him.

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"I mean the little gime!" he said. "Wot's your blesseed gime, in plain English?"

"Oh, you mean game?" said D'Arcy, comprehending.

"Well, wot's the difference between gime and game?" said Jimmy, rather aggressively.

It was evident that Master Chucks's education had been neglected on the subject of the pronunciation of vowels.

"You see, there is no little game," explained D'Arcy, avoiding a discussion on the subject of pronunciation. "I have told you the simple twuth. I am sowvy you do not believe me; but I cannot thwash you after your hospitality, so we had bettah close the discush. I am afraid you must have been brought up vewy badly, or you would not be so suspicious. It is wotten bad form to doubt a fellow's word."

Jimmy Chucks exploded.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy raised his rather dusty topper in a stately way, and left Master Chucks, still grinning gleefully.

CHAPTER 7.

Hard Luck!

"IS this Little Burford, deah boy?"

"Yes, zur."

"Have you seen a circus here—a circus called Tomsonio's?"

"Yes, zur."

"Is it here now?"

"No, zur; it moved on last night."

Arthur Augustus's face fell.

The dialogue took place between the swell of St. Jim's and a stout, red-faced countryman, as D'Arcy entered the village.

It was nearly noon, and D'Arcy, after losing his way several times, had found the little village of Burford, only to find that Tomsonio's Circus was not there.

It was a bitter disappointment.

Arthur Augustus was tired, and he was hungry. Besides that, the weather prophecies of Master Chucks were being fulfilled. Heavy drops of rain were falling.

"Do you know where the circus is now?" he asked.

"No, zur."

And that was all D'Arcy could gain from the countryman. But he inquired further, and at the village inn he learned that the circus had taken the southern road towards the sea, and that it was the intention of Signor Tomsonio to stop the next afternoon at a place called Westbrook.

Arthur Augustus wearily turned his face to the south.

He had not a coin about him, and his pride rose in revolt at the thought of begging his bread. He would rather have starved. And there was no friend like Jimmy Chucks to come to his rescue this time.

D'Arcy gave a longing glance into the cosy inn, and turned to the road. In the now faster-falling rain he tramped out of the village.

The trees were weeping by the roadside, and the ditches running deep. There was a sound of trickling water from the fields on either side of the road.

The rain came steadily down.

Arthur Augustus looked hopelessly round him.

He could not keep on now it was turning to a steady down-pour.

He glanced about him for shelter.

He had left Little Burford a half-mile behind, and there was no habitation in sight. But as he tramped on he caught sight of some farm-buildings over the hedge, and he clambered through and sought shelter in a barn.

His clothes were by this time in a shocking state, and his silk hat was soaked with rain. A St. Jim's fellow would hardly have recognised the usually handsome, elegant swell of the Fourth Form.

"Bai Jove!" muttered Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove! I regard this as awfl'y wotten! I wealdy do!"

He shook the water from his clothes. The rain was coming down thicker and thicker, lashing on the walls of the barn, and splashing on the sodden ground round the building. Through the dash of the rain D'Arcy now heard another sound—the deep growl of a dog. The sound made him shiver with uneasiness.

It recalled to his mind Herries's bulldog at St. Jim's. There was a pattering of feet on the wet earth, and a large animal came bounding into the barn—a huge, savage-looking mastiff.

He glared at D'Arcy and came straight at him.

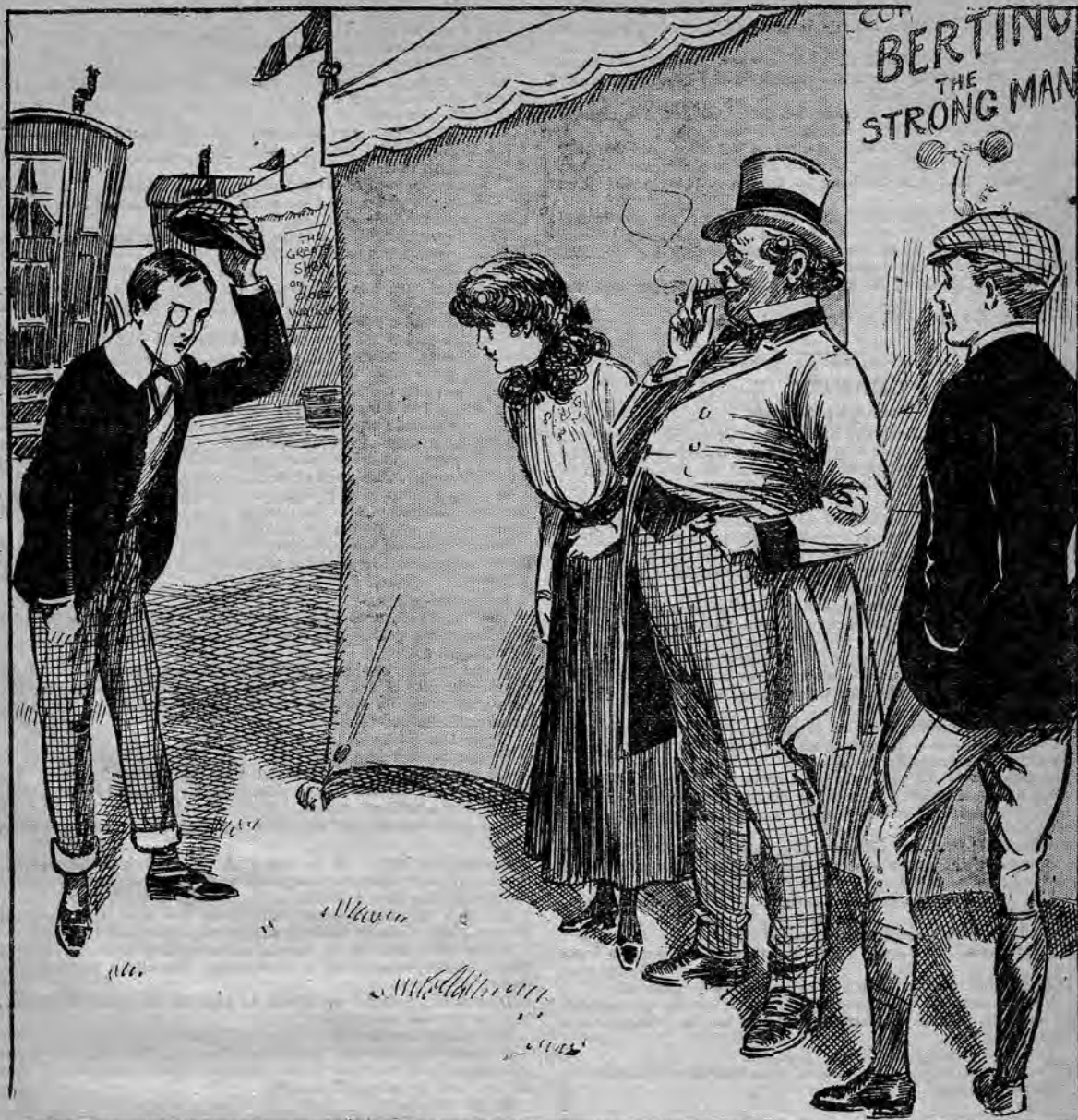
The swell of St. Jim's jumped upon the ladder that led to the loft above the barn, and just escaped the rush of the mastiff.

CR-rr-r!

The dog bounded at the ladder, and then ran up and down the barn, growling savagely.

He had evidently been trained to keep tramps off the premises, and he equally evidently mistook Arthur Augustus D'Arcy for one of the fraternity of the road.

The swell of St. Jim's looked unquietly at the animal. He



"Hullo!" said the Signor. "So you're about again?" "Yes, wathar, sir!" said D'Arcy, raising his cap. "I am feelin' all right now—only a little bit wocky."

waved one hand admonishing, and said, "Shoo!" in a commanding voice, but the mastiff declined to be shoo'd.

He stopped under the upright ladder, regarding Arthur Augustus with a steady and deadly stare, which said only too plainly what he intended as soon as the swell of St. Jim's was within his reach.

Arthur Augustus climbed further up the ladder. But the trapdoor leading into the loft above was padlocked, and there was no escape that way.

The mastiff growled.

D'Arcy clung to the ladder, and waited. The dog showed no inclination to go away. Arthur Augustus's arms were beginning to ache, and he felt that he would soon fall off the ladder, fairly into the jaws of the mastiff.

With the hope of attracting help from someone belonging to the farm, he shouted again and again; but either he was not heard, or no one cared to venture out in the heavy rain. There was no reply to his calling.

"Help! Help! Wescue!"

But only the echo of his own voice, and the heavy lashing of the rain, answered him.

"Bai Jove! Whatevah shall I do?" muttered D'Arcy, in great distress.

He clung desperately on to the perpendicular ladder.

Again he shouted.

"Help! Help!"

But there was no response.

He could not hold on much longer, and it seemed clear that he would have to face a tussle with the mastiff. He looked about him for a weapon. There was a pitchfork in the barn, leaning against the wall a dozen yards from the ladder. If he could get hold of that! But how?

The mastiff was ready to nail him the instant he descended.

Arthur Augustus hesitated; but his hesitation was cut short without his own volition. His aching arms were getting cramped with the strain on them, and in changing his position he missed his hold, and suddenly fell from the ladder.

He gave a gasp of terror as he shot down.

The descent was too sudden for even the mastiff to be ready for him. Arthur Augustus fell fairly upon the dog, and there was a howl of anguish from the mastiff.

D'Arcy rolled off the animal, and leaped for the pitchfork.

The mastiff was rolling on the floor, but he was up in a few seconds, and dashing at the swell of St. Jim's with open jaws.

But the pitchfork was in D'Arcy's grip now.

He swung round, and the steel prongs glittered at the mastiff's throat as he came on, and as they pricked the skin the animal retreated with a growl.

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE TERROR OF ST. JIM'S."

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy breathlessly. "Now come on if you like."

The mastiff growled and showed his teeth, but did not come on. He tried to dodge round the pitchfork, but D'Arcy carefully kept the points towards him.

The swell of St. Jim's, keeping the pitchfork between himself and the mastiff, retreated backwards to the door.

He could not keep up such a contest for long, and he only thought of keeping the dog off while he beat a retreat; and as for the rain, that was nothing in comparison with the jaws of the farm mastiff.

D'Arcy passed backwards out of the door, and the rain lashed upon him again. The dog, as if satisfied with having cleared him out of the building, or perhaps not caring for the rain himself, stopped in the doorway, growling.

D'Arcy backed away to the road, and passed through the hedge.

He threw the pitchfork to the ground, and ran.

CHAPTER 8. Found by Friends.

THE swell of St. Jim's did not stop running till he had placed a quarter of a mile between him and the barn. But the mastiff was not pursuing him, and he slackened down at last. He was gasping for breath and dripping with rain.

"Bai Jove!" muttered D'Arcy. "This is weally howwible! I almost wish I had remained at St. Jim's. But then, it is impossible for a fellow to pveserve his dig if he is flogged. Aftah all, this is bettah than sacrificin' one's personal dig."

And comforted by that reflection, the swell of St. Jim's tramped on.

His clothes were now in such a state that it was useless to think about them any more; and with that anxiety off his mind, the swell of St. Jim's felt less troubled. But where was the circus? Where was Signor Tomsonio's company?

Arthur Augustus felt that he ought to have reached Westbrook by this time. The sun was sinking westward in clouds of rain.

As it was impossible for him to get any wetter than he was, the swell of St. Jim's did not think of looking for shelter again. He tramped on doggedly.

The rainy roofs of a village loomed up in the wet mist. D'Arcy heaved a sigh of relief. It was his destination at last—or was it? In the maze of country lanes he might very easily have missed his way.

He tramped into the village. The rain was still falling. A smith was at work in an open forge, and Arthur Augustus stopped in the red glow that fell out into the darkening street.

"Pway excuse me," he remarked. "But is this Westbrook?"

The blacksmith turned and looked at him.

"Westbrook," he said. "No. Westbrook is six miles from here."

D'Arcy's heart sank. He had missed the way after all.

"You go through the village, turn round by the pump, and keep on past Harrison's barn," said the smith, "then it's a straight road."

"Thank you, vewy much."

D'Arcy was turning away, when the smith called to him.

"Stop a minute."

"Yaas?"

"Come in. You're wet."

Arthur Augustus smiled a rather ghastly smile. He certainly was wet.

He came gladly into the forge. The glow from the furnace seemed to send new life into his chilled limbs.

The smith looked at him curiously.

"Going to Westbrook?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah."

"Got friends there?"

"Yaas."

"You look worn out," said the smith. "What are you tramping in the rain for?"

"I—I'm in wathah a huwwy, you know."

"Sit down and rest."

"Thank you, vewy much."

The smith pulled out a stool, and D'Arcy sank wearily upon it, warmed to the heart by the glow from the furnace.

"Hungry?" said the blacksmith

"Ya-a-as."

"You can eat cold vittles, eh?"

"Yaas, wathah," gasped D'Arcy.

He could have eaten anything at that moment.

The smith watched him curiously as he ate. He was a big, muscular man, with a very kindly face. Arthur Augustus ate and ate. He finished at last, and gave a sigh of relief.

"Lie down and rest," said the smith.

"I—I think I had bettah be goin', thank you," said D'Arcy.

"I may miss my fwends if I don't get to Westbrook."

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"It's still raining."

"Yaas, I shall have to chance it."

"You'd better stay and rest," said the smith, eyeing him. "You're not in a state to travel. Are you sure you have friends at Westbrook?"

"Yaas, wathah."

"Well, I suppose you know your own business best, but——"

"I think I had bettah go, thank you."

The smith nodded.

"You're an awfl' decent chap," said D'Arcy. "I hope I shall have the pleasure of wenewin' our acquaintance. I should like to shake hands with you."

The blacksmith, with a smile, held out a huge hand, into which D'Arcy's completely disappeared.

Then the swell of St. Jim's took his departure.

The meal and the warmth in the forge had refreshed him, and he tramped on his way through the falling rain with a firmer step and a higher heart.

The sun had quite gone now, and the road was dim with rain and darkness. Arthur Augustus found the turning and tramped on, but mile after mile crawled wearily under his feet, and he had not arrived at Westbrook. When he came to a finger-post, it was too dark to read it, and he had to trust to chance.

He was certain that he had covered more than six miles, but there was no sign of his destination.

In the rain, and in the growing night, he met no one; the roads were deserted. The swell of St. Jim's stopped at last.

He was aching with fatigue, and he felt that he could go no further. He crept into the shelter of a big tree, and snuggled into the wet fern that grew thickly round the trunk.

As he sheltered there, faintly from afar came the chime of a church clock, and he counted the hours.

Twelve!

It was midnight.

The blackness was thick round him, only broken by the glimmer of the falling rain and the puddles in the road.

Midnight!

If the circus was at Westbrook the performance would be over now, and if the signor were staying only one night, the caravans would be upon the road again by this time. D'Arcy's heart sank at the thought.

Again the circus had escaped him.

Would he ever find it?

He crept out of the fern and took to the road again. He tried to guide himself by the sound of the chimes he had heard, but it was a difficult task.

The unfortunate lad was now walking along like one in a dream.

He swayed from side to side with exhaustion as he walked, and hardly saw where he was going, and more than once narrowly escaped falling into a ditch.

Through the night came sounds on the road that reached his ears, but without making any impression upon him.

There were sounds of wheels, of trampling animals, and of men's voices—sounds of a large party travelling through the night.

Dim forms loomed up ahead of him in the rainy darkness, but he did not see them.

He walked on blindly.

A glare of a lantern streaming through the darkness from the shaft of a waggon blazed into his eyes, and struck him at last, and he stopped dazedly.

Where was he?

What were those forms and those sounds round him? The junior stared about him blankly and dizzily.

There was a buzz of voices.

"What are you stopping for?"

"There's somebody in the road."

"Here, there! Get aside!"

"Out of the way there! Do you want to be run over!"

Even in his dazed state Arthur Augustus was struck by a note of familiarity in some of the voices.

He staggered to the roadside and fell out of sheer weakness. There was a thud as he dropped heavily into the wet grass.

"Hallo, by gum! What's that?"

"Some drunken bounder," said a cool, clear voice. "Don't stop!"

"I'm going to stop, Carson. He mayn't be drunk."

"Nonsense! It is no concern of ours, anyway."

"Rats!"

A form leaned over D'Arcy.

"Here, wake up: What are you doing there?"

"B-b-bai Jove!"

"Bring a light here."

"You're stopping the show, Joey Pye."

"I'll stop the show as long as I like, Jim Carson. This chap is a mere kid, and he's soaked with rain, and he's ill, I think."

"Oh, rot!"

"Bring a light!"

"Here you are, Joey!"

Containing a Grand, Long, Complete Tale of Rylembe Grammar School.

"Show it on his face. My only hat—by gum! It's the kid who rode the horse at the school—it's our Cowboy Dick! D'Arcy!"

Arthur Augustus looked dazedly at the face above him.

"Joey, Pye!"

Then he fainted.

But ere he lost consciousness he realised the truth; he had not found his friends, but they had found him.

CHAPTER 9.

With the Circus.

A RAY of sunlight came in at a small square window and fell across the white coverlet. It was the first thing that met Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's eyes when they opened.

Where was he?

The swell of St. Jim's lay still, his brain in a whirl.

Above him a low roof, round him close walls, and that small window with the sunlight streaming through—sometimes sunlight, sometimes shadow.

And a strange motion made itself felt, too, as he grew wider awake—the bed in which he lay was not still.

Was he at sea?

It was not the motion of the sea—but the bed, the room, the furniture about him—none of these things were still for a moment.

There was a faint rumble some distance from him, and he gradually recognised what it was—the roll of heavy wheels on a hard road.

He was in a vehicle of some sort.

And as he realised that, he remembered all.

He had fallen among friends, and the circus had picked him up on the road. He was in bed in one of the circus caravans, and it was morning.

D'Arcy lay and thought.

He was too weak still to move, but it was luxurious to lie there without the necessity for motion.

He was among his friends at last. He remembered now hearing the kindly voice of Joey Pye the clown, and the cold, hard tones of Jim Carson, the Handsome Man.

He would see all his friends again now: Jack Talbot, the boy Tiger Tamer; Clotilde, the Queen of the Ring; Samson, the Strong Man; and the fat genial signor.

They had taken him in—and they would befriend him, he knew that. He was among friends at last.

There was a blaze of sunshine in the van as the door swung open.

A handsome lad of about D'Arcy's own age, but more sturdily built, stepped in. He came in without a sound, and glanced at D'Arcy, and as he saw that the junior was awake, he stepped to the bedside with a smile.

D'Arcy moved a feeble hand on the coverlet, and the lad grasped it.

"Talbot!"

Jack Talbot nodded cheerily.

"I thought I'd look in and see how you were getting on," he remarked. "Have you been long awake?"

"Only a few minutes, I think, deah boy."

"Feel better?"

"Much bettah, thanks. I think I could get up now."

Jack Talbot shook his head.

"Not yet, lad. Better have a good rest. Do you feel hungry?"

"N-no."

"You will when you get your strength back again. Think you could sleep now?"

"Ya-a-as, powwaps I could."

D'Arcy closed his eyes.

Jack Talbot stepped quietly from the van and closed the door.

The swell of St. Jim's sank into slumber again.

He slept soundly, quietly, a healthy sleep. It was the halting of the caravan at last that awakened him.

He started into wakefulness again.

The van was at a standstill.

Through the little window the sunlight of spring was streaming, and the shadow of a bunch of foliage was thrown into the van.

The door reopened.

"Awake?" said a soft voice.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Joey Pye came in. The fat, good-natured face of the clown was very kindly. There were still traces of grease-paint and chalk about his ears and his chin, relics of the previous night's make-up.

"Feel like getting up?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The clown eyed him curiously.

"You shall tell us presently how you came in this part of the country, and the state we found you in," he remarked.

"Never mind now. Do you feel well enough to get up? You've had a bad time."

"Oh, yaas, I'm all wight now, thank you," said Arthur Augustus.

He made an effort to rise.

But his strength had not come back yet, and he sank down again on the pillow.

Joey Pye shook his head.

"You can't get up," he said. "I'll bring you some tommy in here. You'd better lay up for the rest of the day."

"I do feel wathah wokey," admitted the swell of St. Jim's reluctantly. "I'm an awfily stwong chap as a wule, though, you know."

"You've had a rough time."

"Yaas, it was wathah wuff. I am afwaid my clothes are wuined."

The clown grinned.

"Well, they'll want some cleaning and pressing to restore their original brilliancy," he remarked. "But you can change into some of Talbot's clothes when you get up. They'll fit you with a little pinching."

"Thank you vewy much. Whose van is this I am in, deah boy?"

"Talbot's and mine. We share it," explained Joey Pye. "When we picked you up last night, you were simply soaking. We rubbed you down, and shoved brandy down your throat, but you never came to."

"I am afwaid I was vewy wokey."

"You were, by gum! Then we shoved you into Talbot's bed, and piled blankets on you. I'm jolly glad to see you looking so chippy this morning. You might have had a serious illness."

"Oh, I'm pwetty fit, you know, and if a chap keeps himself fit, he can stand things," remarked Arthur Augustus sagely.

"Still, you'd better keep in bed to-day," said Joey Pye. "We're camping now—place called Fidleys. We're staying here a day or two, before we take the road again."

"How awfily lucky I met you."

"Well, yes, it was—and quite by chance, too, of course."

"Oh, no, not quite!"

"How do you mean? You weren't looking for us, I suppose?" said Joey Pye, in surprise.

D'Arcy nodded.

"Yaas, I was lookin' for you. I have left St. Jim's."

"Left the school?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Not for good?" exclaimed Joey Pye, in surprise.

"I don't know—powwaps. You see, there were certain cires which made my posih there doocid awkward, and I had no othah wresource. I remembahed that the signor had offahed me a job as a widad in the cirus, and I came to look for you."

"By gum!"

"I missed you at two or three places, and then you found me," said Arthur Augustus. "It was awfily lucky for me."

Joey Pye looked at him directly.

"Look here," he said, "better speak out. Does this mean that you have run away from school?"

Arthur Augustus hesitated.

"Powwaps I'd bettah not say too much," he remarked. "It is bettah for you not to know all the cires. If the signor is willin' to take me in, I'll make myself usefial; if not, I'll go furthah on. But I'm not goin' back to St. Jim's in any case."

"Oh!"

"I'm feelin' pwetty lungwy now."

Joey Pye nodded, and left the van. He returned in a few minutes with a most appetising supply of provender, and D'Arcy, sitting up in bed and propped with pillows and cushions, did full justice to it.

Jack Talbot looked in to chat with him while he ate.

The meal finished, D'Arcy sank down in the bed again with a sigh of satisfaction.

Weariness was overpowering him again.

Joey Pye and Jack Talbot left the caravan quietly.

Arthur Augustus went to sleep.

He slept soundly while the circus camped, and made the preparations for the night's entertainment.

CHAPTER 10.

D'Arcy Joins the Circus.

JOEY PYE came away from the caravan with an unusually serious expression upon his fat, comical face. Signor Tomsonio was smoking his afternoon cigar, a big black one, that filled the air round him with a thick cloud.

The day was very fine and sunny after the night of rain. The scene was a very cheerful one.

Clotilde was seated near the signor, sewing. The girl glanced up at Joey Pye with her sweet smile.

Signor Tomsonio removed the black cigar from his mouth.

"How is the lad, Joey?"

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"All serene, signor."

"Has he explained how he came away from the school?"

"No."

"It's odd."

"By gum it is!" said Mr. Pye, leaning against a tree, and sucking at an unlighted cigar. "My impression is that he's run away from school."

Clotilde started.

"Run away from school!" exclaimed the signor.

"That's it."

"The young donkey."

"But why should he do that?" exclaimed Clotilde, in wonder.

"The boys at St. Jim's seemed all so happy; that was the last thing I should expect one of them to do."

Joey Pye nodded.

"Well, that's how it is, signor. Do you remember when the boys were at the circus one day they got us out of a fix, when Talbot was laid up D'Arcy took his place, and Jack Blake played the Indian in the ring?"

"I remember."

"You told D'Arcy that if he ever wanted a job he had only to come to you."

The signor laughed.

"Did I?"

"Yes. Had you forgotten?"

"Yes."

"Well, the lad hasn't," said Mr. Pye, with a grin. "He's left school, and he's come here to get a job."

The signor gave a jump.

"Impossible!"

"Fact!"

"The young donkey," said the signor again.

"I don't see what you can do."

"If he's run away from school I can't take him in," said the signor. "He will have to go back."

"I rather think he won't."

"But—"

"And you can't turn him out," said Mr. Pye, with a shake of the head. "That's impossible. And I know he won't go back to school unless he chooses."

"I don't know whether I ought to communicate with his Head-master," said the signor, looking distressed.

Joey Pye shook his head.

"You can't give him away like that when he's trusted himself to your protection, signor."

"Certainly not," said Clotilde warmly. "And you do not know what reasons he may have had for leaving school."

"Exactly," said Joey Pye. "He's a decent lad, and I think he's probably had cause for what he's done."

"Well, it's an awkward situation," said the signor.

"It is," agreed Mr. Pye. "Still, I don't see what you can do but keep your word. And he would be useful in the circus."

"Yes, that's so."

Mr. Pye strolled away to attend to his duties; and the signor was left to smoke his cigar and think it over. He glanced several times at Clotilde. Youthful as she was, Clotilde was a very sensible girl, and the signor often consulted her. The girl sat now with her eyes upon her work and a little pucker of thought in her smooth brow.

"Well, girlie?" said the signor at last.

Clotilde looked up.

"Yes, signor?"

"What am I to do?"

"You must take care of D'Arcy," said Clotilde. "If they want him at the school, they can find him. So long as he has let his relations know that he is safe, that is enough. And you must keep your word."

The signor granted.

"I suppose so."

And he smoked in silence.

It was nearly sunset when Arthur Augustus came out. He was dressed in some of Jack Talbot's clothes, which fitted him pretty well, and, though he was looking somewhat pale, he did not appear very much the worse for his rough experiences.

He had a cap belonging to Jack on his head in the place of his battered and rain-soaked topper, which was in too terrible a state to be worn.

He raised his cap to Clotilde as he met her, chatting with Jack and the signor outside the big marquee, which had been put up for the evening performance.

"Hallo!" said the signor. "So you're about."

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

"I am so glad to see you well," said Clotilde softly. "You must have had a terrible experience."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "My clothes were uttally ruined, and my hat is a wreck! But I am feelin' all wight now—only a little bit wocky."

"You're lucky," said the signor.

"I was vewy lucky to fall among friends in this way," said Arthur Augustus. "I was lookin' for the circus when you ound me. I wanted to see you, signor."

"To see me?"

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"Yaas—on biznay."

Jack and Clotilde smiled, and strolled away. Signor Tomsonio looked a little uneasy. He lighted a fresh cigar.

"Go ahead, kid."

"You made me an offah when I saw you last, signor."

"Did—did I?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, we do these things, you know," said the signor tamely.

"I have decided to accept it."

"Oh!"

"You require a chap to wide in the wing," said D'Arcy. "I am lookin' for a job."

"Oh!"

"That job will suit me down to the gwound."

"Oh!"

"So I am willin' to be taken on at once, if agweeable to you."

"Oh!"

Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle into his eye and gazed inquiringly at the signor.

"Of course," he remarked, after a pause, "if you have repented of your offah I don't want to hold you to it for a moment."

"Oh!"

"I am quite willin' to wesease you fwom the engagement, and twy my luck elseweah," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"Not at all!" said Signor Tomsonio hastily. "Not at all!"

"Then you take me on?"

"You see—er—you see—"

"Yaas, go ahead, deah sir."

"I'm afraid you've run away from school," said the signor. "You'd better tell me if that's the case. Have you run away from St. Jim's?"

"Certainly not!"

"Oh!"

"I have wetired fwom the school for a time," explained D'Arcy. "Wunnin' away is an undignified and suwveptitious thing to do, and I should wegard myself with scorn if I ran away. I have wetired fwom the school for a time, which is a vewy diffewent thing."

"What's the difference?"

"Well, you see, it was a question of dig."

"I don't know whether I ought to send a wire to your Head-master," said Signor Tomsonio, eyeing D'Arcy in a doubtful sort of way.

Arthur Augustus drew himself up.

"I should not wegard that as playin' the game," he remarked. "I trusted to your honah in comin' here. But if you do not want me, I am not goin' to bothah you. I will wetire fwom the place at once."

"Hold on!" exclaimed the signor, as the swell of St. Jim's was turning away. "Don't be a young ass, you know."

"Weally, sir—"

"I was speaking for your own good."

"Thank you vewy much."

"It would be better for you to return to school."

"It is imposs, deah sir."

"If that is really so—"

"Honah bwight, sir."

"You are determined not to return to St. Jim's in any case?" asked the signor doubtfully.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Quite sure?"

"Quite."

"Then I suppose I ought to stand by you," said the signor. "Anyway, the circus is your home as long as you need it. And if you like to work for your provender, I sha'n't say no. I can't give you any more definite engagement than that."

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"That is quite satisfactory, sir."

"Good! Then you can join the show as soon as you're strong enough."

"I shall be all wight this evenin', sir."

The signor smiled.

"You are eager to begin, eh?"

"Yaas, wathah! I don't want to eat the bread of idleness, you know."

"Very well; you shall begin as soon as you like."

"Thanks awfily!"

And so it was settled.

CHAPTER 11.

Straight from the Shoulder.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY had been duly enrolled now as a new member of the circus company, and he settled into his place with wonderful adaptability. Although he was not feeling up to his usual form yet, he was, as he said, quite strong enough to work, and he didn't want to eat the bread of idleness. He lent a hand at once, and there was no work too rough for him.

a Grand, Long, Complete
the Grammar School.



Arthur Augustus let out his right in a way that took the Handsome Man quite by surprise. Jim Carson caught the blow on the side of the jaw, and went reeling and tumbling across the ring.

Jack Talbot, who had a sincere friendship for the swell of St. Jim's, willingly agreed to share his van with him for the present. Arthur Augustus's way of life had, of course, always been very different from that of the circus lad, but Arthur Augustus did not seem to be conscious of any social distinction between them. Arthur Augustus had many uncommon little ways; but there never had been anything snobbish about him.

"This must be an awfully wippin' life, you know!" he remarked to Talbot, as he joined the circus lad in helping to put up the seats in the big marquee. There was no time to be lost before the evening performance began, and nearly everybody was lending a hand. Jack, as a "turn" on the programme, and paid for riding and tiger-taming, was not called upon to help in this work unless he liked, but he was not the kind of lad to stand idly by while others were working.

He wired in with a will, and did quite as much as any of the circus hands whose work it really was.

Jim Carson lounged in the ring, smoking a cigarette, and he would as soon have taken a hammer in hand as have flown across the arena. And for that reason Jim Carson was not popular in the circus, as well as for other reasons. In times of hurry and stress, a man who always stood upon his exact rights was not to be liked.

"You're right, D'Arcy," said Jack cheerfully; "plenty of hard work and plenty of roughing it; but it's a fine life."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But I say, you can't do this work, you know," said Jack good-naturedly. "Better leave it to the others."

D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye.

"Why can't I do it?" he asked.

"Well, it's hard work."

"I twust you do not wegard me as a lazay slackah who can't do wuff work?" said the swell of St. Jim's, with dignity.

"Oh, no; but—"

"I can hammah in nails as well as anybody, and I'm a gweat hand with a scwow-dwivah," said D'Arcy. "Where does this plank go?"

"Here, across the trestles."

"Good! By the way, this work must make the hands wathah wuff?"

Talbot laughed.

"We haven't time to think of that," he said. "Of course, those of us who care for such things—and I'm one—take as much care as possible. But—"

"I know a good dodge," said D'Arcy. "You should wear an old pair of gloves, you know, and save the hands from wuff contact with the tools."

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE TERROR OF ST. JIM'S."

"I'm afraid there's no time for that."

"Upon the whole, I think I shall do so," said D'Arcy. "My gloves have been ruined by the wain, but they are good enough for that purpose."

Talbot laughed again. Arthur Augustus fetched his gloves from the caravan, and came into the big marquise again putting them on.

Jim Carson burst into a laugh as he saw him.

Arthur Augustus put up his monocle, and surveyed the acrobat with a haughty and inquiring stare.

"May I inquire the weason of your mewwiment?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause for laughtah."

"Look in the glass, then," grinned the Handsome Man.

"I wegard that wemark as wude."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If I were not, in a sense, a guest in this circus, I should feel bound to administrah some slight cowwection to that wude wottah," said D'Arcy, joining Talbot.

Jack smiled.

"Oh, never mind Carson; he's always making himself disagreeable," he said.

"Vewy good."

"Hand me the hammer."

"Pewwaps I could dwive in that nail bettah," said Arthur Augustus. "I wathah fancy myself as an amateur carpentah, you know."

"Go ahead, then."

D'Arcy held the nail in place with his left hand, and slashed at it with the hammer in his right. The next moment there was a terrific yell.

"Ow, wow!"

"Hallo, what's the matter?"

"Ow-wow!"

"What—"

"Ow! I've hit my thumb! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Carson.

Joey Pye came running up.

"Hullo!"—Arthur Augustus was twisting about with one hand tightly tucked away under his arm, and the clown gazed at him in astonishment—"Hullo, are you hurt, D'Arcy?"

"Ow!" groaned Arthur Augustus. "I'm not doin' this for fun! Ow!"

"He's hammered his finger," roared Jim Carson. "Ha, ha, ha! This is as good as a play!"

D'Arcy left off squeezing the damaged thumb, and glared at the Handsome Man.

"I fail to see anythin' funnay in a chap hammewin' his fingah!" he exclaimed.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as a beast!"

"Ha, ha!"

"And a wude cad!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus turned to Talbot and Joey Pye, who could not help grinning. The elegant junior of St. Jim's was looking decidedly wrathful.

"Do you think, deah boys, that the signor would wegard it as wuffianly of me if I gave that wottah a feahful thwashing?" he inquired.

"No," gurgled Joey Pye. "Go it! Give him the licking of his life! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Vewy good; if you are sure the signor would not object?"

"He, he! No."

"Then I will give him some little cowwection."

Arthur Augustus pushed back his cuffs, stepped into the tent, and advanced towards the Handsome Man. The acrobat watched him coming in some astonishment.

"Well, what do you want?" he inquired.

"I am goin' to give you a feahful thwashin'!"

The Handsome Man grinned.

He was a head taller than the swell of St. Jim's, and larger in proportion, and his limbs were like iron from the exercise of the trapeze.

"Don't be a fool," he said.

"I wegard that as an oppwobwious expression."

"You young ass!"

"I wufuse to be called an ass. Put up your hands, you wottah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you put up your hands?" demanded Arthur Augustus, letting his eyeglass drop to the end of its cord.

"Ha, ha! No, you young fool!"

"You have tweated me with gwoss diswespect, and I am goin' to thwash you. If you do not put up your hands, I shall give you the coward's blow," said Arthur Augustus determinedly. "Oh, get away!"

Arthur Augustus reached out, and his open hand came with a smack upon the face of the Handsome Man.

Jim Carson started back with an oath.

He was not much hurt, but he was enraged, and his face flushed red, and a savage glitter came into his eyes.

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He gritted his teeth and sprang straight at the junior of St. Jim's.

Jack Talbot made a step forward.

"Stop, you—"

He broke off.

The Handsome Man had leaped upon D'Arcy as if to sweep him away by the force of his attack, and hurl him to the ground.

But it had not worked out exactly like that. Arthur Augustus avoided the rush, and let out his right in a way that took the Handsome Man quite by surprise. Jim Carson caught the blow on the side of the jaw, and went reeling and tumbling across the ring, to fall heavily into the sawdust four or five yards away.

"By gum!"

Joey Pye clapped his hands involuntarily. The Handsome Man lay in the sawdust, blinking. Arthur Augustus carefully adjusted his monocle and looked down upon him.

CHAPTER 12.

The First Performance.

CARSON lay for some moments without making an effort to rise. He was dazed by the fall, but far more surprised than hurt.

It seemed impossible that the slim, elegant junior had dealt the blow which had stretched the Handsome Man upon the tan.

"By gum," said Joey Pye, again, "the Handsome Man has waked up the wrong passenger!"

Jack Talbot looked anxious.

"But this can't be allowed to go on," he exclaimed. "The kid is not a match for Carson; he would have no chance."

"You're right."

Jim Carson staggered to his feet. His dark, handsome face was convulsed with rage.

D'Arcy faced him calmly.

"I am quite willin' for this affaih to stop where it is," he said. "I have no desiah for it to go furthah, if you care to apologise for your wudeness."

The Handsome Man did not reply. He rushed at the swell of St. Jim's like a bull.

Arthur Augustus dropped his eyeglass again and put himself upon the defensive. The junior was a good boxer, and extremely active and light on his feet.

Carson, powerful as he was, found that he had not an easy customer to tackle.

Arthur Augustus avoided coming to close quarters with great skill, and whenever the Handsome Man thought he had "got him," D'Arcy, like the lively insect in the story, was "not there."

And all the time the junior was tapping the Handsome Man on the nose, or the chin, or the chest, till he was frantic with rage. Joey Pye roared with laughter as he looked on.

"By gum," he said, "this is as good as a turn in the ring!"

The hammering had ceased; the circus hands were all looking on. Signor Tomsonio came bustling into the tent.

"Now tthen there, are you going to sleep? Why don't you get those benches up? Why—what—how—"

The signor stared blankly at the combatants.

Carson made a desperate spring at D'Arcy, and succeeded in getting through his guard at last.

His sinewy hands closed upon the junior, and then his weight and his strength told, and he gained the upper hand.

In the grip of the Handsome Man, D'Arcy was forced backwards, the savage face of the acrobat looking into his.

The swell of St. Jim's struggled hard, but he was no match for a full-grown man at close quarters, and he was not yet fully recovered from his late experiences.

Jim Carson had the upper hand now, and kept it. His grip was like iron upon the junior, as he forced him backwards.

Jack Talbot made a step forward.

"Carson," called out the signor, "let him go!"

The Handsome Man gritted his teeth.

"He attacked me first! He shall not go unless he begs my pardon on his knees!"

"Nevah!"

The Handsome Man smiled savagely into the face of his victim. He was master of the situation now.

He forced D'Arcy back and back, till the junior was in the tan, still struggling, but helpless against the weight of the Handsome Man.

"Now will you beg—"

"No!"

Jack Talbot ran forward.

"Stop that, Carson!"

The acrobat gave him a savage look.

"Mind your own business!"

"Stop it, I say; or—"

"Or what?" said Carson, with a sneer.

"Or I will stop you!" said Talbot, his eyes flashing.

"Bah! Stand aside!"

Talbot did not stand aside. He laid his hands upon the



"Are you asleep, sir?" said Mr. Bowers. Only a regular, steady breathing responded. "Are you awake, sir?" Mr. Bowers repeated the question in a slightly louder tone, but there came no reply from D'Arcy. He was sound asleep.

acrobat and dragged him off D'Arcy. The junior sank exhausted in the tan.

Carson turned upon Talbot with a snarl.

"Your turn, then!" he exclaimed.

"I am ready."

"Stop!" cried the signor. "By George, if you begin fighting now I'll sack you both. The people are collecting outside the tent already."

Talbot stood on the defensive. Carson looked as if he would spring upon him, but the signor pushed between.

"Get away, Carson."

The Handsome Man sulkily drew back.

Jack Talbot helped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to his feet.

"Bai Jove!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's. "What an extremely stwong beast! Howevah, I think I kept my end up."

"You'd better keep out of Carson's way," said Talbot. "He's a disagreeable rotter, and we can't have rows all the time, you know."

"Vewy true."

"Let the matter drop."

"Yaas; but I think Carson should apologise."

Talbot laughed.

"Well, he won't, anyway."

"I wegard him as a cad."

"Come, lend a hand. We shall be keeping the people waiting," said Talbot, changing the subject.

"Yaas, wathah! I never thought of that."

And they set to work busily again.

Jim Carson strolled away with a very ugly look on his face. Arthur Augustus had made one enemy in the circus, and a very bitter one.

But the Swell of St. Jim's gave it a little thought. Carson was not the kind of man he could have agreed with in any case.

The preparations inside the tent were finished, and the performers retired to make up for the scene.

Arthur Augustus accompanied Joey Pye and Jack Talbot to their van, and was there provided with a redskin rig-out for the cowboy act.

With assistance from his two friends, D'Arcy was made up as a redskin, while Talbot donned the garb of Cowboy Dick. Arthur Augustus's heart was beating faster.

The situation was new and strange to him, and he could not accustom himself to it as yet. Once before he had appeared for a turn in the circus to oblige Signor Tomsonio when Talbot was not fit. That had been an exciting and pleasant experience;

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but now he was on the regular bill, and to-night was to be his first essay at earning his own bread.

It was novel enough to the swell of St. Jim's.

When he was made up he went to the ring entrance of the tent, and, keeping out of sight of the public, he watched the turns.

He saw the Handsome Man's feats on the high trapeze with great admiration, and watched the juggling of Puggles, and the feats of Sanson, the Strong Man, and gazed breathlessly at the bareback riding of Clotilde, the Queen of the Ring.

He had seen the show more than once from the front, but he gazed upon it with a new interest now that he was one of the circus company.

A strange thrill went through him as he gazed, too, at the sea of faces in the crowded seats. St. Jim's seemed far enough away from him now. He could hardly believe that he was the same junior who had attended classes in the Fourth-Form room, sung in the choir on Sunday, who had been locked up in the punishment-room, and had run away from school to escape being flogged.

Between his past life and the present there seemed to be a great gulf fixed.

The time came at last for the cowboy scene.

Jack Talbot, looking very handsome as Cowboy Dick, tapped the junior on the shoulder.

"Ready?" he asked, with a smile.

D'Arcy started out of his reverie.

"Yas, wathah!"

"Here's your horse. We go on in a few minutes now."

"Jolly good!"

There were nine or ten "supers" made up as Indians mounted on circus horses, and Arthur Augustus joined them.

Clotilde, the Queen of the Ring, was to be chased by the Redskins, and rescued by Cowboy Dick. It was an act which afforded opportunities for a fine exhibition of riding skill, and it never failed to evoke applause.

The signal came at last.

A bunch of Redskins thundered into the arena, with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in the midst of them.

D'Arcy's heart was beating hard, and for the first few minutes he hardly knew where he was or what he was doing. He galloped blindly round the ring in the midst of his companions.

But his brain soon cleared.

In a few minutes he was enjoying the scene keenly, and yelling with the loudest of the painted and feathered Redskins as he swept round the ring.

CHAPTER 13.

The Expedition.

TOM MERRY came out of the Head's study at St. Jim's with a bright expression on his face. A group of juniors were waiting for him in the passage, and they all looked at him eagerly as he came up.

"Well?" said Blake.

"Well?" said Herries and Digby.

"What's the verdict?" asked Monty Lowther.

"To go, or not to go," said Manners. "Out with it."

"Get it off your chest," said Figgins.

"Shout it out," said Kerr.

"For goodness sake let's know!" ejaculated Fatty Wynn.

As nearly all these remarks were made at the same moment, or almost so, it was not surprising that Tom Merry did not reply to all of them.

Blake shook his arm.

"Are we going after Gussy, or are we not?" he exclaimed.

"Yes."

"Good!"

All the juniors said that together.

"This is how it is," said Tom Merry. "It's two days since Gussy disappeared from this school, and the masters and the prefects haven't been able to find him. All we know of him is that he wired to his father that he was safe and all right. The police can't find him, and I don't suppose they will till he chooses to be found."

"Very likely," said Lowther.

"Yes, rather!"

"We offered our services to the Head——"

"And he didn't jump at them, either," Monty Lowther remarked, in a thoughtful way. "Obtuse, you know. These old gentlemen often are."

"But now he's come round," said Tom Merry. "He's given me permission to go and look for Gussy——"

"And us?" cried half a dozen voices.

Tom shook his head.

"I'm sorry!"

"What?"

"We're jolly well going!"

"Can't he did! The Head says I can go, and take Blake and Figgins and young Wally. Young Wally is awfully anxious. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 197.

about his major, and he's going about looking like a ghost. The Head says——"

"He said I could go, of course?" suggested Lowther.

"He didn't."

"He must have mentioned me," remarked Manners.

"Oh, no!"

"But I simply must go!" exclaimed Kerr. "No good going without a Scotsman to show you the way."

"Kats!"

"I think I ought to go," said Fatty Wynn. "As a matter of fact, I've made a big bundle of sandwiches all ready."

"Never mind, we'll take 'em," said Blake.

To this remark Fatty Wynn vouchsafed no response but a stony stare.

Wally of the Third came along the passage.

"Well, any news?" he asked.

"Yes. We're going to look for Gussy—four of us."

"I'm coming!"

Wally made that statement in the most matter-of-fact way, as if permission from the powers that were was only a little formality that could be dispensed with.

Tom Merry laughed.

"You can come if you like. We have permission."

"Good!"

"But I ought to come," said Herries furiously. "You see, I can take Towser with me, and then finding Gussy will only be a matter of time. You know how Towser is on a trail."

"Yes," agreed Blake. "He can track down a herring if it's held right under his nose."

"Look here, Blake——"

"Let's get ready," said Tom Merry briskly. "You chaps can come down to the gates and see us off. I wish you were all coming, but it can't be did."

And the juniors who were not coming had to content themselves with giving Tom Merry and his companions a send-off at the gates.

Tom Merry, Blake, Figgins, and D'Arcy ^{had} left the school in cheerful spirits. They had little doubt of their ability to track down the missing junior.

True, the masters and the prefects had failed to get on the track. The county police had been applied to in vain.

But that made no difference to the self-confidence of Tom Merry and Co. They were going to find D'Arcy.

That he intended to follow the circus and join it they knew, a piece of knowledge they had kept to themselves so far at the school.

Had he found the circus?

If so, it was only necessary for them to find Signor Tomsonio, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy would be found too.

And with this idea in mind they took the train at Rylcombe for the town in which they had last heard of the circus.

Needless to say, Signor Tomsonio's show was many a long mile away when the juniors of St. Jim's arrived there.

But at a village in the south of Sussex they learned of a lad who had inquired at an inn for the circus, and from the description they received there was little doubt that it was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

They learned, too, that the circus was in the neighbourhood, or, rather, had been lately, and they set off again with high hopes.

"We may get to the circus to-morrow, and find Gussy there," Tom Merry remarked hopefully, as they tramped along a woodland path in the sunset. "We shall have to stop for to-night at the next village, I think."

Blake nodded.

"Yes, we've had a long day."

"We're on Gussy's track, anyway," Figgins remarked. "If we knew just where the circus was——"

"But we don't," said Wally.

"No, I know we don't," said Figgins. "Don't you chip in when your elders are talking, kid."

Wally sniffed.

"I shouldn't wonder if Gussy has missed the circus altogether, and is wandering round," he said. "That's all."

"Yes, but——"

"And he's bound to be in some trouble or other," said Wally restlessly. "You know Gussy. And I believe he had a lot of money about him, as well as his gold watch and his diamond pin."

Tom Merry's face clouded over.

"Well, there's no need to meet troubles half-way," he said. "Now, there's no necessity to think Gussy has come to grief till we find that he has."

"I know that, but——"

"Hullo!" interrupted Figgins. "Look at that merchant!"

A tramp was lying in the grass beside the woodland road, basking in the setting sun. He was not a pleasant object to look at.

He was ragged and dirty, but that was not the worst. He was evidently under the influence of liquor, and had doubtless lain down in the grass there to sleep off the effects of a debauch.

His looks showed that he had been constantly imbibing strong

liquor for days past, and the thought occurred to Tom Merry as he glanced at him that the tramp had been "blowing" the proceeds of some robbery, for he certainly did not look like a person who was likely to come into the possession of much money by honest labour.

The tramp sat up and blinked at the boys.

"Old on a minute, gentlemen!" he exclaimed, in a husky voice. "Pity a poor man."

Tom Merry gave him a look of disgust.

"I do pity you!" he exclaimed. "I pity any man who is in such a filthy condition as you are in. Why don't you get a wash?"

The tramp grinned in a sickly way.

"My 'ealth is bad, sir, and—"

"No wonder," said Figgins. "Let the whisky alone, then, and it'll improve. You jolly well won't get any money out of us, anyway."

"Rather not," said Blake, with emphasis.

"Oh, let's get on!" said Wally impatiently.

"Old on a tick, gents!"

The tramp staggered to his feet. The fumes of liquor were still in his brain, and he stood unsteadily upright, holding on to a tree for a minute or two.

"I'm 'ard up, young gents, and—"

"Where do you get the money for beer, then?" said Wally, with a sniff.

"I—I—"

"Blessed if he doesn't reek like a blessed beer-barrel," said Blake. "Let's get away from him."

"Old on!" said the tramp, who appeared quite unconcerned by the remarks upon his personal appearance and habits. "I've got something here."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"I've got something to sell," said the man, with a wink, fumbling among his rags. "It cost pounds and pounds, but you can 'ave it for a quid."

He drew something from his pocket that flashed and gleamed in the sun. He held it up to view.

It was a gold watch.

"Where did you get that?" inquired Tom Merry sternly. "Do you expect us to believe that you came by it honestly?"

"I bought it of a man who—"

The tramp was interrupted by a loud yell from Wally who sprang forward and seized his arm.

"You scoundrel!"

"Wally—"

"Can't you see," shouted Wally, "that's Gussy's watch?"

"Gussy's watch?"

"Yes."

For a moment the junior stared; and then, with grim looks they surrounded Mr. William Bowers.

CHAPTER 14.

D'Arcy at Work.

TALBOT slapped Arthur Augustus on the shoulder as they rode out of the ring, after taking the third call that followed the cowboy performance.

"Well, how do you like it?"

"Wippin'!" said Arthur Augustus enthusiastically. "Weally wippin'!"

Talbot laughed.

"Good! And you think you'll stick to it?"

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

"I shall be jolly glad if you do for one," said Talbot, as he slipped off his horse. "I should like you to remain in the circus. After all, it's a jolly life."

"Wippin', deah boy!"

"And you can go on with your lessons, too, with the Doc. You know the Doc. He was a University man, and he teaches Clotilde and me."

"Jollay good," said D'Arcy. "I think, howevah, that a little bit of a west from lessons wouldn't be a bad capah."

"Ha, ha!"

"But I say, what a charmin' gal Clotilde is, isn't she?" said D'Arcy, with a glance towards the Queen of the Ring, who had just left the tent.

Jack Talbot nodded.

"Yes, rather."

"I like her awf'ly," said D'Arcy confidentially, "don't you?"

"Yes—we all do."

"I suppose so. I wegard her as weally wippin'. She is somethin' like my Cousin Ethel, who is a wippin' gal, too."

"Yes, I've seen her."

And Arthur Augustus was looking very thoughtful as he put up his horse in the canvas stables.

His work was over for that night, and he had time to think about his new life.

But, as a matter of fact, he was not thinking very much about the circus work now, or his own prospects, but about the bright eyes of the Queen of the Ring.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had a susceptible heart.

He had already been in love several times, at the early age of fifteen, and he was in danger once again.

D'Arcy's love affairs were very harmless ones; he looked upon Clotilde, as upon his Cousin Ethel, as a delicate piece of porcelain, so to speak, which might be looked at and admired to any extent, but touched only with the greatest care.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy to himself, a dozen times at least. "Bai Jove! What a weally charmin' gal!"

Arthur Augustus slept soundly that night.

He was tired out, and he did not open his eyes till Jack Talbot rose in the morning, and shook him by the shoulder. D'Arcy opened his eyes drowsily, and blinked up at the handsome, cheery face of the circus lad.

"It isn't wisin' bell yet," he murmured.

Talbot laughed his cheery laugh.

"You're not at the school now," he remarked.

D'Arcy started into wide wakefulness.

"Bai Jove! No! I was dweamin'. Is it time to get up?"

"Yes, rather."

"What's the time?"

"Half-past six."

"Oh, all wight!"

And Arthur Augustus turned out. The hour was considerably earlier than his accustomed hour for rising at St. Jim's, but he was willing to take things as they came in his new life.

The morning was bright and fresh. There had been some rain in the night, and the grass was very wet, but the sky was blue and the sun already well up.

"Pway show me what to do, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "I am willin' to turn my hand to anythin', you know."

"Right you are!" said Talbot.

He was a little doubtful as to how the swell of St. Jim's would take his new duties.

He spared D'Arcy all he could; but there was a great deal of rough work that had to be done, and every hand had to help.

But he need have had no doubts about Arthur Augustus.

D'Arcy had certainly never done much in the way of work, but he was real grit all through, and he was ready to turn his hand to anything rather than eat the bread of idleness.

And among horses, especially, Arthur Augustus was quite at home.

In the stables he was very useful. He knew as much about horses as the oldest hand in the circus, and the animals understood him, too. The worst-tempered animal was quiet with D'Arcy.

Few of the fellows at St. Jim's would have recognised Arthur Augustus as he looked while he was at work—in rough clothes, with an apron on, and his sleeves rolled up.

But Arthur Augustus was enjoying himself.

It was a new experience, and a very pleasant change from the classrooms at St. Jim's.

He was pretty tired by the time they called him to the midday dinner, and he ate the homely but substantial fare with an appetite greater than he had ever experienced at school.

"Well, you like the circus?" asked the signor, in his jovial way.

"Yaas, wathah, sir."

"And you don't want to get back to St. Jim's?"

D'Arcy shook his head.

"No, sir."

"Well, here's a home for you as long as you like," said the signor. "But I don't sign on any engagement, you understand. You wire in with the rest, and you feed with us, and I'll pay you a pound every week, and that's how it will be. But as soon as your Head-master finds you, you'll have to go."

"I should wefuse to weturn to St. Jim's, sir," said D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity. "But I should leave the circus, so as not to cause you any trouble."

After dinner the swell of St. Jim's joined Clotilde, who had come out of her caravan with her hat on.

The junior blushed a little as he raised his cap.

"The signor says there is nothin' more for me to do until we get weady for the performance this evenin'," he remarked.

Clotilde smiled.

"No? I hear that you have been working harder than any of the hands."

"Weally? Well, I felt bound to buckle to, you know. But, pewwaps, you are goin' out for a walk now?"

"Yes. I was going to look at the woods."

"Pewwaps you—you would not mind if—I came?" stammered D'Arcy. "You might need to be pwotected, you know, if—if you should meet a lot of twamps, for instance."

Clotilde wondered how much protection a slim and elegant junior would be able to afford against a gang of tramps, but she did not say so.

"I shall be very glad of your company," she remarked.

"Thank you, vewy much."

And the two walked away from the circus across the heath.

Jack Talbot glanced after them rather curiously.

Talbot was Clotilde's constant companion, but this afternoon he was detained in the circus by the necessity of attending to Julia the tigress, who was sick. He was glad to see Clotilde

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An Extra Long Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By Martin Clifford.

provided with a pleasant companion, but there was something in D'Arcy's manner that made him reflect.

A chuckle from Joey Pye caused him to glance round.

The clown seemed to be highly tickled about something. Talbot looked at him inquiringly.

"What's the matter, Joey?"

"It's a case, Jack."

"What's a case?"

The clown jerked his thumb towards Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's was assisting Clotilde over a stile in the most elegant way. D'Arcy had changed into his own clothes again, and though they looked somewhat the worse for their rough experiences, the swell of St. Jim's was always elegant. And the silk hat had been brushed and brushed till it shone with almost its old glitter.

Talbot laughed.

"Don't be an ass, Joey!"

But Joey Pye only chuckled.

Joey had a keen eye, and he had observed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. And the mirth merchant of Tomsonio's Circus anticipated fun.

CHAPTER 15. Rough Justice.

BILLY BOWERS looked alarmed as the four juniors of St. Jim's closed round him, looking grim and hard. He tried to back away, but Tom Merry was in the way—he tried to side off to the right, but Figgins stopped him. The juniors were round him, and they evidently did not intend to let him escape.

Wally grasped the hand that held the watch, and jerked the timepiece out of the dirty fingers of the tramp.

He held it up for the others to see.

There, plainly engraved on the case, was D'Arcy's monogram; and, besides, now that they had a good look at it, the juniors recognised the watch easily enough. It was a splendid "ticker," presented to Arthur Augustus on a birthday by his "governah," and it was supposed to have cost the noble earl twenty-five guineas. Such watches were not common in the Fourth Form at St. Jim's. The juniors knew it well.

"It's Gussy's watch," said Tom Merry.

"Right enough!"

"Where did this scoundrel get it from?"

"Look 'ere," said Mr. Bowers, in a blustering tone, "I'm not a-goin' to stand this! Look 'ere, you gimme that watch back!"

"It's my brother's watch, you thief!"

Mr. Bowers changed colour.

Now that he looked at Wally he could trace some resemblance in his features to those of the lad he had robbed two days before. He cast a hurried, hunted glance round him, but there was no mistake.

Tom Merry took the watch and slipped it into his pocket.

"I'll keep this for Gussy," he said.

"Look 'ere," began Mr. Bowers feebly.

"Now, then, where did you get that watch?"

"I—I bought it."

"Lie number one," said Blake.

"He might have bought it of the thief, some fellow like himself," Figgins remarked.

"Well, that's possible!"

"More likely he stole it from Gussy," said Wally. "Let's search him, and see if he's got any more of Gussy's property about him."

"Good idea!"

"Collar him!"

Mr. Billy Bowers made a sudden spring.

He had parted with the money he had stolen from D'Arcy in a long debauch, but the articles of jewellery he had not ventured yet to attempt to dispose of.

He had come to the end of his money, but the other things he had taken from the swell of St. Jim's were worth a great deal, if he could dispose of them.

But that was the difficulty.

He could not take them into a pawnshop without being immediately arrested as a thief, and he could not hope to sell them.

In London he could easily have found a "fence" to take them off his hands, but he was many a long mile from London.

Hence his attempt to dispose of the watch to the boys, who might have bought it without asking questions.

But that attempt had turned out very unluckily for Mr. Bowers.

Unless he was to lose all his ill-gotten gains, it was necessary for him to escape; and he made a desperate effort.

With a sudden spring he dashed away.

Blake clutched him, and was hurled off, and Mr. Bowers ran as if for his life.

"After him!" yelled Tom Merry.

"What-ho!"

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The juniors dashed down the footpath after the tramp.

The swiftest sprinters in the junior Forms at St. Jim's were not likely to be left behind by Mr. Bowers. They overhauled him rapidly.

The tramp gave a terrified glance behind.

On the footpath he had no chance. He plunged into the wood, and ran on desperately through the tearing, clinging thickets.

Tom Merry was close behind.

Suddenly Mr. Bowers halted, in dismay.

Fairly across his path a stream was flowing—he came out upon the bank, and his way was barred. The stream was too wide to jump, and Mr. Bowers stopped in blank dismay.

Before he could think what to do, Tom Merry's grasp was on his shoulders.

The tramp turned with a savage curse, and struck out at the boy's handsome, flushed face, but Tom Merry's ready arm swept up the blow.

The next moment he had closed with Billy Bowers.

"Collar him!" shouted Figgins.

And he rushed at the tramp with Blake and Wally. The grasp of the juniors dragged the ruffian down, and he plumped into the grass, with the four lads sprawling over him.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Ow!"

"Do you give in?" panted Tom Merry.

"Ow! Yes. Ow!"

"Sit on his chest, Figgins."

"Right you are!"

"Now keep still, you beast," said Tom Merry sternly. "You're a rotten thief, and you'd better own up. Did you steal that watch?"

"No!" gasped Mr. Bowers. "I'm an honest man, but I've been unfortunate."

"Have you anything else belonging to the same chap?"

"Ow! No!"

"Go through his pockets, Wally."

"What ho!"

The juniors held the tramp pinned down, struggling feebly, while Wally went through his pockets in the most scientifically thorough way.

The hero of the Third turned out quite a curious collection.

There were bits of string, and fragments of tobacco, and stumps of cigarettes, and copper coins, and a knife, and a bunch of skeleton keys.

Among the other things were D'Arcy's diamond pin, his studs, and watch-chain, and card-case, and several other articles belonging to the swell of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry gave the tramp a poke in the ribs with his boot, and Mr. Bowers squirmed.

"You said you had nothing else," said the junior sternly.

"Ow! I—"

"Did you buy these of the same man?" said Figgins.

"Ow! I—"

"You'd better own up to the truth," said Tom Merry, taking a thick stick from the thicket with a jerk. "Look here; you see this?"

"Ow! Yes!"

"Well, I'm going to larrup you at every lie you tell. It will feel like that when I larrup you!"

And Tom gave Mr. Bowers a sample across the shoulders. The tramp yelled.

"Yow! Yah!"

"You don't like it?"

"Ow—wow—yah!"

"I suppose that means that you don't. Well, you'll get lots of it if you don't tell the truth. You stole these things?"

"No!"

Thwack!

The stick came down with a sounding whack across Mr. Bowers' shoulders. Mr. Bowers gave a fearful yell and wriggled.

"Groo—yarooh—yow!"

"Did you steal those things?"

"No—yes. Yes!"

"From a boy?"

"Yes!"

"Tell us how it happened, and where, and when—sharp!"

In jerks the story came out of Mr. Bowers.

Whenever Tom Merry thought he was wandering from the plain and unadorned path of truth, he gave him a touch with the stick, and the tramp roared and came back to the facts again.

In this way the truth was gradually extracted from Mr. Bowers.

The juniors looked very grave as they heard it.

Arthur Augustus had been robbed and abandoned without a penny in his pockets, just before the late heavy rains.

It was a serious situation for the swell of St. Jim's. What had become of him since? Tom Merry, with a wrinkled brow, placed D'Arcy's property away in his pockets, and signed to his comrades to let the tramp rise.

Containing a Grand, Long, Complete Tale of Rylcombe Grammar School.

"We've no time to waste now in handing him over to the police," he said. "Let him go. We've got to go and look for Gussy."

"Better give him a hiding."

"Well, he's had one."

"Not half enough!" said Wally wrathfully. "He's spent all Gussy's tin, and Gussy may have got into awful scrapes without any. Look here, we're going to give this beast a wash. He needs it more than anything else!"

"Good egg!" chorussed the juniors.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow!" roared Mr. Bowers, as the juniors rolled him towards the stream. "Yow! Leggo! I'm in bad 'ealth! Ow!"

"This will do you good, then," said Figgins.

"In with him!"

Splash!

Mr. Bowers rolled into the stream.

He disappeared into the water with a loud splash, and came up gurgling and spluttering and gasping.

"Ow! Elp!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh! I'm drownin'!"

"Go it, then," said Blake. "We're not going to stop you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Bowers struggled through the rushes to the shore. Blake stepped briskly towards him.

"Collar him as he comes out, and give him another!" he exclaimed.

"Yah!"

"Now, then——"

Mr. Bowers plunged back into the shallow stream, and sought the other shore. There he scrambled out, dripping and furious.

Leaving him there, shaking his fist and saying things, the juniors of St. Jim's hurried away. They knew the spot where the ruffian had robbed Arthur Augustus, and they set off at once to reach it, and take up the trail afresh from there.

CHAPTER 16.

Mutual Confidences.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY wore a very thoughtful look.

He was standing by the caravan he shared with Jack Talbot and Joey Pye, and his hands were in his pockets and his eyes on the ground.

He was thinking!

He had lately returned from the walk with Clotilde, and he had seemed like a youth in a dream ever since.

Joey Pye came out of the van and glanced at him.

"D'Arcy!"

Arthur Augustus did not reply. He did not even hear.

Joey Pye grinned.

He stepped off the van and came round in front of Arthur Augustus, and tapped him on the shoulder. D'Arcy started out of a brown study.

"Hallo, deah boy!"

"Penny for your thoughts," said Mr. Pye cheerfully.

D'Arcy blushed red.

"Oh, weally—you see——"

"Yes, I see," said Mr. Pye sympathetically. "I suppose you first felt it coming on this morning?"

"Eh?"

"But going out in the wood made it more serious?"

"Ye-o-s, but——"

"And now you can think of nothing else?"

"You—you guess my feelings exactly," stammered D'Arcy.

"You are a very intelligent chap."

"Always considered so," agreed Mr. Pye. "The signor thinks I'm an ass, but that's only his jealousy. I can see these things. Now, would you like some advice?"

"Ya-as," said Arthur Augustus dubiously.

"I should recommend a little gin and water, and then lying down," said Mr. Pye genially.

D'Arcy jumped.

"Eh?"

"There's nothing like it for that tired feeling."

"That w-w-what?"

"That tired feeling, you know."

"Wh-wh-what tired feeling?"

"The one you're suffering from," said Mr. Pye in astonishment. "The tired feeling that was brought on this morning, and made worse by going for a walk."

D'Arcy stared at him blankly.

"Were you speakin' of a tired feelin'?" he asked.

"Certainly!"

"I—I thought you were talkin' about somethin' else," said D'Arcy confusedly. "It's—it's all wight. I'm not tired."

"Oh, good!" said Mr. Pye.

And he walked away chuckling. Arthur Augustus jammed

his monocle into his eye, and glanced curiously after the humorous Mr. Pye.

"I wondah whethah that chap guesses, and was havin' a little joke?" he murmured. "I should wegard it as extweme impertinence on his part. I wish I had somebody to confide in. I should like to talk to somebody about her."

Jack Talbot was coming towards the van. Arthur Augustus caught sight of him, and his face brightened up.

Talbot was just the fellow for a confidant.

He was a nice, kind, sympathetic fellow, who would be sure to understand exactly how the matter stood; and he was a great friend of Clotilde's, too.

Nothing could have been more opportune.

Arthur Augustus turned towards the circus lad, and Jack, seeing that he wished to speak, paused at the steps of the caravan.

"I—can I have a few minutes talk with you, Talbot?" asked Arthur Augustus shyly.

"Of course. Go ahead!"

"I—I want to tell you somethin'——"

"Fire away!"

Jack Talbot's manner was direct and matter-of-fact, and not exactly that of a confidant in a love affair. But there was no one else for the tender secret to be confided to, unless D'Arcy confided it to the signor.

The swell of St. Jim's coloured and hesitated.

"I—I—I——"

Talbot stared at him.

"I'm listening," he said.

"You—you see——"

"Yes!"

"I—I should prefer to talk in some quartah where we should not be ovahheard," said Arthur Augustus. "It's—it's wathah a peculiar mattah."

"Oh, all right," said Talbot, considerably puzzled. "Come along here."

He walked out of the circus camp towards a clump of trees at a little distance, and the swell of St. Jim's followed him.

They entered the trees, which screened them from the camp, and then the circus lad looked enquiringly at his companion.

"Well here we are," he said. "What's the matter? Have you been quarrelling with the Handsome Man again?"

"Oh, no, nothin' of that sort."

"Had news from the school?"

"Oh, no!"

"Anything gone wrong?"

"No—not exactly."

"Then, what is it?" said Jack, in wonder. "It's all right though, don't hurry. I'm not in a hurry myself, there's plenty of time."

Arthur Augustus took full advantage of that. He was quite silent for three minutes, while Talbot waited patiently. The colour was deepening in D'Arcy's cheeks, till it seemed as if all the blood in his body was pumped there.

"You see," he began at last.

"Yes, I see," agreed Talbot patiently.

"She's such a wippin' gal."

Talbot started.

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE TERROR OF ST. JIM'S."

"She!"
 "Yaas."
 "Who?"
 "Clotilde!"

The murder was out now. D'Arcy's eyes were on the ground, and he did not see the extremely peculiar look Talbot gave him.

"Oh, Clotilde!" said the circus lad slowly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Yes, everybody likes her," said Talbot. "She is a favourite with the public, and with the circus company, too."

"Yaas, and I—I—I—"

"Well?"

"You see, she is such a wippin' gal," said D'Arcy, "and a fellow can't help it, can he?"

"Can't help what?"

"I-i-i-i."

"I'm afraid I don't quite catch on," said Talbot gravely.

"What is 'it'?"

"Of course, I'm not of age yet," said D'Arcy.

Talbot smiled.

"No, I suppose you need another six years at least."

"Yaas, and of course an engagement—"

"A what?"

"I shouldn't have the cheek to ask—"

"I shouldn't think you would," agreed Talbot cordially.

"Now, I won't pretend to misunderstand you, D'Arcy. You are a nice kid, and I like you. You can admire Clotilde as much as you like, but no bosh."

"Eh?"

"Clotilde hasn't the faintest idea that you are playing the giddy ox," said Talbot. "Don't let her have. In a few years' time Clotilde will be old enough to think of these things, but then there is somebody else already for her to think about."

D'Arcy started.

"Bai Jove! Then I should have a wival?"

Talbot laughed.

"Exactly; you would."

"And who—who—"

"Can't you guess?"

D'Arcy shook his head.

"I have not seen anybody here who is worthy," he said. "Of course, I'm not ethah, as fah as that goes; but a fellow might have a chance."

"You are quite right," said Talbot cordially. "There is nobody in the wide world who will ever be worthy of our Clotilde. But there is someone who is going to look after her, if he gets the chance."

"And who is that?"

"Myself."

D'Arcy stared at the circus lad, then he adjusted his eye-glass and stared again. And then he gasped.

Under the circumstances it was most peculiar that he should have chosen Talbot as the recipient of his tender confidences.

"B-b-bai Jove!" he gasped.

Talbot laughed again.

"It's all right," he said cheerfully. "Let's forget all about it."

D'Arcy was very silent as they walked back to the circus.

CHAPTER 17.

Friends and a Foe.

DURING the next two or three days Arthur Augustus D'Arcy fell quite easily into his new way of life. St. Jim's now seemed a great way off from him, his old life there a long way behind, and he thought little about it. He entered into the life of the circus, and he found it hard enough, but pleasant enough too.

After his little talk with Jack Talbot, the swell of St. Jim's cast no more "sheep's eyes" at the Queen of the Ring. But he was very friendly with Clotilde, and they had many pleasant walks and chats together.

Arthur Augustus had only one enemy in the circus, and that was Jim Carson, the acrobat. The Handsome Man had never forgiven that knock-down blow.

He would gladly have renewed the fight with the junior, and given D'Arcy a licking, but he could not, for very shame's sake, attack a lad so much younger than himself, and besides, the signor had put his foot down.

But the Handsome Man was ready to do the lad an ill turn at any time when opportunity might arise, and D'Arcy's friendship with Talbot only made Carson's dislike keener.

The junior avoided the Handsome Man as much as possible for the sake of peace, and when they were thrown together, he was as civil as he could be.

Meanwhile, D'Arcy was making progress.

It was curious that so elegant and dainty a youth as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy should be so splendid a rider, of the roughest horses, too; but so it was, and the signor had noted it while the circus was at St. Jim's.

After the first two or three performances, D'Arcy was found

something better to do than riding in a crowd of pseudo red skins.

The signor thought out a solo act for him, and the swell of St. Jim's carried it through with great success.

It was a bareback act, and the first time D'Arcy went through it he was greeted with loud applause.

After that it became a regular item of the bill.

Then there was an act in which D'Arcy, Talbot, and Clotilde acted together, in which their horses kept time to the strains of a waltz from the band, with a very fine effect.

This was a new act, and the signor had to find room for it in the evening, and so was under the necessity of cutting short some other turn.

He broached the subject to Jim Carson.

"You've seen the youngsters rehearsing the new act, Carson?" he remarked.

"Yes," said the Handsome Man shortly.

"What do you think of it?"

"No good."

The signor shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, that's your opinion, it's not mine," he remarked.

"But the question is, something else will have to be cut down."

The Handsome Man's eyes glittered.

"I suppose you're not proposing to cut any of my turn?" he remarked.

Signor Tomsonio looked uncomfortable.

"Well, you see—" he explained.

"No, I don't see."

"The twenty minutes will have to come from somewhere."

"So you've thought of cutting my turn to give that school-boy a show?" said the Handsome Man.

"Well, say five minutes off it."

"If you cut any, you will cut the lot!"

"But—"

"That's final."

And the Handsome Man walked away.

Signor Tomsonio gave an expressive grunt. Sensitiveness and personal vanity played quite as prominent a part in circus life as in the theatrical profession, and caused as much trouble.

But the Handsome Man's act was not cut.

The time was found elsewhere, and the new riding act was squeezed into the evening's bill by some means or other.

It proved to be a very popular turn, too, and the people in front cheered loudly as the three riders careered round the ring to the strains of the "Merry Widow" waltz.

Arthur Augustus rode a handsome spotted pony, a fiery animal, which was quite amenable to the touch of the swell of St. Jim's.

The morning after the first performance of the musical act D'Arcy went into the circus stables as usual for his work there.

He attended to the spotted pony with great care, and as he was thus occupied the Handsome Man came in.

Carson was scowling darkly. His scowl grew darker at the sight of the swell of St. Jim's. He came over towards the stall in which his own pony stood. Carson kept a pony himself, and was in the habit of taking a gallop in the morning.

He glanced at his pony, and then turned sharply towards D'Arcy.

"Why haven't you attended to my pony?" he exclaimed roughly.

D'Arcy looked at him.

"I am goin' to," he said.

"Well, lead him out for me, you idle loafer," said Carson.

"Put the saddle on, and be quick about it."

All the blood of the D'Arcy's boiled in the junior's veins at the hectoring tone of the Handsome Man.

He did not make a motion to obey.

Exactly what right the Handsome Man might have to order him about was a doubtful point, but if he had spoken civilly, D'Arcy would have done what was required at once. Now there was no inducement that would make him do it.

The Handsome Man glared at him.

"Do you hear me?"

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus quietly.

"Then do as I tell you."

"Wats!"

"Eh?"

"Wats!"

Carson gritted his teeth.

"Will you do as I tell you?" he roared.

"No."

Carson pointed to his pony.

"Take him out and saddle him. Do you hear?"

"Yaas."

"Then do it."

"Wubbish!"

"You will obey me, or I'll make you!" said the Handsome Man, with a spiteful gleam in his eyes.

It was an early hour, and he was alone in the stables with D'Arcy. All the bitter dislike he felt for the elegant new-

comer boiled up in the Handsome Man's breast. It was his opportunity for revenge at last.

D'Arcy went on cleaning down his pony with a steady hand. He had not the slightest intention of obeying the orders of the Handsome Man.

"Well?" said Carson threateningly.

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

Carson advanced upon him. D'Arcy was kneeling down beside the pony, attending to its fetlock, and a push from the Handsome Man's boot rolled him over in the straw.

The swell of St. Jim's uttered an angry exclamation.

"Oh, you wuff beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy scrambled to his feet.

"Now, then!" said the Handsome Man.

But he had no time to get further. Arthur Augustus was running at him, hitting out. Carson dodged the blows and closed with the junior.

A cruel smile flickered on his face.

Now was his time at last.

His grasp closed cruelly on the slim form of the junior. Arthur Augustus, with his teeth set hard, struggled to free himself.

But he could not.

They swayed to and fro, and then D'Arcy, with a powerful effort, shoved the Handsome Man violently backwards.

Carson staggered, and endeavoured to regain his balance, but D'Arcy threw his whole weight forward, and the Handsome Man sat down violently.

There was a loud splash.

Just behind Carson was standing a wide, deep bucket, full of dirty water that had been used in mopping. The Handsome Man sat down fairly in it.

The water shot up in spurts all round him.

He involuntarily let go of D'Arcy, who sprang back, and stood gasping for breath. Carson was fairly in the bucket.

It was a deep one, and just wide enough to admit him comfortably—or rather uncomfortably—in a sitting posture.

His knees hung over the rim of the bucket, and at the back he was in it almost up to his coat collar.

The impetus of his fall, and the weight of D'Arcy upon him, had jammed him into the big bucket. But now that he was jammed in, he was quite unequal to the task of unjamming himself, so to speak.

He was simply wedged in, and could not get out.

D'Arcy, breathless but game, stood on the defensive, ready for a fresh attack from the Handsome Man. But the fresh attack did not come. Carson could not get out. He was squeezed in too tightly, and he sat wedged there, with his head and legs appearing over the top, and his dark face convulsed with rage. Arthur Augustus smiled softly. He groped for his eyeglass, and jammed it into his eye, and surveyed the Handsome Man with great interest.

CHAPTER 18.

In a Tight Corner.

JIM CARSON gritted his teeth with rage.

"You young hound!" he snarled.

"Bai Jove!"

"I—I'll smash you!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"Help me out!"

"Weally, you look vewy intewestin'," said Arthur Augustus, with his monocle fixed upon the squirming figure of the Handsome Man. "I regard this as a most remarkable sight."

"You—you—"

"Howevah, I suppose I had bettah help you. You do not deserve it, aifah attackin' me in such a fewocious and unwovoked way."

Carson gasped with fury.

"Will you help me out?" he yelled.

"Yaas, wathah."

"Quick, then, hang you!"

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Quick, you fool!" yelled Carson, who was in dread every moment of someone entering the stables, and seeing him in the ridiculous position he had fallen into.

He could not squeeze out of the bucket, and to be seen in it by the circus hands would be too cruel a humiliation. The Handsome Man was very sensitive on such points. And his usual overbearing manner would make his fall very gratifying to the others, he knew that, if they saw him as he was.

But he was not taking the right tone with D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's had started forward to help him, but now he paused.

"I refuse to be chawacterised as a fool," he said coldly.

"I am surprised at your allowin' yourself to—"

"Will you help me out?"

"Yaas, but—"

"Quick, then—"

"Yaas, but—"

"Lend me a hand, you babbling idiot!" shrieked Carson.

"I wefuse to be called a babblin' idiot."

"Oh, you idiot—you dummy!"

"I wegard all those expwessions as distinctly oppwobwious. I am sowwy to see you in such an extwemely uncomfy posish, but I am afwaid I cannot extend you a helpin' hand till you have apologised," said D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity.

Carson gasped.

"You utter fool—"

"I am waitin' for the apology."

"Fool! Idiot!"

"Vewy well," said D'Arcy, turning away, "I will wewire fwom the scene until you feel inclined to apologise in a gentlemanly mannah."

And he walked over towards his horse, and took up the brush. Carson almost choked with rage.

"Come here!" he spluttered. "Come here, and help me out of this bucket."

"I shall have gweat pleasuah in helpin' you out of that bucket if you care to apologise for your wascally wudeness."

"You young hound!"

"Pway say no more. I wefuse to take any notice of your presenace."

Jim Carson writhed.

He strove again and again to squeeze himself out of the bucket, but in vain: he was too tightly wedged into it. The water that remained in it was soaking through his clothes and giving him a decidedly chilly feeling.

It was pretty clear that discretion was the better part of valour in this case. At any moment someone might enter the stable, and then the whole crowd would be called up to witness his absurd discomfiture.

"D'Arcy! D'Arcy!"

Arthur Augustus did not turn his head.

"D'Arcy!"

"Pway don't talk to me, deah boy!" said D'Arcy, without looking round. "I wefuse to take any notice of your presenace."

"I—I— Come and help me!"

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

"I—I apologise," gasped the Handsome Man.

D'Arcy turned towards him at once.

"Ah, that altahs the case," he exclaimed. "I shall be vewy pleased to help you."

He came over towards the Handsome Man. Jim Carson held up his hands, and D'Arcy grasped them and tugged.

But the Handsome Man was too tightly wedged in the bucket. D'Arcy only succeeded in dragging him over, and the bucket as well.

Carson fell on his side with a clatter, and the water in the bucket ran out over him, but that uncomfortable appendage was far from coming off.

The Handsome Man's position was worse than ever now.

"Help me!" he gasped.

"I am helpin' you," said D'Arcy, tugging away the bucket.

"The beastly thing will not come off, you know. It was awfully careless of you to drop into it like this."

"Get it off!"

"I'm twyin' to."

But D'Arcy tried in vain.

"Bai Jove, I've got a gweat ideah!" he exclaimed. "There's a chopper here, and I'll smash the bucket, and then you will be all wight."

And he seized the chopper. The Handsome Man gave a yell of alarm.

"Stop!"

"What for?"

"You idiot! You'll chop me as well as the bucket!" shrieked Carson.

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that!"

"Help me out, you fool!"

"I decline to be called a fool. Besides, I can't help you out," said D'Arcy, with a shake of the head. "You are in too tight, you know. I had bettah call for help."

"No—no! I—"

"My deah chap, I must get help, and then one can take the bucket, and the other can hold you woud the neck, or by the eahs, you know, and tug."

"You dummy!"

D'Arcy was already at the door.

"Help!" he shouted.

The Handsome Man ground his teeth.

"Oh, fool, fool!"

"What's the matter?" exclaimed Joey Pye, putting his head out of the door of his van, and looking round in surprise.

"Help!"

"What's wrong?"

"To the wescue, deah boy."

Joey Pye came running over. Jack Talbot came in sight.

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from another direction. They reached Arthur Augustus D'Arcy at the same moment.

"What's the matter?" exclaimed Talbot.

"Look here!"

They looked into the stable. The sight of the Handsome Man wedged in the bucket was too much for them. They burst into a wild roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway help me get him out, deah boys. I cannot help but think that he must be in a most uncomfortable posish."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hang you!" said Carson, between his teeth. "Hang you! Help me out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Joey Pye, wiping his eyes. "What's the little game, then? Is this a new turn you're rehearsing?"

"Help me!"

"Oh, certainly! Ha, ha, ha!"

The clown's shout of laughter had drawn others to the scene. A dozen or more pairs of eyes were looking in, and the Handsome Man writhed with rage at the yell of irresistible laughter that went up.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Help me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here, collar hold!" exclaimed Joey Pye. "You take the bucket, Jackie, and I'll take our dear friend by the shoulders."

"Right you are."

"But how on earth did you get into this fix, Carson?"

"Mind your own business; help me out."

"I can explain, deah boys. He was bwatally wude to me, and I was chastisin' him," explained Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you help me, you cackling fools!"

"Certainly, my son."

Jack Talbot, grinning, seized the bucket with both hands, and Joey Pye laid a loving grasp upon the shoulders of the Handsome Man.

"Ready, Jackie!"

"Right-ho!"

A terrific wrench, and Jim Carson was dragged out of the bucket. He rolled on the floor, gasping for breath.

"Bai Jove! It's all wright now," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

But the Handsome Man did not seem all right. He staggered to his feet, white with rage. His look was so savage that some of the laughter died away. He shook his fist at Arthur Augustus.

"I will make you suffer for this!" he said, in a choking voice.

"Weally, deah boy—"

The Handsome Man rushed from the stable. D'Arcy looked after him through his monocle.

"He seems wathah pwovoked," he remarked.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Joey Pye. "He does; he do!"

"I fail to see how he can blame me because he was silly ass enough to fall into the bucket," said D'Arcy. "Some chaps are awfully unweasonable."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Handsome Man did not take his ride that morning, and he did not return to the stable. He had had enough of the well of St. Jim's just then. But he was planning vengeance.

CHAPTER 19.

A Mysterious Message.

JOEY PYE came over the common in the growing dusk. The circus had moved on to a new pitch at a village near the coast of Sussex, and Joey Pye had been in the village to make some purchases. He was coming back with a dozen or more parcels and bundles hanging upon his arms or jammed into his pockets. The dusk was thickening on the common, and the trees and bushes were growing dim. In the distance loomed up the big marquee of the circus camp.

"Hallo!" muttered the clown abruptly.

From the shadow of a large bush a dark form glided.

Joey Pye stopped.

The figure hesitated a moment, evidently peering at Joey through the dusk, and then disappeared behind the bush again.

Joey Pye looked after it in amazement.

"Hallo!" he called out. "What do you want?"

There was no reply.

"Who are you?"

Silence reigned.

With a slight feeling of uneasiness as he passed the bush behind which the figure had disappeared, Joey Pye tramped on towards the circus. But he saw nothing of the form. It had quite vanished.

Twenty yards further on, however, the clown caught a glimpse of a moving figure among the bushes. He quickened his pace.

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"Hallo, there!"

The figure disappeared.

Quite puzzled, Joey Pye tramped on to the circus.

The thought occurred to him that the two strange forms might be footpads lurking about the camp for what they could find, but in that case it was odd that they had not interfered with him, for it would have been quite easy for the two to rob him and get clear away.

"Got the things?" asked Talbot, as Joey Pye came up to the caravan.

Joey nodded.

"Yes."

Jack looked at him quickly, reading his expressive face.

"Anything happened?"

"No," said Joey. "But it was odd."

And he related his experience.

"Footpads, very likely," said Jack. "Hallo, there's Carson coming in. Ask him if he's seen anything of them."

The Handsome Man, with a collar turned up about his neck—for the night was chilly—was just entering the camp. Joey Pye called to him.

"I say, Carson?"

The Handsome Man stopped.

"What is it?"

"Did you see anything of two strangers hanging about in the bushes, between this and the village?" asked Joey Pye.

Carson started violently.

"Two strangers!"

"Yes."

"No, I've seen nobody," said Carson. "I suppose there are plenty of strangers to us knocking about, though."

"Yes, I suppose so; but these two chaps looked as if they were up to no good."

"Well, I haven't seen them."

And the Handsome Man passed on.

"They might be wobblers," said Arthur Augustus, with a thoughtful look. "Pewwaps it would be a good ideah to go and look for them, and make them explain."

"Not much. Come and grub. There's the performance in half an hour."

"Vewy good."

The naphtha lamps were being lighted now, and they shed a glare of light upon the path leading up to the road, which ran from the neighbouring village.

Ere long the glare of the lights and the blare of the band had had their usual effect of attracting a crowd.

Joey Pye, in full war-paint, took up his station at the entrance of the big tent, and addressed the gathering public in his usual strain of flowing eloquence.

"Walk up, gents! Walk up, ladies! Roll up in your thousands, and in your motor-cars! Come and see the show that the crowned heads of Europe and America jostle one another to see. Come and see Joey Pye, the wonderful, the unequalled, the inimitable mirth-merchant."

"Bai Jove! that chap knows how to blow his own twumpet," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Jack Talbot laughed.

The circus lad was entering his van to don his Tiger Tamer attire. It was not time for the riding act yet and Arthur Augustus had nothing to do for a time.

The swell of St. Jim's stood leaning on the van, and looking towards the crowd before the tent, and the clown mounted upon a bench haranguing them. The eloquence of Joey Pye came clearly to his ears upon the wind.

Suddenly a footstep close at hand made D'Arcy look round. A dark, roughly clad figure loomed up in the dusk, and D'Arcy, remembering what Joey Pye had related, started a little. But the man's manner was quite civil. He touched his ragged fur cap.

"Master D'Arcy?" he asked

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I've a note for you, sir."

D'Arcy looked at him in surprise.

"A note for me?"

"Yes, sir."

"From whom?"

"From a lady, sir." The man fumbled in his pockets.

"There was to be no answer, sir, but the lady said you would give me a shillin'."

"Certainly," said D'Arcy.

He had already received some cash for his services in the circus, and he was not without money now. He felt in his pocket, and extracted a shilling, and handed it to the man as he received the letter.

The rough-looking fellow touched his cap again.

"Thank you, sir."

And he disappeared. Arthur Augustus looked at the envelope in his hand in blank amazement.

Whom could it be from?

The only lady D'Arcy was acquainted with in the neighbourhood was Clotilde, the Queen of the Ring, except for Signora Tomsonio, the signor's wife.

It was not likely that either Clotilde or the signora would send him a letter by a messenger, when it would be easier to speak to him.

It was some moments before the puzzled junior opened the letter. There was no name written on the outside.

He opened it at last, carefully slitting the envelope with his penknife, and took out the folded sheet within.

There was a brief message in a small round hand.

"Will you meet me after the performance, under the big oak? It is very important. I have something I must say to you. Not a word to a soul. I trust you. CLOTILDE."

D'Arcy read the message with difficulty in the gloom. He took the note under the little window of the caravan, and read it again in the light.

His heart was beating. It was from Clotilde, and she asked him to make an appointment—to meet her in a secret way. It was very curious, and very gratifying. Had she perceived the state of the junior's heart? Was that what the message meant?

Arthur Augustus was considerably excited. He was puzzled, too. But one thing was clear, he could not neglect the message. He must meet Clotilde as she wished. There was no doubt whatever upon that point.

The big oak was at some distance from the camp, and was a very conspicuous object in the daytime. It was invisible now, but the junior knew exactly where to find it. After the performance, he would be there. What was it that Clotilde had to say?

D'Arcy's eyes were sparkling as he folded the note and placed it in his pocket. Not for an instant did any doubt of the genuineness of the message cross his unsuspecting mind.

CHAPTER 20.

Run Down.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS did not see Clotilde until they rode together in the ring for the musical act. Then he glanced at the girl, expecting to receive a glance of intelligence in return. But Clotilde's manner was quite unconscious.

She met the junior's glance, and smiled; but the smile was as usual, and there was nothing in her manner to indicate that anything was amiss.

What was it she had to say to D'Arcy in secret? Was she in some difficulty—some danger—and requiring his help?

The thought made D'Arcy's heart beat with the fire of knight-errantry.

If not that, what could it be? D'Arcy found himself thinking more of the coming meeting than of the act he was engaged in, and his horse fell out of time.

Signor Tomsonio cracked his whip. The sound recalled D'Arcy to himself.

"Wake up, kid," said Talbot, looking at him in surprise. "You're putting us all out."

"I'm sowwy. I was thinkin' of somethin' else."

"Well, you'd better think of the act."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And D'Arcy gave his whole attention to the work in hand after that.

Joey Pye was in the ring, and as the horses pranced round the arena to the strains of the waltz, the clown turned somersaults, and affected to fall just in the way of the hoofs, always, however, squirming away just in time.

The clown jumped up from almost under the feet of D'Arcy's pony, and started and looked round quickly as a cheer fell upon his ears.

"Bravo, Joey!"

"By gun!" muttered Joey Pye, "I know that yell."

He glanced over the sea of faces in front.

In one of the seats further back there were four familiar faces in a row—faces that the clown remembered well.

They were faces he had seen often while the circus was in the neighbourhood of St. Jim's. Tom Merry, Jack Blake, Figgins, and D'Arcy minor were sitting in a row there, cheering.

Joey Pye waved his hand to them, and Tom Merry waved back.

The clown pointed the juniors out to the signor.

"Look there, guv'nor."

The signor nodded.

"I saw them, Joey. They've come for D'Arcy, of course."

"That's it."

"I shall be sorry to lose him," said the signor thoughtfully.

"But I suppose this means that he will have to go back to school."

"I rather think so."

"Well, it can't be helped; and, after all, it was bound to happen, and no doubt it's better for him."

"Bravo, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus started violently as the shout fell upon his ears, and he very nearly fell out of time again.

"Bai Jove! it's the chaps!"

He glanced round and recognised the juniors.

Arthur Augustus was made up for the performance, not as a redskin now, but in riding clothes, with an artificial moustache; but the chums of St. Jim's had recognised him.

Tom Merry's quest was at an end. The juniors had tracked the circus from place to place, and they had come up with it at last, and the performance had commenced when they reached it. They had come into the tent to see the performance in the usual way, pretty certain that they would recognise Arthur Augustus if he appeared in the ring, under whatever disguise he might appear.

And they had recognised him at a glance. They had found him!

"That's the ass," said Figgins, with great satisfaction, as the musical act went on, D'Arcy having waved his hand to the juniors to show that he knew them. "There he is, as large as life, just as I expected."

"Just as I expected, you mean," said Tom Merry.

"Rats!" said Blake. "Of course, it was my idea all along that Gussy would be found as soon as we found the circus."

"Oh, come off!"

"Rats!"

"Look here—"

"My only Aunt Jane!" said Wally. "Of course, if I hadn't been with you you wouldn't have found Gussy in a dog's age. I knew jolly well that he would be with the circus."

"Oh, rats!"

"I tell you—"

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"Well, it doesn't matter whom the credit is due to!" he exclaimed. "We've found Gussy, and that's the chief thing."

"Well, there's something in that," admitted Blake.

"Well, yes," said Figgins, with a chuckle. "After all, that's the principal thing. We've found Gussy; and we've got to take jolly good care that he doesn't dodge us again."

"What oh!" said Wally, with emphasis.

"My idea is that we should go round and catch him immediately he leaves the ring after this turn."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Good egg!"

"It's a jolly good turn!" said Wally, surveying his major's performance with a critical eye. "I couldn't do that better."

"You couldn't do it at all," agreed Blake. "Gussy isn't half the ass you'd expect from knowing his minor."

"Look here, Blake—"

"Oh, don't jaw! I want to hear the band."

"You ass—"

"Oh, ring off, kid!"

Wally glared. The chums of St. Jim's watched the riding musical act with keen attention. It was really a good performance, and the people cheered it loudly, and the juniors, of course, joined heartily in the cheering.

When the act was over they stood up and stared and clapped and yelled.

"Bravo, Gussy!"

"Good old Augustus!"

"Hurrah!"

"Bravo St. Jim's!"

The three riders cantered out of the ring, but a roar from the audience brought them back again. Three times they had to take the call before the people would let them go, and the next turn could commence. The next turn was the acrobatic performance of the Handsome Man; and Carson stood at the ring entrance gnawing his lips while the applause continued, and Talbot, D'Arcy, and the Queen of the Ring took their calls.

There was a spiteful gleam in the Handsome Man's dark eyes as he glanced at D'Arcy, as the swell of St. Jim's retired for the final time.

And he was smiling in a peculiar way as he went into the arena for his turn. Anyone who had scanned the face of the Handsome Man at that moment would have fancied that he was plotting mischief.

Arthur Augustus was not thinking of the Handsome Man, however, and was far from dreaming that Jim Carson could have had anything to do with the mysterious appointment at the big oak on the common.

He looked for an opportunity of slipping away without attracting attention.

Talbot went into his van, and the swell of St. Jim's, without delaying to remove his ring costume, stepped away to cross the dark expanse outside the radius of light from the circus. He had no doubt that Clotilde would reach the rendezvous in a quiet way unobserved.

But the swell of the circus was not destined to go unobserved. Four forms came looming up in the dimness, and he was stopped.

"Hallo, Gussy!"

"Here he is!"

"Found you at last, you ass!"

And the four juniors surrounded their old comrade, and D'Arcy's progress was effectually barred.

The swell of St. Jim's jammed his monocle into his eye

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and a curious effect it had along with the sunburnt complexion and the twisted moustache.

"I'm glad to see you, deah boys."

"Good!" said Tom Merry, slipping his arm through D'Arcy's.

"Are you ready to come back to St. Jim's?"

D'Arcy jerked his arm away.

"Certainly not!"

"But—"

"I belong to the circus now," said D'Arcy, with dignity. "I am earnin' my lwead. Besides, I could not return to St. Jim's without an infraction of my personal dig—a most serious infraction. I should have to refuse to be flogged."

"That's all right—"

"I decline to regard it as all wight," said Arthur Augustus. "It would be too utfably dewogatiwoy to my personal dig to submit to a floggin'."

"It's all right, I tell you. The Head is goin' to let you off the floggin'," exclaimed Blake.

"Oh, I see! Are you sure?"

"He said so."

"But how—why—"

"Wally owned up, you see."

"Bai Jove! Then he is expelled!"

Wally chuckled.

"Of course not, ass! I—"

"I refuse to allow my minah to address me as an ass."

"Oh, do listen! I worked it all right—I'll explain afterwards. But I'm not expelled, and you're not to be flogged, and everything in the garden is lovely," said Wally. "Now you can come home."

"I will think about it, deah boys," said D'Arcy, hesitating.

"Of course, what you say altahs the case completely."

"Then come on," said Tom Merry. "We've been hunting you for days, and we've found your props, too!"

"My pwops?"

"Your property. We came upon the tramp who robbed you, and made him disgorged," said Tom Merry. "We've got your gold watch—"

"Bai Jove!"

"And your diamond pin."

"Gwont Scott!"

"And your scented handkerchiefs—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"And your hair-curlers, and—"

"I refuse to listen to silly jokes," said D'Arcy. "I am vewy glad you have wecovahed my things, howevah. That tickah was a pwesent fwom my govahnah, and I should have been extremely sowwy to lose it. But I must be off—"

"Right! We're ready."

"You fail to comprehend. I have an appointment."

"Yes—with us."

"No, no! I must wun like anythin'!"

Tom Merry caught the swell of the circus by the shoulder.

"Now, look here, Gussy, you're not going to give us the slip!"

"I was not thinkin' of givin' you the slip, Tom Mewwy," said the swell of St. Jim's, with a great deal of dignity.

"Then where are you going?" demanded Blake.

"I am goin' to keep an appointment."

The juniors looked at him curiously.

"Where?" demanded Figgins.

"That is wathah an impertinent question, Figgins; but I do not mind tellin' you. Under the big oak twee yondah. You will see it when the moon is up. And now I must be off. I cannot be so howwibly wude as to keep a laday waitin'."

Four voices ejaculated at once:

"A lady!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Do you mean to say that you are meeting a lady exclaimed Tom Merry, in blank astonishment.

"Yaas, certainly."

"Gussy!"

"Pway don't be an ass, deah boy."

"Gussy!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"I think we ought to go along and see fair play," said Blake, with a serious shake of the head.

"I refuse to take you, Blake."

"That wouldn't make much difference, my son, if I wanted to come," said Blake, with a chuckle.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Look here," said Tom Merry, "it's honest Injun, you know. You're not going to give us the slip."

"Certainly not!"

"Honour bright?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, all right. We'll wait for you here, and if you don't come back—"

"I shall come back, Tom Mewwy. I am not likely to bweak my word of honah, I hope. You can wait for me in the circus."

"But—"

"I weally must go now, deah boys, or I may keep The Gem Library—No. 107.

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a laday waitin'. I'm awf'ly glad to see you, you know, and I think I shall return to St. Jim's with you."

"I jolly well know you will!" chuckled Blake.

"Excuse me, Blake, it wests with me entirely. But I will see you latah; I must be off now. Au wevoih!"

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

He disappeared into the darkness, and left the chums looking rather blankly at one another.

"It's all right," said Tom Merry, after a pause. "Gussy wouldn't break his word for worlds. He'll come back."

"I don't understand it, though," said Blake thoughtfully. "It's all rot about his having an appointment with a lady. Somebody's rotting him."

"Yes, that's very likely."

"Of course it is," said Figgins. "It's some blessed practical joke, of course. It serves Gussy right to be japed, for being such an ass. But I don't think we ought to let a fellow from St. Jim's be japed, all the same."

"Rather not," said Wally.

"We might chip in," said Blake thoughtfully. "Of course, it's a jape of some sort. Gussy is being taken in."

"Yes, rather!"

"Let's get after him," said Tom Merry abruptly.

"Good egg!"

"That's the tree, I suppose—the moon's just showing over it."

"Yes: come on!"

And the juniors hurried on the track of the swell of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 21.

Tricked!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS plunged into the shadow of the big tree. The moon was emerging from behind a great bank of clouds, and a dim glimmer of silvery light fell upon the common. But in the shadow of the great tree all was dark, and the bushes growing wildly round were wrapped in gloom.

Arthur Augustus stopped.

"Clotilde!"

There was no reply.

"Miss Clotilde! Are you here?"

There was a rustle in the bushes.

D'Arcy started forward. He had no doubt that it was Clotilde.

"You are here, deah gal!"

The next moment a strong grasp was laid upon the junior in the darkness, and he was thrown to the ground.

The surprise was so great that D'Arcy could not make a movement to defend himself.

He fell heavily to the ground, dazed by the shock and the suddenness of the unexpected attack.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped.

The strong grip was still upon him.

A rough voice muttered in the darkness:

"Don't let him get away."

And D'Arcy recognised the voice of the man who had brought him the supposed note from Clotilde.

The junior's brain was in a whirl.

What did it all mean?

He did not realise yet that it was all a trick—that Clotilde's name had been forged to draw him into this trap. But what did it all mean—where was Clotilde—why was he seized like this.

There were two assailants, and he dimly made out their forms in the growing moonlight. One of them knelt upon him, and fastened his wrists together with a thong, and then thrust a gag into his mouth.

"Now, then, Badger!"

"All right!"

Thwack!

Arthur Augustus writhed as a heavy blow descended upon his shoulders.

The gag in his mouth prevented him from uttering a cry, and he could only gasp and gurgle faintly.

Thwack! thwack! thwack!

The blows rained down.

It was a thick and heavy stick, wielded by a strong hand, and the blows were savage ones. Arthur Augustus writhed and gasped with pain. But one of the ruffians was holding him, while the other lashed him, and he could not help himself.

The swell of St. Jim's understood at last what it all meant.

The note from Clotilde had lured him there, and these scoundrels had been in wait for him—and D'Arcy could not be at a loss to know to whom he owed it all. He knew as well as if he had seen it done, that the Handsome Man had forged the note from Clotilde—this was the Handsome Man's revenge.

D'Arcy writhed under the lashing blows.

A dozen had fallen, when there was a sudden rush of footsteps in the grass. Four juniors had come round the dark shadow

(Continued on Page 26.)

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of the oak, and in the glimmer of the moonlight the scene had burst suddenly upon them.

For a moment Tom Merry & Co. stood petrified.

They had expected to discover that Arthur Augustus was being "japed" in some manner, but anything like this they had never dreamed of.

It was only for a second that they stopped.

Then they rushed forward and seized the two ruffians, and in a moment had them pinned to the ground.

The two roughs struggled, but they had no chance against the indignant juniors. Tom Merry, Blake, and Figgins held them down, while Wally released his major.

Arthur Augustus staggered up.

He dragged the gag from his mouth, and gasped for breath.

"Bai Jove, deah boys! I've had a most howwid expewience."

"Which of these is the lady you came to meet?" demanded Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"You ass!"

"I have been twicked," said Arthur Augustus. "I weceived a note sayin' that a lady wished to meet me heah—and I am convinced now that it was a twick."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I have been used most bwutally."

"Poor old Gussy! Lend us a hand, and we'll yank these fellows off to the circus, and they can be locked up," said Tom Merry. "I don't think I ever saw anything quite so cowardly and brutal in my natural."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Old on, guv'nor!" gasped Badger, wriggling in the grasp of Figgins and Blake. "Old on! We didn't want to 'urt him, you know, only——"

"What did you do it for?" demanded Tom Merry abruptly. "It looks to me like a piece of sheer hooliganism, as you were not robbing."

"I am afwaid they were put up to doin' it," said D'Arcy. "I am convinced now that the note I weceived was a forgewy."

"We was," gasped Badger. "It was the dark chap—the gent they call the Handsome Man in the circus—he's paid us a pound each. I swear it was."

"The bound!" said Tom Merry wrathfully.

"I swear it was, guv'nor; and we was 'ard up!" whined Badger. "We——"

"You wotten scoundwels!" said D'Arcy, in disgust. "I wegard you with absolute loathin'. Pway take that stick, Wally, and give them a feahful thwashin'! I would do it myself, but I am feelin' wathah knocked up."

"What-ho!" said Wally, with alacrity.

He picked up the stick and used it with such hearty goodwill that the two ruffians were soon yelling at the full force of their lungs.

"I wathah think that will do, Wally."

"Rats! they've only had twenty each," said Wally.

Tom Merry laughed.

"That's enough, Wally. Let them go, you chaps!"

And the two roughs, groaning from the effect of the castigation, slunk away into the darkness.

"And now," said Tom Merry, "if you've finished keeping appointments with ladies, you may as well come back to the circus."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Oh, come on!"

The juniors left the spot. Arthur Augustus took the forged note out of his pocket, and tore it into little pieces. He was looking rather worried.

"I say, you chaps, bottah not say anythin' about this in the circus," he said suddenly.

"Why not?"

"Well, it's no good makin' twouble there," said D'Arcy. "As I'm goin' away, Carson won't be able to play any more of his twicks; and it would place the signor in an awkward posish, as he can't afford to part with the acwobat, you know. Bettah say nothin'!"

"And it would make you look an ass, if we told the story too!" chuckled Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Gussy's right," said Tom Merry. "Better keep mum."

The juniors reached the circus. The Handsome Man was coming out of the ring exit after his turn. He started as the swell of St. Jim's stood before him.

D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye and stared directly at him.

"You ead!" he said.

"What!"

"You wotten ead!"

The Handsome Man gritted his teeth. But he looked at the accusing faces of the juniors, and the colour wavered in his cheeks. He saw that his cowardly treachery was known.

"What—what——" he faltered.

"My friends came in time to wescue me," said Arthur Augustus quietly, "othahwise I should have been vewy wuffly used. The wascals you sent there have confessed."

"I—I——"

"You ought to be sent to pwison, you cur!"

"I—I——"

"Bah, you are not worth punishin'," said Arthur Augustus contemptuously. "Get away—the sight of you makes me feel wathah sick, it does weally!"

And the Handsome Man, for once utterly confused and speechless, simply slunk away from the scornful glances of the juniors.

"Sorry to lose you," said Signor Tomsonio, when he heard that the swell of St. Jim's had decided to return to school with Tom Merry & Co., "but, of course, you couldn't have remained with us much longer, you know. And it's all right now at the school?"

"All wight, thank you."

"Good! I hope I shall see you all again."

"What-ho!" said Mr. Pye.

"And I, too," said Clotilde softly.

And the juniors of St. Jim's, who had passed the night at the circus, under the hospitable tent roof, took their leave of the signor and their friends of the circus. Joey Pye walked with them to the railway-station, and saw them off.

"Sorry to lose you," he said, as he shook hands with D'Arcy. "If you ever decide to take up a circus life in earnest, mind you come to Tomsonio's."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And if I ever decide to go to a public school I shall come to St. Jim's, and chum up with you," said Mr. Pye seriously.

Arthur Augustus stared.

"Bai Jove!"

"Yes, I shall really," said Mr. Pye. "Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

The train rolled off. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat silent and thoughtful for a few moments.

"I think Mr. Pye must have been jokin'," he remarked, at last.

To which Tom Merry rejoined simply:

"Go hon!"

THE END.

NEXT THURSDAY!

"THE TERROR OF ST. JIM'S."

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BRITAIN'S REVENGE

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS ARE:

AUBREY VILLIERS, nicknamed Sam Slick. A lad who has performed wondrous service for his country in her time of need, during the terrible invasion by the Germans.

STEPHEN VILLIERS, his brother. He is Sam's companion in all his exploits.

The two boys form part of the crew of the Condor, a wonderful airship invented by John Carfax. The Condor is commissioned by Admiral Frobisher to destroy a German steamer bringing floating mines down the Elbe. The enterprise is successful, the mine-ship being blown up by a shell from the airship; but the force of the explosion plays havoc on board the Condor. Stephen Villiers and Hugh, another of the crew, are struck down, and Carfax looks grave as he directs the crippled airship back to the British fleet.

(Now go on with the story.)

The Price of Victory.

Sam had staggered right back from his Maxim, driven by the air-wave of the explosion, and the senses were almost knocked out of him. Kenneth and Carfax, with grave faces, lifted Hugh's body from the gun.

Their worst fears were realised. It needed only one glance at the ragged hole in the young gunner's forehead to see that poor Hugh had fought his last fight.

Sam caught his breath as he heard the words. The news was bad enough, but a great fear seized him, and he hurried to his brother's side.

A mighty relief came over him as he saw that the boy was living. Stephen raised himself on his right arm, but his left shoulder was soaked with blood.

"Where are you wounded, Steve?" exclaimed Sam anxiously.

"Shoulder. I don't think it's very much," said Stephen faintly. "Is poor old Hugh gone?"

He insisted on getting on to his feet, and they stood by Hugh's prostrate form. A mist came over the boys' eyes, and Carfax gave a deep sigh.

"We have lost him," he said; "but he died at his post, and never flinched—a hero's death."

"It was that last volley from the rifles," said Sam, a

lump in his throat. "He's taken, and I'm left. You could have spared me better, sir."

"I could spare none of the Condor's crew, for I consider them all as my sons," said Carfax sadly. "This is our first great loss; yet we had to do our duty; so let us remember that Hugh died with honour, and for his country."

"Amen!" said Kenneth. And lifting the prone form, he carried it reverently into the deck-house. There, 10,000ft. above the earth, Hugh lay in state, a Union Jack drawn over him.

"Let's see your wound, lad," said Carfax, skilfully baring Stephen's shoulder. "I'm only thankful you didn't share Hugh's fate. It's a wonder that last volley left any of us."

Stephen's hurt, though it had bled very freely, and pained him a good deal, was no more than a flesh wound, and a clean one. The bullet had passed out just under the scapula.

Carfax dressed and bandaged it rapidly and skilfully. For the first time Sam and Stephen learned that among his many attainments he was a properly qualified doctor.

"That will soon heal. You'll feel nothing more than a stiffness for a few days," Carfax said. "And now, work comes before all. We've been knocked about, and we must get the vessel in order without delay. That was the narrowest escape we've had, and work that we're scarcely fitted for."

The airship's damages were not such as to put her out of action by any means. Kenneth, with a few screws and bolts, secured the broken part of the framework strongly enough, and it did not affect her balance or manœuvring power, though it looked rather a wreck to the eye.

The Condor was able to stand far more knocking about than an outside judge would have supposed. Her vital parts were skilfully protected. Carfax devoted himself to the engines, working like a nigger, and in half an hour he had them in as good order as before, and repaired the crippled fan-wheel.

"She will do now," he said. "We shall not need to return to the workshops at Tournay. The next thing we shall do is to lay our dead comrade to rest, for we owe him all respect."

"To bury him at sea, sir?" asked Sam quietly.

"No," replied the chief, after a moment's thought. "He did not belong to the fleet, but to us. You are sailor as well as soldier, Sam, I know. But these are German waters, and I would wish to lay Hugh in British soil, with full honour."

"In England, sir?"

**NEXT
THURSDAY:**

"THE TERROR OF ST. JIM'S."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 107.
An Extra Long Tale of Tom Merry
& Co. By Martin Clifford.

"We cannot give up the time to go there; our services are needed at the front. Hugh's will be a soldier's burial, which cannot wait. But I brought him from home, and I feel I owe it him that he should lie in British soil. You know where it is to be found in Germany? In the little churchyards of the English churches. They are consecrated by an English bishop, and are British soil. We will lay poor Hugh in one of them, and then go on our way."

Sam nodded. For himself, he would as soon have been buried at sea, or in a soldier's trench; perhaps sooner. But he saw that Carfax felt deeply about it, and so he respected the feeling. He knew, too, that the Condor would do that as quickly as anything else, for her services were badly needed. They were all willing to do all possible honour to their dead messmate.

Carfax mounted the bridge, and started the Condor ahead. "At Hamburg and at Lubeck there are English churches," he said, "but those would hardly be—"

"There's one at a much smaller town, sir—Elmshorn, within a few miles of us," said Sam, "for I know the church and the English chaplain there. I was at school two years in Schleswig, you know."

"Then, there it shall be," said Carfax. "There is but one thing we must do first, and that is to report to the admiral. He has doubtless guessed the fate of the mine-ship, for he must have heard the explosion out at sea; but we're bound to let him know."

The Condor increased her speed, and flew over the Elbe mouth, and out to sea, reaching the fleet in a few minutes.

"Run out the Union Jack at half-mast, Sam," said Carfax.

The flag was hoisted out upon the horizontal signalling-bar that served the Condor as a mast, and, picking out the flag-ship, Carfax brought his vessel at once down abreast of her.

"You've done it, then?" hailed the admiral, who was waiting on the bridge.

"You will have no more trouble from the mines," replied Carfax. "The ship and her entire cargo are destroyed."

"Thank goodness!" exclaimed Sir Francis. "But your flag's half-masted, sir. Have you had any losses?"

"We have one killed and one wounded," said Carfax quietly. Then, saluting, he turned the Condor, and sent her skywards again, without waiting to hear thanks or congratulations. The aeroplane's crew were in no mood for them; the shadow of their comrade's death hung over them, and the wound was too fresh to stand being talked about.

"Take charge," said Carfax to Kenneth. "Keep her going south-east. We will go to Elmshorn at once."

He went into the deck-house, took out a fountain-pen and paper, and spent some minutes there.

"Will the chaplain agree, sir," asked Sam, when he returned, "at such short notice, and the rules—"

"I can't imagine his refusing, and we must find a way over all difficulties. Sam, you and I will have to be the mourners, and do everything. Stephen is not fit to go, and Kenneth must keep charge of the Condor. We cannot let her remain on the ground here in the heart of the enemy's country."

"Very good, sir."

"We shall have to land right at the chaplain's door with this sad burden of ours. Kenneth, you will then take the Condor right out of range again, clear away, so as not to draw attention to her. You will drop down, and take us up half an hour later at the little hill just to the east of Elmshorn."

"I'll do so," said Kenneth anxiously; "but won't you be running big risks down there, sir? Your landing is bound to be noticed, and you'll be at the mercy of—"

"In an errand like this," cut in Carfax, "I am confident we sha'n't be disturbed. Even the Germans must draw the line. But if it shouldn't be so, we are quite able to take care of ourselves. That's Elmshorn below us, isn't it? Which is the English church, Sam?"

The young scout, who remembered the place well, took his glasses and pointed it out. It was a small galvanised iron building, well outside the outskirts of the town. The little gabled house next it

was the chaplain's. There was a small graveyard with but three or four stones in it.

The Condor was at a great height, and these details were seen with the telescopes. Carfax had sewn poor Hugh's body into a sleeping-bag that served as shroud, and the remains were laid reverently on the deck, the flag still over them.

Sam wondered how Carfax would get over half a dozen difficulties that began to occur to him, but he had complete faith in his chief.

"Down with her! Right to the house," said the aeronaut quietly. And the Condor dropped out of the clouds, and alighted by the chaplain's very door.

The Last of Hugh.

The laying to rest of poor Hugh is soon told. Two or three Germans in the neighbourhood saw the Condor's descent, and bolted in a fright. The English chaplain came to his door in no less surprise.

He was a little, quiet-looking man, on whose hands idleness was hanging heavy, for the small British colony that lived near the place had all perforce left for the old country at the first outbreak of the war. The chaplain, refusing to leave his post, and protected by his cloth, stayed.

The arrival of the Condor startled him beyond words. He saw the great airship alight at his door, two of her crew lifted a heavy burden, across which lay the Union Jack, from off her decks, and laid it gently upon a rough wooden bench by the gate, where the chaplain was wont to sit in summer. Then the huge machine whirled away into the sky again, and sped out of sight, leaving the two visitors and their burden.

"Are you the English chaplain?" asked Carfax.

"I am," said the little man.

"Then, sir, I have a deep favour to ask of you. I am John Carfax, and that was my airship, the Condor. We have been in action with the Germans, and one of my crew, as gallant a youth as any who ever served me, was killed. Yonder is his body, and we beg you to perform the last rites for us. We wish him buried in consecrated ground, and on British soil, so we have come to you. We have to leave for the front in half an hour."

It took the chaplain some seconds to get over his amazement.

"I would serve you if I could, Mr. Carfax, but I don't see how it is to be done at such short notice. I have to inform the authorities, and then there are legal formalities. No clergyman can bury any person unless a death-certificate—"

"I have thought of that," said Carfax. "I am a qualified medical man, and here is a death-certificate I have drawn up. As to all the other details, please brush them aside. I ask you, in the name of Britain, whom we all three serve."

The chaplain hesitated.

"Both countries are under martial law," said Carfax, "and these formalities no longer count. You will not refuse your services for a lad who has died for his country's flag?"

"You are right," said the chaplain. "I should be a poor Christian to refuse. Give me one moment, and I will be with you."

"As to the grave," said Carfax, "if you will give us spades, Lieutenant Villiers and I will—"

"No need of that. There is a grave ready that was made many weeks ago, and stands open."

The chaplain went into his house, and came back very soon in his surplice. The two mourners bore the body into the little churchyard, and lowered it into the grave reverently.

The chaplain read the Burial Service, and, often as Sam had heard the words, they never sank into his heart as they did then.

Bare-headed, the two mourners stood by the grave, and a prayer was offered up for the comrade who had so often fought at their side, and who had given his life at last for the flag that covered him.

(Another long instalment of this thrilling story next Thursday.)

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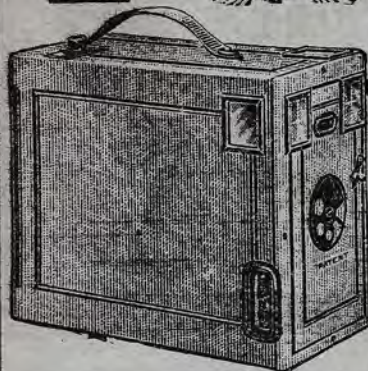
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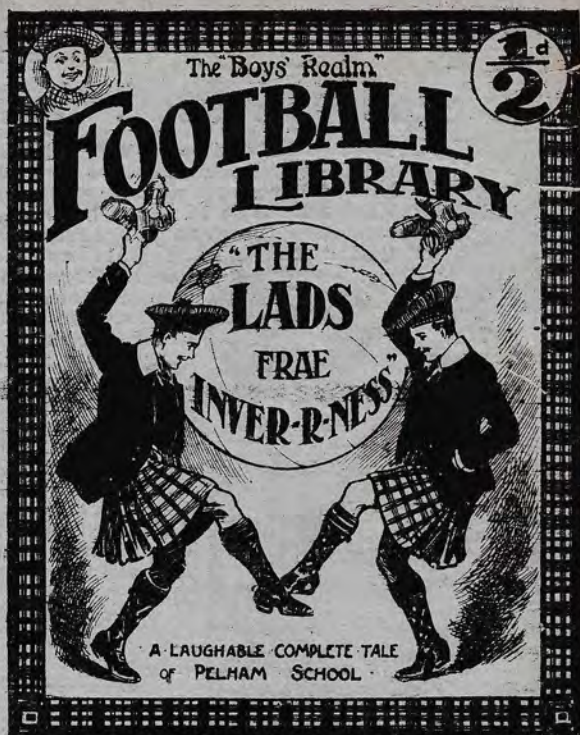
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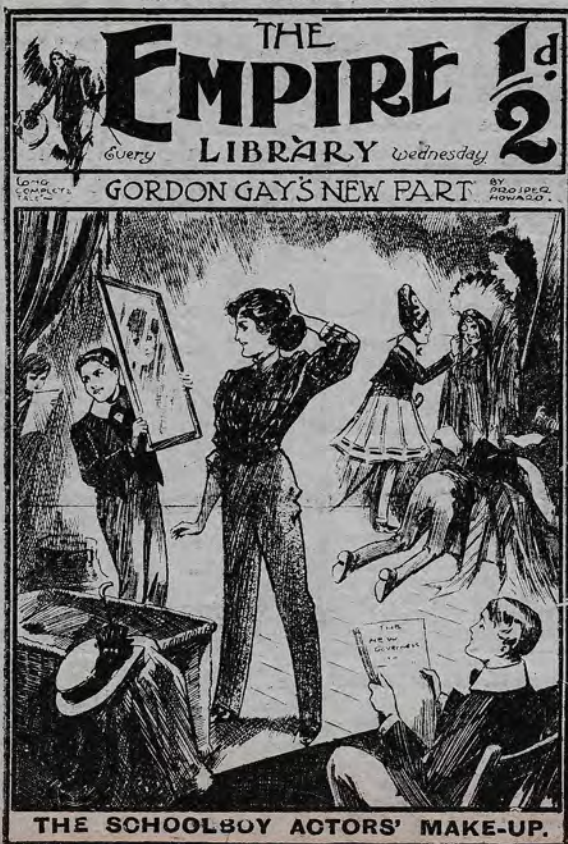
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