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A 26-PAGE ^{TALE} _{OF} TOM MERRY & CO.

The

GEM

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Tale

A Tale of the Terrible Three.

by
MARTIN
Clifford.



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THURSDAY



FIGGINS & CO.'S PLOT.

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

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

The School House Plot.

"[SAY, deah boys, we ought to be getting weady now!"
"Oh, do ring off, Gussy! You grow more like
some cackling, long-winded old hen every day!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"You do, Gussy!" declared Jack Blake, the chief of Study
No. 6. "You can take my word for it!"

"And mine also," said Herries.

"Not to mention mine likewise," added Digby.

"You see, you can take the words of all three of us,
Gussy," said Jack Blake. "I am surprised at you."

"Bai Jove, deah boy, what have I done?"

"Nothing but cackle like an old hen since tea, kid. What
we want you to do now is ring off."

"I wefuse to wif off."

"Try switching off instead, then. Doesn't make any
difference to us which it is, so long as you let us get on with
the washing. As I was saying, Digby, when that eight-
minute-motor gramophone Gussy began to cackle—"

"Weally, Blake, I do not wish to wow with you, as I
considah you one of my fwiends, but I must wefuse to be
chawactahwised in that extemely wough-and-weady
mannah. It is a mattah of personal dig. with me, so undah
the circs—"

"Yes, undah the circs., for goodness' sake dry up. You
don't know what might happen to you if you don't. As I
was saying, Dig., to-morrow is an afternoon simply made for
a jolly good fifty-five horse-power wheeze, and don't you
forget it!"

Digby grinned.

"Not much chance, kid. Fancy the old hot-water pipes
going wrong and getting us off maths. for to-morrow! Three
of the best for the hot water-pipes—"

"Digbay, deah boy, I must wequest you to allow me to
speak. I considah it w'etched bad form of you thwee to
monopolise the wotten convahsation in this mannah, how-
evah! I must insist on wepeatin' that it is time we got
weady for the masked fancy-dwess carnival on the wink—"

"Is that Gussy cackling again there?"

"Weally, Blake; I wathah think I was makin' a pwactical
obsahvation, deah boy."

"Well, drop making them, kid; we want to get on with
the washing."

"I must wefuse—"

"Are you going to ring off?"

"Blake, deah boy, I have wequested you on pwvious
ocasions—"

"Switch off, then. As I said before, we don't care which
it is so long as you stop cackling. Are you going to dry
up?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Then mind you do," returned Jack Blake quickly. "Now
fire ahead, kids, and work out some sort of a wheeze for a
rag on the New House to-morrow afternoon. I propose from
the chair that we spend the hour shifting old Figgins' furni-
ture into some other kid's room, and so on. Mix up all their
mouldy old sticks, I mean."

"Rotten!"

"Worse!"

Jack Blake stared at Herries and Digby in turns, then
smiled cheerily.

"Yes, it isn't much of a wheeze, is it? What's your idea,
then, Dig.?"

"My idea?"

"Yes, old kid; your idea."

"Well, you see— What's Herries' idea first, though?"

A DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

No. 109 (New Series.)

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"After you," said Herries pleasantly—"after you, Dig. You see—"

"Weally, deah boys, we must be gettin' weady, whatever we do! As a mattah of fact, that w'etched clock has wun down, and—"

"My—my hat!"

Jack Blake gasped loudly. Herries and Digby glanced at him, then they also gasped loudly.

"My only aunt!"

"Gussy—oh, Gussy!"

"Weally, Hewwies, deah boy, what is the mattah?" And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's, turned round hastily, an expression of surprise on his aristocratic features.

The surprise deepened. Not only was Jack Blake staring at him in shocked indignation, but Herries and Digby were looking at him in precisely the same manner.

"Bai Jove, deah boys, what is the mattah—"

"Gussy—oh, Gussy, how could you?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"And in his old age, too."

"Bai Jove, Hewwies, deah boy—"

"A backslider after the way in which we've brought him up! Gussy, how could you? Gussy a backslider!"

"Good gwacious, Digbay, what has happened? Is my necktie crooked?"

Jack Blake sighed.

"It's not your necktie that's crooked, Gussy," he said sadly; "it is you who are not straight. Who would have ever thought the one and only would break his word—would develop into a backslider of the first water?"

"Weally, Blake," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity, "I fail to compwchend your stwange language, but I must wefuse to be chawactahwised as a backslidah of the first watah, even in humouah. Pway cease wagging, and get weady foah the fancy dwess carnival on the wink, deah boys."

"He gave his solemn word—"

"Not to cackle—"

"And he has broken it," concluded Digby sadly. "Gussy has broken his solemn word not to cackle—Gussy! Oh, Gus!"

"Weally, Digbay—"

"And in his old age, too," said Herries—"that's what hurts me so! Steadfast in his youth, only to fail in the sere and yellow leaf, as it were!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"And I always looked upon Gussy as a man of honour—a silly ass, but an honourable silly ass."

"Weally, Blake—"

"You all heard him promise not to cackle again," went on Jack Blake, "and what is the result?"

"He has cackled!"

"Weally, pway listen—"

"And he is cackling now."

"Gussy—oh, Gus!"

Then Arthur Augustus made himself heard. For once in a way he did not mince matters, and what he said was to the point.

"I weward you all as wank outsidahs! I look upon Blake as a w'etched wabbit, and I no longer weward him as a fwiend! I considah wags in pwopah season as funnny in the extweme, but when a weally important mattah like dwessin' for a fancy dwess carnival has to be discussed, I wewet to say I fail to see the humouah! I weward you all as wottahs!" And Arthur Augustus retired behind a large screen which cut off a corner of the study.

Jack Blake grinned.

"Good; he's done cackling at last! Now to get on with the washing! Let's see, Digby was just going to give us his great idea for the fifty-five horse-power wheeze against Figgins & Co., weren't you, Dig?"

"Yes, fire ahead, Digby."

"Yes, rather—of course. Er—suppose we slip into the New House while the kids are still at mathis. and—and tie up all the study-doors?"

Digby spoke without conviction. He was half-conscious of the fact that his idea was not up to the standard.

Jack Blake did not leave him long in doubt about the matter.

"Good!" he said sarcastically. "Excellent! Or we might slip out into the quad. and make faces at them through the class-room window—it's on the ground floor! You frabjous idiot, Digby!"

"It's a better idea than yours, anyway, Blake."

"Ha, ha, ha! He's being funny now, like you, Gussy!"

Not a word came from behind the screen. Arthur Augustus was maintaining a dignified silence.

"Of course it is!" added Digby warmly. "Isn't my idea better than Blake's, Herries?"

Herries thought for a moment.

"No," he said, "it's worse, and Blake's was rotten. I say!"

Herries had jumped to his feet excitedly. The other two stared at him.

"What's up, kid?"

"Gone dotty?"

"My hat!"

"Where's your hat? What do you want it for? He must be going out to try and walk it off!"

"Don't goat, Blake!" exclaimed Herries breathlessly. "I believe I've got the very wheeze!"

Jack Blake and Digby looked more than doubtful. Herries took no notice.

"I believe I have, kids. What about Tom Merry's bottles of eucalyptus?"

"My aunt!"

"It's come at last. Lie flat on your back, Herries."

"Don't be an ass, Dig. I tell you this is a great idea. You knew Tom Merry had a few gallons of eucalyptus, didn't you?"

Jack Blake nodded.

"Of course I did, ass. Miss Priscilla sends him two bottles a week now they have a touch of the flu in the New House, and the smell of the stuff nearly kills the kid."

"He hasn't used it all, has he?"

"Not much. Hasn't used any, as far as I know. Keeps it corked up in his cupboard. Have you got the flu coming on, or something?"

"Of course not, ass!"

"I believe you have."

"He's got something which has already come on," said Digby. "Lie flat on your back, Herries."

"Silly ass—"

"Well, put your feet in hot mustard-and-water, then."

"I'll put my fist in your eye if you don't ring off! You know how touchy Figgins & Co. are about the flu, Blake?"

The chief of Study No. 6 grinned.

"Rather! You've only got to mention the word, and old Figgy's wig's as good as off! They've been giped a bit by our fellows ever since two of their House eleven had to stand down to have the giddy complaint, you know."

"Yes, I should think they have! And have you ever seen Figgins's face when he's run across a good whiff of eucalyptus?"

Jack Blake looked interested. He was beginning to understand.

"Can't say I have!" he exclaimed. "But I know for a fact that he nearly wrecked his own study trying to find a piece of blotting-paper which the matron had soaked in the oil and had put under his bookcase!"

"And Manners is as bad."

"Worse! He declares eucalyptus gives influenza instead of preventing it."

"Ha, ha, ha! And Lowther, too—they are all the same."

"So are most of the fellows, of course," put in Digby. "It's a smell enough to stop a clock. What—what are you driving at, Herries?"

"Why not fairly soak the New House with eucalyptus, you chaps?"

"My hat!"

Jack Blake jumped to his feet.

"The very thing, kid! I was just going to suggest it myself!"

"I don't think!"

"Then it's time you began—you're getting on now," observed Jack Blake. "My only aunt, we shall just have an hour clear to-morrow afternoon to fairly bathe the New House in the beastly stuff. Tom Merry'll be jolly glad to get rid of his eucalyptus, I can tell you! I'll slip along and tell him."

"Is there time?"

Jack Blake glanced at his wrist-watch and whistled.

"My aunt, no! It's six o'clock already, and I ordered the waggonette for a quarter-past! It'll take us an age to get dressed!"

"Wire in, then. We can tell Tom Merry on the rink."

"Yes, that's it! What—ho, within there! Where is our parcel of togs, Gussy?"

Not a word came from behind the screen. All three could hear Arthur Augustus moving about before his full-length glass, but not a word came in response to Jack Blake's shout.

Jack looked surprised.

"Is this our parcel on the table, Gussy?"

Still no answer. Then Jack Blake grinned.

"Hard cheese!" he said loudly. "Gussy must have gone."

Yes, this is our parcel all right, kids! Pity about Gussy having gone! The young ass is bound to get into trouble without us to look after him!

An indignant cough came through the screen, but the other chums of the Fourth took no notice of it. Digby winked solemnly to Jack Blake instead.

"Gussy always was off his rocker a bit, you chaps," he said.



"You have won the first prize, haven't you?" "Yaas, wathah!" replied Beau Brummel. "Here it is then, sir!" And the rink attendant thrust the flapping goose into the arms of the amazed swell of St. Jim's.

"He's been a trial to us one way and another. I sha'n't be sorry when he gets older."

Jack Blake sighed.

"He never will get older unless he keeps near us," he said sadly. "One of these days the youngster will find himself cut off in his youth—you see if he doesn't! Yes, that little lot is mine, Dig."

Another indignant cough came through the screen, but no other sound, so the three commenced to unfasten the large brown paper parcel in silence.

CHAPTER 2. Beau Brummel.

"MY hat! We've got enough stuff here to start an old clo' shop!" Jack Blake whistled in surprise.

The undoing of the brown-paper parcels certainly had flooded the floor with the most curious assortment of garments ever seen there, and curious garments had found a resting-place in Study No. 6 since the arrival of Arthur Augustus. But this time all records were beaten.

As Jack Blake had said, there were enough costumes in

the room to start a small shop, and in character they represented such widely separated periods as the Crusades and the most modern of modern pierrots.

"Jolly fine assortment, I call it!" said Digby. "There's a dozen costumes here for us to choose from. That's mine! Someone told me D'Arcy minor is going as a Red Indian."

"A Wed Indian! What a widiculous chawactah to go as, bai Jove!"

"Hallo! Did someone speak? Was it you, Herries?"

"No, Blake, old man."

"No, wathah not!" came the voice of Arthur Augustus again, from behind the screen. "It was I, deah boy!"

"There it is again!"

"Oh, it's only that ass, Binks, reciting from the latest doings of Deadly David. He is a silly ass, Binks."

"Weally, Blake, deah boy—"

Evidently something else attracted the attention of Arthur Augustus at that moment, for he did not complete his sentence, and silence reigned behind the screen once again. At the other side of the study there was anything but silence, Jack Blake's efforts to attire himself as a Crusader having its humorous side.

"You'd think he was trying to tie himself up in a knot,

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By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE ST. JIM'S SURPRISE."

wouldn't you, Dig?" chuckled Herries. "What's that teatray thing for, Blakey?"

"It's a shield, ass!"

"A shieldass, is it? Put a label on it, then, kid. Ha, ha, ha! Look at old Dig!"

"Well, what about him?" demanded Digby warmly, stopping in the middle of an exasperating attempt to fasten some buttons at the back of his neck. "If I looked the ass you do—What are you supposed to be, Herries?"

"A matador, of course!"

"Humph!"

"Anyone but an idiot would have seen at once that I was a matador. Bother the stud!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Herries also stopped fumbling at the back of his neck, and glared at Digby; then he turned away with a growl.

"You ought to have gone as a fool, Digby!" he growled. "You wouldn't have had to make up, then. Anyone got a pin?"

"No—"

Jack Blake stopped speaking, because a crash had sounded behind him. The big screen which had formed Arthur Augustus's dressing-room had toppled over. As a matter of fact, Arthur Augustus had pushed it over, because he had wished to descend to dramatic effect, for once in his life.

He stood now where the screen had been, smiling.

"I want your weal, candid opinions, deah boys. Do I look all wight?"

In truth, Jack Blake, Herries, and Digby had never seen anything quite like Arthur Augustus's costume before. It was Georgian in every detail, beautifully made of materials which would have caused Beau Brummel to sigh with envy.

Gussy had surpassed himself, and he knew it.

"Do I look all wight, deah boys?"

Then the other three recovered themselves. They carefully looked through Arthur Augustus instead of at him, then went on with their own make-up.

"Weally, Blake, deah boy—"

"I say, kids, we shall have to buck up. It must be getting on."

Digby glanced at his watch deliberately.

"Great Scott, it is, too! The 'bus ought to be at the gates by now."

"My hat!"

"Digbay, deah boy—"

"What's Tom Merry going as, Blake?"

"Sir Walter Raleigh, he said."

"Ha, ha, ha! He'll get lined for bringing tobacco into the country."

"Hewwies, deah boy—"

"What's Figgins going as, too?"

"Don't know; silly ass, I expect."

"Blake, deah boy, I considah it wank bad form—"

"My hat, look!" suddenly roared out Jack Blake, wheeling round. "A New House cad has drifted in!"

"My aunt, yes!"

"Out with the young ass!"

"Up guards, and at 'em!" shouted Digby, who was dressed as a midshipman in Nelson's time. "I mean, England expects every man to do his duty."

"Hooray!"

With a wild rush the three made for Arthur Augustus. Arthur Augustus gasped with horror.

"Bai Jove, what's the mattah, deah boys? Digbay, if you wumple my clothes, I shall have to administah a feahful thwashin'—I shall, weally!"

"What is it?"

"What's it supposed to be?"

"Beau Bwummel, Blake, deah boy."

"Brummel? I say, you chaps, Brummel of the Third is in here."

"Like a New House fag's cheek—"

"Turn him out!"

"Rather!"

"Weally, deah boys, I am not Bwummel of the Third—"

"Out with him!"

"Like a fag's cheek! Window or the door, Blake?"

"Window, of course!"

"Hooray! Come on, Brummel of the Third!"

"Don't be a sillay ass, Digbay, deah boy, and don't wot. I'm Beau Bwummel."

"He's stammering now."

"Bai Jove, Hewwies, I wathah think I have a weliabie tempah, but I should advise you not to wouse it. I should wegwet thwashin' you, but— Welease my collah!"

"Out with him!"

"Welinquish your gwasp of my collah, Hewwies!"

"Drop him on his head, so that he won't hurt himself," said Blake. "It's only a twenty-feet drop to the quad."

"Hewwies, I have wequested you to welease my collah."

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NEW STORY BOOK.

Bai Jove, put me down, you wottahs! I wefuse to wegard any of you wagging outsidahs as fwiends in the future. Dwop me!"

And instantly Jack Blake, Herries, and Digby obeyed. They had been carrying Arthur Augustus towards the window, but at his request to be dropped, he was dropped.

Arthur Augustus found himself on the hearth-rug, ruffled in clothing and in mind. Jack Blake and the others stood over him, expressions of intense amazement upon their faces.

"My hat, if it isn't old Gussy!" grinned Blake, after a bit. "Who would have thought it?"

"Poor old Gussy!"

"It is his own fault. Why did the young ass want to tell us he was Brummel of the New House Third?" demanded Digby sternly. "Gussy, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

Arthur Augustus got up, and screwed his monocle deeply into his left eye. Then he stared fixedly at Digby.

"I look upon you, Digby, as a wuff beast," he said coldly. "Blake I considah in the light of anothah wuff beast, and Hewwies I wefuse to considah at all."

"But you did tell us you were Brummel of the Third, Gussy, didn't you now?"

"Don't be widiculous, Blake! Is it likelay I should tell you I was Bwummel of the Third? I considah—"

"Anyway, it was all your fault, ass," said Jack Blake.

"Of course, we thought you must have gone out of the room when you wouldn't answer us."

"How could I have gone out of the woom when the doah is ovah there, Blake? You have put me all in a fluttah with your wuffness."

"Hard cheese, kid!"

"And in future I must wequest you to westwain ffrom startlin' me," went on Arthur Augustus coldly. "Pway heah me out, deah boys. I must wequest you not to startle me in that wotten mannah. In fact— Pway, Digbay, why are you laughing?"

"Laughing!" said Digby; and his face became very grave, indeed.

"And Blake. I fail to see what there is to laugh at, Blake."

"Ahem!"

"And Hewwies. Hewwies is gwinnin'—"

"Perhaps there is a fly on my nose," said Herries hastily. "You see—"

Then one of the most terrific roars ever heard in the study rang out behind Arthur Augustus. It even made Jack Blake start, and he had been expecting something startling for the last few moments.

The effect it had upon Arthur Augustus was tremendous.

He sprang in the air. He knocked a chair over, and stumbled across it. Then he caught sight of a Red Indian in full war-paint in the doorway.

"Cheer ho, Gus," said the cheery voice of D'Arcy minor, Gussy's younger brother. "What are you doing on the floor, kid?"

"Bai Jove! Gweat Scott!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Did—did you make that wotten wow, Wally?"

"Well, I called out a bit, Gus," grinned D'Arcy minor, "just to make you ring off gassing, and listen to me. Hope I didn't startle you. Oh, don't you begin, Gus!"

"Wally, come into the woom instantly!"

"Sorry, kid; haven't the time. That yahoo, Gibson, has lost his own mask, and has sneaked mine. I've lost Gibson now."

"Come into the woom, Wally, you young wascal! As an eldah bwothah, I have a wight to administah a feahful thwashing, though it will hurt me more than it will you."

"Yes, I expect it will, Gus!" grinned Wally. "But I've got to find a mask somewhere, so I can't stay talking to a parcel of old fogies all the evening. See you later, Gus, if I don't before. Oh, but I forgot! I came here to tell that your 'bus is at the gates, and that the driver is about fed-up with waiting. So long!"

"Wally—Wally, you young wascal!"

Arthur Augustus rushed for the door, flung it open, and gazed both ways down the corridor. D'Arcy minor was not to be seen in either direction.

The laughter of Jack Blake, Herries and Digby reminded Arthur Augustus that his dignity was suffering, so he came back into the study.

"Weally, Blake, I fail to see the humour of the young wagamuffin's w'etched twick!" he said loftily. "As you thwee were facin' the doah, you must have seen him come in, and as fwiends it was your dutay to warn me—"

"But we aren't your friends, Gussy; you said so yourself."

Arthur Augustus waved that point aside.

"Howevah," he said severely, "as an eldah bwothah, there it no othah course open to me but to administah a feahful

thwashin to Wally. I twust it will do him good. Bai Jove, I am all in a fluttah again!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Poor old Gus!"

"Suppose we cut the cackle, and get down to the 'bus?"

"Right-ho! Where are the masks?"

"In that papah parcel, deah boys. Ha, ha, ha! Bai Jove, you do look a sillay duffah, Blake, deah boy!"

"Do I?" said Jack Blake, without enthusiasm. "There are others."

"Yaas, wathah! Hewwies would waise laughtah in the dootah's pwivate woom."

"What's that, Gussy?"

"And Digbay, too. Ha, ha, ha! Yaas, wathah, Blake! There are othahs."

Jack Blake, Digby, and Herries stared solemnly at the swell of the School House, but there was not a vestige of a smile on Gussy's aristocratic features as he selected his mask. Jack Blake shrugged his shoulders at last with a chuckle.

"Sometimes the one and only isn't the dotter he looks," he remarked. "Still, hurry on with the washing, and don't forget to tackle Tom Merry about his eucalyptus."

"No, wathah not!"

"And keep the wheeze dark," added Jack Blake. "This ought to be the rag of the term if it's properly worked. Fit?"

Masks were hastily donned, light coats slipped over the fancy-dress costumes, and the four chums of Study No. 6 were ready for the masked carnival to be held on the Rylcombe rink that night.

CHAPTER 3.

Skimpole's Sword.

"MY hat! Doesn't it look ripping, you chaps?"

An elderly gentleman, of Shakespeare's time, was the speaker, and he was talking to an able-bodied seaman of the present day. The able-bodied seaman chuckled.

"Rather! Can't recognise a single kid, can you?"

"Not one! Ha, ha, ha! Doesn't Manners look a funny ass?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A pierrot with a beauty spot on each side of his chin, looked up.

"What price Lowther, then?"

"Twopence, I should say."

The able-bodied seaman tried to look indignant through someone's patent sunburn.

"Silly asses!"

"Let's see you do a giddy hornpipe on skates, Monty."

"Shiver my beasty timbers!" chuckled Tom Merry, the elderly gentleman of Shakespeare's time. "Yo-ho!"

Lowther did not answer. He finished putting on his skates in silence instead, then rose to his feet.

Monty Lowther was the humorist of the Shell, and he had a fine, cutting rejoinder for Tom Merry and Manners. Lowther had been thinking it out while fastening the straps of his skates, and he meant that rejoinder to be the last word. On account of this wish he skated slowly backwards from the annexe on to the rink, then he stopped.

"Thank goodness," he began, "I'm not—"

What he was not Lowther never explained. He fully intended doing so, but a voice interrupted him from behind.

"Move away, please! Dear me! There will be a collision! Move away—"

"Stop!" shouted Lowther. "Ass!"

"Dear me!"

And a general of the British Army came dashing up.

He was swaying about a little as though he were expecting a fall, then on he came. Lowther was guilty of a fatal hesitation.

He tried to go to the left, then at the last moment he changed his mind and decided to escape to the right. The consequence was, that he did not escape at all. The British general dashed into his chest. With a great effort Lowther managed to maintain his balance for a moment, then the general's sword got under his skates and he fell to the rink with a thud.

"O-oh!"

"Good gracious! Really, sir, I consider you ought to have got out of the way! Dear me, I believe I have broken my arm! Oh-h!"

Then the general wailed dismally. Someone coming up from behind, had skated over him, and had then fallen on his hands and knees. It was Napoleon. And he appeared more exasperated than after his other fall at Waterloo.

"Silly ass!" he cried, scrambling up. "Shrieking duffer!"

The general looked at him and blinked solemnly through an enormous pair of glasses which he wore outside his mask.

"Really, sir, you cannot imagine that I caused your fall

intentionally? Of course, as a sincere Socialist I have a perfect right to kneel down on the rink whenever I want to; in fact, I will go so far as to say that I have a perfect right to cause you to fall if it is for the common good that you should fall, and—"

"Oh, you have, have you?" cried Napoleon, better known at St. Jim's as Figgins, the leader of the New House juniors.

"Let me get at him!"

"Don't be absurd! Really, sir—"

Skimpole rose hastily to his feet. So did Figgins, and then his wrath overcame him. There was a distinct tear in his trouser-knee, caused by the general's sword, and for once in his life Figgins had wanted to take special care of his clothes.

Cousin Ethel would be on the rink before long, and there were some prizes offered by the management for the best costumes. Figgins did not mince matters.

"Let me slay Skimmy!" he said hastily. "Move out of the way, ass! Let me slay Skimmy!"

Lowther had also scrambled to his feet. He was hurt, and he glared at Skimpole.

Skimpole looked nervous, and began to skate away.

The other two skated after him, and Skimpole increased his pace. Probably there was no one in the rink less at home on roller-skating than Herbert Skimpole, the brainy man of the Shell; but he did not realise this. He tried a long, outside edge movement in the hope that a graceful swerve might help him to lose himself amongst the crowd.

Skimpole was unsuccessful. With the aid of considerable luck he succeeded in escaping a Swiss peasant doing the two step backwards, then his sword got between the ankles of a French refugee.

The French refugee uttered a cry and bumped his head on the rink.

"Take his sword from him—take his sword away!"

Figgins and Lowther were dodging in and out of the crowd like veterans, but they could not come up with Skimpole. However, Skimpole heard their voices, and became flustered.

"Dear me! How ridiculous all this is! I wonder whom it was I upset?"

The French refugee was on his feet again now, and seemed to have but one aim in the world—the capture of Skimpole and his sword.

In private life the French refugee was Clifton Dane, of Cornstalk & Co., and he rinked splendidly. With a quick turn he almost cut Skimpole off.

"Take his sword away!"

"Collar him!"

"My hat!"

Skimpole had seen his danger in a flash, and he also tried to turn. It was not a graceful movement, because it was only effected by a violent cannon off the back of a fifteenth century jester.

The jester's bells jingled loudly, then the jester himself brought up heavily against the wall, and gasped. The next moment he had joined in the Skimpole hunt.

"Take his sword away!"

"Now we've got him!"

"Look out, Skimmy!"

Skimpole was skating wildly round the rink, his arms flying out on both sides and his long sword clanking on the rink a yard or two behind him.

The rink was almost uncomfortably crowded; but in spite of that, Skimpole succeeded in scattering the skaters right and left.

Some fell of their own accord, a good many Skimpole bowled over, while a few escaped. The few who escaped laughed heartily, while those Skimpole had upset joined in the chase. In less than three minutes from Skimpole's first accident he had about twenty St. Jim's juniors skating after him.

Figgins was getting excited.

"Cousin Ethel will be here in a minute!" he panted to Lowther. "We must collar the young ass! He'll be the death of someone with the beasty sword!"

"Skimmy, take your sword off—"

"Don't be an idiot, Skimpole!"

"By Jove, everyone is laughing at us!"

Clifton Dane and his chum, Bernard Glyn, the jester, set their teeth. They knew Skimpole, and they knew Skimpole was dangerous on roller-skates even when unarmed. With a sword they preferred not to think of him.

The whole string of juniors rinked wildly after him.

Skimpole heard them coming, but he had set his hand to the plough.

"As a sincere Socialist I have a perfect right to wear a sword, when and where I please," he mused. "It is a matter of principle with me, and I shall refuse to unarm. Besides, my costume would be incomplete without a sword, and I might not win a prize."

"Collar him!"

"Stop him, Gussy!"

Beau Brummel started as he heard Jack Blake's voice, and turned gracefully with the slow waltz turn. Then he started again.

The spectacle of an excited general careering for him was unnerving.

"Stop him!"

"Take his sword away!"

"He'll kill someone before he's done!"

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Well, I nevah—"

"Dear me! Get out of the way, please! I am unable to stop! Dear me!"

And Skimpole dashed into Beau Brummel's chest at top-speed.

"O-h! Bai Jove! Gweat Scott!"

Arthur Augustus flung his arms round Skimpole's neck, and Skimpole clasped the swell of the School House round the waist, then they both fell in a heap. The St. Jim's juniors, and quite a crowd of other skaters, hurried up, laughing, Figgins to the fore.

"Ha, ha, ha! Well stopped, Gussy!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Well tackled, old man! You've got his sword, too!"

"Have I, weally?"

"Yes, rather! You're kneeling on it!"

"Gweat Scott!"

Arthur Augustus jumped to his feet and looked down. He certainly had been kneeling upon something which might have remotely resembled a sword in its prime. It was now in two pieces, and very much bent.

Skimpole also looked at it, then at Arthur Augustus.

"Dear me, D'Arcy, you have spoilt my sword! This is most unfortunate, because I was relying upon that sword to obtain one of the valuable prizes for me. I consider you have prevented my winning a valuable prize, D'Arcy."

"Bai Jove, deah boy! I hardly considah that sword would have got a pwize, Skimmay, deah boy!"

"You never know."

"No, you nevah know; but I hardly think it. Howevah, I shall insist upon wepaying you for the damage I have done. Yaas, Skimmay, I insist; I will not listen to a wefusal."

"I'm not going to refuse," said Skimpole. "I hired the sword specially to enable me to obtain one of the valuable prizes."

"Blessed bandit!" muttered Lowther, the humorist.

"Please don't interrupt, Lowther. Yes, D'Arcy, I hired the sword specially to complete my costume, and I certainly have no money to pay for the damage. Of course, as a sincere Socialist there is no need for me to pay for the damage, but—"

"But there would be wathah a w'etched wow if you didn't," chuckled Art'ur Augustus. "The mattah is settled, deah boy."

"Yes. But about the prizes. Without the sword I may only get second prize now."

"More likely get into trouble for being at large, kid!"

"Dear me, how senseless your remarks are this evening. Lowther. As a confirmed Socialist, D'Arcy, I suppose I cannot blame you for smashing my sword, if you wished to; but, on the other hand, I have a perfect right to demand the value of the first prize should I only succeed in obtaining the second without the sword. You understand that?"

"Bai Jove!"

"You do not? Well, if you will come to one of those seats with me I will explain my position," exclaimed the amateur Socialist of St. Jim's. "As a scion of the wretchedly degenerate aristocracy, I can scarcely expect you to understand the great truths of Socialism. You have been pandered to by a downtrodden democracy until it is doubtful whether you are sane; but grant all that—"

"Bai Jove, deah boy, I refuse to gwant it!" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "As a mattah of fact, I considah you in the light of an uttah duffah!"

"Ah! You would—"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy, I do. Pway excuse me, but I see Tom Mewwy, and I have some important information to give him. I may see you latah, Skimmay."

"No, don't go away."

But Arthur Augustus had gone, rinking gracefully towards Sir Walter Raleigh.

Skimpole looked after him in disgust, then he picked up the remains of his sword.

"How painfully dense these upper classes are," he mused. "How shockingly unintelligent. But wait until my great book on Socialism is published. They will have cause to tremble for their position, then. The lower classes will be enlightened at last, and the great revolt of intellect and labour against—against ermine will have started. Dear me!"

Someone had bumped into Skimpole, and his thread of thought was broken.

THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 109.

CHAPTER 4.

Sir Walter Raleigh.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS skated easily through the crowd, and slipped his arm through that of Walter Raleigh.

"Hallo, deah boy!"

"Hallo, Gussy!"

"Bai Jove! then you wecognise me?"

Sir Walter chuckled, and patted Arthur Augustus on the back.

"Yes, kid, you would want some disguising, and no mistake," he laughed. "What do you think of the turn out? Pretty decent, isn't it?"

"Yaas, wathah; and the valuable pwizes that are to be pwesented by the managah for the best costumes—they say they are wipping."

"What are they?"

"No one knows, deah boy. It's a secret, and no one will know until it has been decided which of us have the best costumes. We have all to wettire to the end of the wink then to weceive the pwizes, and they are to come as a wipping surprise."

"How do you know that they are ripping 'if you don't know what they are, ass?"

Arthur Augustus waved his hand.

"Of course, they are wipping. Field glasses, watches, perhaps a motah-bicycle. You nevah know."

"No, you don't, Gussy!" grinned Sir Walter. "Hallo! this is a two-step, and there's Cousin Ethel. Bother, Figgy is going to take her round."

"Yaas, wathah; twust that wottah Figgay. But nevah mind, deah boy, I will do the two-step with you."

Sir Walter grunted.

Arthur Augustus dropped into the graceful movement with the greatest of ease.

"Besides, deah boy," he went on, as they threaded their way in and out amongst the crowd, "I have somethin' of an important nature to tell you."

"Fire ahead, then. Hang Figgy!"

"Yaas, wathah—that is, wag him. Ha, ha, ha! It's about that I'm talkin', deah boy."

"Oh, you are, are you? Fire ahead, then."

"Yaas, wathah. You know Jack Blake?"

"Silly ass!"

"Weally, deah boy—"

"So you are!"

"Weally, deah boy, I must wequest you not to chawactah-wise me as a sillay ass."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Sir Walter began chuckling. Arthur Augustus looked at him coldly.

"I fail to see the humoah of the wemark," he said, with dignity. "It is widiculous of you to chawactah-wise me as a silly ass."

"Is it, kid? Fire ahead with your funny yarn."

"Yaas, wathah. You know Jack Blake—"

"Get on with it, duffer."

"Weally, deah boy, I am talkin' as wapidly as I can. You know Jack Blake? Bai Jove! but it wasn't Jack Blake's ideah at all now I come to think of it. Hewwies first brougth the mattah up. Howevah, do you want that beastly eucalyptus, deah boy?"

Sir Walter nearly fell in surprise. He slowed down, and looked at Arthur Augustus through his mask in amazement.

"Do you mind saying that again, Gussy?"

"Certainly, deah boy. You know Jack Blake—Hewwies, I mean—"

"Not that part, ass; about—about the eucalyptus."

"Yaas, wathah. Do you want it, deah boy?"

"Want what?"

"Gweat Scott! The eucalyptus."

"Of course, I don't want any of the beastly stuff."

"Wipping! I wathah thought you wouldn't want it, deah boy. Can we have it for a wag?"

"Have what?"

Arthur Augustus gasped.

"The eucalyptus. Bai Jove! I wegwet to say that you appeah remarkably dense to-night. Perhaps it's the heat of the woom. Howevah, may we come wound to your studay to-morrow aftahnoon and take the eucalyptus?"

Sir Walter flared up at that rather suddenly.

"Look here, Gussy, I'm not going to be ragged by you. If you want a thick ear—"

"Weally, deah boy, I am not waggin'."

"Then what the great Cesar are you cackling about?"

"I am not cackling. I wathah think I am not in the habit of cackling," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"Then what are you talking about, ass?"

"Your eucalyptus, deah boy?"

"What eucalyptus?"

"All those bottles Miss Pwiscilla sent you!" chuckled

Arthur Augustus. "Jack Blake says you have gallons of it. Yaas, weally."

Sir Walter started, looking at Arthur Augustus curiously.

"My—my only hat!"

"What's the mattah, deah boy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus looked surprised, then he suddenly lowered his voice.

"Pway keep it dark, Sir Walter, deah boy," he said cautiously, "but it's a wag we have up against the New House wottahs."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah. You know how watty Figgay and the othah outsiders get over influenza. It wiles them if you mention the word. Bai Jove!"

"Oh, does it?"

"Yaas, wathah. Haven't you noticed? Weally, deah boy, you are a back numbah, and no mistake. Figgay & Co. wave if the school dame brings eucalyptus near their wotten little studays, so Jack Blake thought—"

"It is about time he started, isn't it?" said Sir Walter sarcastically.

"I mean, Hewwies thought that it would be a jollay fine wag if we were to pour all your eucalyptus over their things—wegrulaly dwench the New House with the oil."

"My hat!"

Arthur Augustus chuckled.

"Wipping wheeze, isn't it, deah boy?" he said. "You know, the hot watah-pipes have to be wepaired to-morrow aftahnoon in the Fourth Form class-room, and so we are to miss maths. We decided that it would be a pittay to waste the time, and mean to wag the New House."

"I see."

"Yaas, wathah. I thought you would when I had explained. Now, about the eucalyptus, deah boy."

"What about it?"

"May we come to your woom while you are still at class for the wotten stuff?"

Sir Walter put the tip of his boot down on the rink, and brought himself and Gussy to a standstill.

"Gussy," he said solemnly, "you are welcome to all the eucalyptus I have in the giddy world."

"Bai Jove! that's wipping of you."

"Yes, isn't it, you shrieking duffer."

"Weally, Sir Walter—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What is the mattah? Bai Jove! Great Scott!"

For Sir Walter Raleigh had suddenly slipped his arm free, and was skating away at his very best. Arthur Augustus stood looking after him.

"Bai Jove! I considah it wathah bad form of Sir Walter to bweak off in the middle of a convahsation in that abwupt mannah," he mused. "I considah it wank bad form, as a mattah of fact. Howevah, it was wippin' of him to give us the eucalyptus, and perhaps he caught sight of Cousin Ethel, and that made him wun away. I shall wemonstwate with him when we meet latah, though."

For the present, Arthur Augustus had to be content with dismissing the matter from his mind because Sir Walter Raleigh was nowhere in sight.

Arthur Augustus went to look for Jack Blake instead.

CHAPTER 5.

The New House Plot.

"THANK you awfully, Cousin Ethel," said Figgins.

"It—it has been a ripping two-step,"

"Yes, hasn't it?" laughed the girl. "You rink much better than you did on the opening night of the rink. You remember?"

Figgins blushed. He could remember quite well—in fact, he never would forget how awkward he felt when he donned roller skates for the first time.

"But you have improved wonderfully," added Cousin Ethel graciously. "You rink nearly as well as Arthur, whom I see is coming for me for this waltz."

"May—may I take you round for the next two-step?"

"Perhaps," laughed Cousin Ethel. And she skated away to meet Arthur Augustus, her cousin.

Figgins was elated. He was not at all the type of fellow to think highly of his own achievements, but he certainly had managed to keep his end up, as he expressed it, in that two-step.

"If it hadn't been for that silly ass Skimpole, who bumped into us," he mused, "and that rotten patch of floor which made me slip, it would have been pretty nearly perfect. I've a good mind to speak to the floor manager about that patch of floor, and I shall slay Skimmy when I meet him. Hallo, there's Paine!"

Figgins started hastily after an elderly gentleman of the Shakespearean period, and thumped him on the bank.

"Cheer ho, kid."

"Silly ass!"

"Don't mention it!"

"But I do mention it!" exclaimed the elderly gentleman wrathfully. "If you are looking for a thick ear—"

"No, I'm looking for you."

"Well, now you've found me go back again to the beginners' annexe. You are dangerous in the open."

Figgins stared at the speaker in surprise.

"Getting funny in your old age, Paine?"

"I'm not."

"Trying to be funny, I mean— By Jove! you can hardly hear your own voice with that band doing the double at a drop three waltz. I say, I shall want some of you other Fourth-Formers to-morrow afternoon."

"Some of us—what?"

"Fourth-Formers and Third-Formers, too, if I can get 'em," returned Figgins, lowering his voice much as Arthur Augustus had lowered his when talking to Sir Walter Raleigh. "You've heard about the hot water-pipes, of course?"

"No, I haven't."

"My hat, when did you wake up, then?"

"Look here, kid—"

"Yes, I am looking there, and it's giving me a shock. But about the hot water-pipes. They are going to be repaired in the New House Fourth-Form class-room to-morrow afternoon, and that means we shall miss Latin."

"Lucky beggars!"

"Yes, but you will miss it—all us New House Fourth-Formers. Now, the point is, what shall we do during the hour?"

"Go in a home, some of us!" grinned the elderly gentleman. "Best place for some of us, I should say."

"I've told you about being funny before, Paine."

"I'm not."

"Dry up and listen," interrupted Figgins briefly.

"Kerr has painted some ripping posters, things to make you shriek. There's one where that cocky bird, Tom Merry, is shown fastened up to a dog kennel gnawing a bone, and I can tell you it's ripping. He's got Tom Merry's expression to a T."

"Humph! He'll get Tom Merry's fist to a T, too, one of these days."

"Yes, it will rile the School House youngster. Then, there's another poster with Jack Blake, Digby, and Tom Merry playing battledore and shuttlecock—that's a fair screamer. Ripping!"

"Is it?"

"Rather, but about the best is Tom Merry playing football against the New House. You'll die when you see that."

"So will Kerr," muttered the elderly gentleman. But the band was playing loudly now, and the noise of the roller-skates on the rink made anything but a loud remark inaudible. "We'll see."

"Yes, you will, to-morrow," went on Figgins, with a chuckle. "What I like about the footer cartoon is that Tom Merry is trying to score a goal for his side, and a New House fellow is stopping him. It's rippingly done. Tom Merry is a miserable little weed, who looks as if he's on the verge of snapping in half in the middle, and the New House bird is a fine hefty chap, about four-stone heavier. Then, like an ass, Kerr went and spoilt the whole thing by painting his own name under the fine New House kid. Swank, I call that myself."

"Do you," said the elderly gentleman tensely.

"Yes, I do; but it will rile the School House kids no end, and that's all we want. You see the idea, of course?"

"I see a silly ass who is—"

"I don't want to use force, Paine, but I've told you not to be funny twice now," said Figgins pointedly. "Dry up and listen. At half-past three all we Fourth-Formers will be free. Well, if about half a dozen of us slip across into the School House, we ought to be able to jolly well cover their miserable little dens with the posters. Kerr has quite a dozen done, and, of course, it's only Tom Merry's den and Study No. 6 we need think of. The others won't matter."

"Oh, won't they? What are you going to do to Tom Merry's room, kid?"

"Plaster his rotten pig-sty until it looks like an election hoarding in a fit," said Figgins promptly. "Can I rely upon you being there?"

The elderly gentleman of Shakespeare's time started.

"Oh, yes; you can rely upon me being there!" he said.

"You can rely upon that if there are earthquakes!"

"That's the spirit! I didn't think you had it in you, kid!"

"Didn't you?"

"No. But you must admit—even a peaceful man like you must admit that—it's time that cheeky bird, Tom Merry, was ragged. In a way he isn't a bad youngster for a School

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 109.

House outside, but the taint is there. Blake has it as well, and so has Digby and Herries. It comes of living in such a rotten House, I suppose. But you will be there, kid?"

"I will!"

"At three-thirty sharp—at the communicating door, say?"

"No; I'll be in Tom Merry's study."

"Is that safe?"

"I think it'll be safe for me," said the elderly Elizabethan, with a chuckle. "The point is, will it be safe for you?"

"Of course; trust me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The elderly gentleman chuckled loudly. Figgins looked at him in surprise.

"Blest if I can see what there is to laugh at!"

"My hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, Paine—"

"My only hat's aunt—I mean, my only aunt's hat!"

"You are a silly ass, Paine!"

"Am I? Ha, ha, ha! I'm sorry, Figgins, but—"

"Oh, don't apologise!" said Figgins coldly. "I don't mind your making an ass of yourself if you want to!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho!"

"Frabjous lunatic!"

"Ha, ha! My—my hat?"

"Shrieking duffer!" growled Figgins. "I always suspected you were on the verge of going off your rocker! You'd better not turn up to-morrow if you're going to cackle like an old hen or Gussy!"

The elderly gentleman became serious at once.

"At three-thirty," he said solemnly.

"That's the time I said, ass!" growled Figgins. "I'd go in a home, if I were you, Paine!"

And the leader of the New House juniors skated away indignantly. The elderly gentleman stayed where he was, and chuckled until his sides must have ached, then suddenly the band stopped playing.

At exactly the same moment the elderly gentleman ceased chuckling.

"My hat!" he gasped. "I forgot!"

And he skated excitedly after Able-bodied Seaman Lowther.

"Seen Blake, Monty?"

"Hallo, Merry! What's up, kid?"

"Never mind now! Seen Jack Blake?"

"Don't know! Don't know what the kid is dressed as!"

"My hat!" exclaimed the elderly gentleman, who possessed the name of Tom Merry at St. Jim's. "Neither do I!"

"No one outside their own set does, I should say," laughed Lowther. "They've kept their costumes a dead secret all through. After the prizes, I expect."

"By Jove! Well, I must find Blakey somehow, if I have to tackle everyone on the rink! See you later!"

And Tom Merry skated away, much to Lowther's astonishment.

CHAPTER 6.

The Silence of Arthur Augustus.

"SEEN Blake, old man?"

"Seen Blake! And who may Blake be, pray?" answered a stout individual pleasantly. "Blake?" Tom Merry went red.

"I am sorry, sir!" he hastened to apologise. "I mistook you for someone I know named Fatty—named Wynn!"

"Ha, ha, ha! It certainly is like looking for a needle in a haystack to attempt to find anyone to-night, isn't it?" laughed the stout individual.

"It is, sir! I must find Blake, my friend! Seen Blake, old man?"

A Dutchman stopped and chuckled.

"I have, kid!"

Tom Merry sighed with relief.

"Good! I've been looking all over the place for the young ass!"

"Have you, really?" said Harry Noble, chief of Cornstalk & Co. sympathetically. "Why didn't you come to me before?"

"Silly ass! Where is Blake? It's most important! Where is the kid?"

"I don't know!"

Tom Merry stared at the young Australian.

"You said you had seen him!"

"And so I have, old man—in his study at the interval this morning! Haven't seen him since! Sorry I can't stop!"

"Ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Frabjous idiot!" muttered Tom Merry. "I suppose it was that beggar Noble! Seen Blake, Skimpole?"

Skimpole stopped, not by any of the approved methods, but by the simple expedient of running into another skater's

back. Skimpole always apologised afterwards, but, as he explained, what could he do?

"You called me," he explained to Tom Merry, "and as a sincere Socialist I must always be willing to oblige my fellow-creatures, however much lower down in the intellectual scale they may happen to be—"

"Dry up for a moment, for goodness' sake, and listen!"

"Please allow me to explain my position!" interrupted Skimpole severely. "I should not like you, whoever you may be, to go away with the idea that I am not justified in stopping in the way I do. I am a Socialist, therefore, I have a perfect right to run into the back of anyone if it is necessary for my welfare that I should do so. You follow me?"

Tom Merry looked at the brainy man of the Shell in amazement.

Skimpole had moods, and they were all wild moods. He was clever, there could be no doubt about that; but he was fearfully apt to allow things to get out of focus, even in calm moments.

Now, when the excitement of maintaining his balance was added to his troubles, he was not minding matters at all in the way of wildness.

"Whoever you may be, a scion of some bloated, money-maddened aristocratic family, like my friend D'Arcy, or a horny-handed son of toil, like a bargee I once knew—dear me, how difficult it is for one to keep one's balance!—like a bargee I once knew—"

"Ring off, Skimmy, if you don't want to be bumped. Have you seen—"

"Whoever you are, it does not matter to me! I will go as far as to say, even—"

"Have you seen Blake?" almost shouted Tom Merry, for the band had started again.

"Have I seen Blake?"

"Yes, ass! Jack Blake—B-l-a-k-e!"

"Dear me! I am quite aware of the way in which he spells his name! No; I do not think I have seen Blake!"

"Silly ass! Are you certain you haven't seen him?"

"Certain! How can I be certain of anything? Is it possible for anyone to be certain of anything? Could I be certain that you are now standing before me? No!"

"Shrieking duffer!" growled Tom Merry, wheeling round.

"I—"

Skimpole clutched his sleeve.

"A moment, please, whoever you are! Have you seen the other half of my sword?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, I fail to see what there is to laugh at!" said Skimpole severely. "Through an accident, my sword was broken, and although I have been able to recover the handle portion from the floor-manager, the blade is missing. There are valuable prizes to be awarded this evening, and I feel that my costume is incomplete without the other half of my sword. If you have found my missing property, I demand its return instantly."

"I haven't got your giddy sword, ass!"

"Can I believe you?"

"You'll get a thick ear if you don't!" said Tom Merry. "I believe you are getting worse, Skimmy; I do, really!"

He skated away, and Skimpole stood looking after him in surprise.

"Dear me, I believe it was a St. Jim's junior," he mused; "I am almost certain it was! Humph! I wonder if that old gentleman over there has my sword?"

Tom Merry skated about in desperation. It seemed hopeless work trying to find anyone amongst the throng.

Skimpole he had recognised instantly, and there was no mistaking Fatty Wynn when once seen; but it was a different matter with a fellow like Jack Blake.

"I may have passed the young ass a dozen times!" muttered Tom Merry. "I wonder if that old salt is he? My hat!"

Someone had bumped into him violently, and it was a moment or two before he could recover his balance.

"Bai Jove, I am awfully sorry, deah boy, but I was skatin' backwards!"

"Gussy!"

"Bai Jove! You recognise me, then?"

"My only hat, yes!"

"You surprise me, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "Do you know, I wathah flattahed myself that no one would recognise me? What do you think of my wig-out?"

"Rotten—I mean, ripping!"

"Weally, deah boy! I believe it's Tom Mewwy?"

"Right for once, kid! But have you seen—"

"Bai Jove, I don't wish to throw cold watah on your evenin', but I must say I considah your wig-out as nothin' to wave about! What do you wepewent, deah boy?"

"Not a silly ass, like some people!" said Tom Merry



"Dear me!" gasped Skimpole. "How ridiculous all this is I wonder whom it was I upset"

aggressively. "Of all the freaks— But never mind about that! Have you seen Blake?"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"

"Where is he?"

"Weally, I cannot say! Winking wapidly wound the big wink, I think!"

"Well, what is he dressed as, then?"

"Weally, Mewwy, I am surprisid at your question!" said Arthur Augustus loftily. "I wegwet to say that I cannot tell you what my fwiend Jack Blake is dwessed as. It is a secwet, deah boy!"

"Don't be an ass!"

"Weally, Mewwy, I have wequested you befoah not to address me in that extwemely wough-and-weady mannah!"

"Idiot! I tell you I must see Jack Blake at once! What is he—a Red Indian?"

"No, deah boy; he is not a Wed Indian! Fourth-Formahs do not dwess as Wed Indians, as a wule!"

"What is he, then?" almost shouted Tom Merry. "I tell you it's most important business—something that'll have to be jolly carefully worked!"

Arthur Augustus started.

"Bai Jove, is that so, deah boy?"

"Of course it's so, you young ass!"

"Then I wegard your lookin' for Jack Blake as unneces-sawy, deah boy," returned Arthur Augustus promptly. "If the biznay is weally important, I do not considah my fwiend Blake as the pwopah person to go to. If you will confide in me, Mewwy, I will put the mattah stwaight instantly!"

"Hopeless ass! I tell you I must see Blake!"

"There is no need, deah boy; I am weady to help you! Pway what has happened?"

"You won't do, old man!" almost pleaded the hero of the Shell. "I must see Blake! Come on, Gussy, what is he dressed as?"

"Weally, Mewwy, I am surprisid at your repeating the question! I have already informed you that Blake's attiah is a secwet!"

"Yes, I know, in the ordinary way; but it doesn't matter now, because they will be awarding the prizes in a few minutes. Besides, Blake would be the first to want to see me!"

Arthur Augustus performed a graceful movement on the front rollers of his skates.

"I wegwet to have to wefuse, deah boy," he said coolly; "but you see my posish. I have given my word not to tell what any of the Studay Numbah Six fellows are dwessed as; it was a solemn pwomise we made to each othah!"

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By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE ST. JIM'S SURPRISE."

"Yes, but—"

"And nothin' you can say will altah my determination, Mewwy!" added Arthur Augustus. "I wegwet havin' to wefuse, but you undahstand—a mattah of personal honouah, deah boy!"

"You shrieking, hopeless lunatic, Gussy!"

"Weally, deah boy—"

"You frabjous, utter ass!"

"Bai Jove, Mewwy—"

"You unspeakable, howling duffer!"

"Gweat Scott, Mewwy—"

"Oh, go in a home!" finished Tom Merry, and he skated off indignantly.

But how was he to find Jack Blake? It would never do to tell Gussy, for, although he was one of the best-meaning fellows in the world, he had a decided propensity for letting state secrets out.

"No, Gussy won't do!" decided Tom Merry. "Blake is the man, but how on earth am I to find him? My hat, though, I shall see him all right when we all get back to the coll. to-night! I can slip across to the Fourth Form dormitory if necessary. What an ass I was not to think of that before!"

And as there appeared to be no one on the rink remotely resembling the chief of Study No. 6, Tom Merry decided he might as well give up the search.

CHAPTER 7.

Skimpole Obtains a Sword.

"**B**AI Jove, Digbay, deah boy, what are they winging that bell foah?"

"To clear the floor, of course."

"Yaas, wathah. But why?"

"Ask me another," grinned Digby. "Perhaps they are going to announce 'Silly asses only,' and so you'll have the floor to yourself, Gussy. You need one to yourself, and no mistake."

"Don't be widiculous, Digbay, deah boy. Your wibald remarks are anythin' but funny, and— Bai Jove!"

"Hallo! What are they doing with that notice-board?"

"Standin' it up on the top of a pair of steps, deah boy."

"Ass—I mean, can you see what's written on it?"

"Yaas, wathah! 'Only skatahs competin' foah the pwizes to use the floah.'"

"So it is. Where's Blake?"

"Here, kid."

"And Hewwies," added Arthur Augustus. "Let's keep togethah, although I am wathah afwaid my wig-out will put your costumes in the shade."

"Yes, if it doesn't put you in an asylum first, kid," laughed Blake. "By the look of it, everyone on the rink is competing for the prizes. What's Skimpole doing?"

"I wathah think he's twying to stand up, deah boy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's up to something," grinned Digby. "He's prowling round after something."

"Looks like it. My hat!"

Skimpole certainly seemed to have some fixed plan in view, and his plan appeared to be connected in some way with three juniors who were standing in a group together.

One of these youngsters was an able-bodied seaman who had just come from the cloak-room, bringing with him a cutlass which he had deposited there a couple of hours before.

Skimpole circled slowly round the three, then suddenly darted in and snatched the cutlass from the able-bodied seaman.

"I have need of this to complete my attire," he said hastily. "I am sorry to have to take it, but as a sincere Socialist, I have, of course, as much right to it as you have."

"My aunt!" gasped the able-bodied seaman, and he made a violent grab at Skimpole.

Skimpole escaped, and Lowther A.B. dashed after him.

"Dear me!" gasped Skimpole. "I have done nothing this evening but skate away from anti-Socialists! It is most exasperating. Your name is D'Arcy, is it not?"

"Hah, hah, hah! Yaas, deah boy."

"Then I demand your protection from the anti-Socialist who is coming after me!" gasped Skimpole. "I demand it as a common right. Under the socialistic regime, protection will be mutual, and, therefore, common. Dear me!"

"Collar him!" shouted Lowther, for he had to shout now that the band had started again, in order to make himself heard. "Collar him, you chaps!"

Skimpole glanced round hastily. He had demanded protection, and Arthur Augustus had not refused it, and yet the brainy man of the Shell was not satisfied.

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Even if he were willing, was it in Arthur Augustus's power to protect him from the enraged able-bodied seaman? Skimpole thought it was not.

"Dear me!" he murmured. "I think I had better go. This is really very absurd of the gentleman dressed as a sailor."

"Stop him! Collar him, Gussy, you ass!"

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Collar him, ass!"

"Wight-ho!"

"Please do not do anything so ridiculous!" exclaimed Skimpole. "I have as much right to the weapon as he has; more, because I require it more."

"Bai Jove! I fail to see how you can pwove that, deah boy."

"Of course, you can prove nothing. Dear me!"

Skimpole dashed across the room, caused a little local excitement amongst a group of skaters who were talking, then disappeared in the crowd which had taken the floor again. Lowther went after him, his teeth gritted.

"I'll have that cutlass, or else there'll be pieces of a slain Skimpole for the skate-boys to sweep up," he growled.

"Stop him, you chaps—stop Skimpole!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to 'ha, ha, ha' about, Merry, you ass. I tell you, there he is!"

Lowther spun round, and darted for Skimpole. Skimpole darted away, but he was very flustered. He bumped into a French refugee and clung to him.

"What is your name, sir?"

"Dane, you ass!"

"Ah, Clifton Dane! Well, Dane, I demand your protection. I—"

But again Skimpole decided not to put his trust in others. He skated away at his best.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Dane. "Of all the freaks Skimmie is the outside edge. Come on, you fellows!"

And Cornstalk & Co. joined in the second Skimpole hunt of the evening.

Other St. Jim's juniors joined them, led by the angry humorist of the Shell. Skimpole became pessimistic.

"I shall be caught!" he gasped. "I feel certain I shall be caught!"

"Close in on him!"

"Now we have the young ass!"

"He oughtn't to be allowed on a rink."

"He'll have someone's head off with that cutlass in a minute!" gasped Lowther, straining every muscle, despite the floor-manager's remark about exceeding the speed limit. "I'm going to collar him if it snows eggs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Then something happened which none of them could have foreseen. Skimpole dropped the cutlass.

He had not had time to fasten it to his uniform, and a sudden swerve caused him to stagger. In the excitement of the moment he dropped the weapon.

"Look out!"

"My—my hat!"

Then Lowther tripped up over his own cutlass.

Clifton Dane was behind him, and tried to step over the Shell fellow's prostrate form. He failed, because Arthur Augustus skated into him when he was on one foot.

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jack Blake managed to steer round the three juniors, and roared with laughter. Digby also chuckled until he caught his skate against Arthur Augustus, and was neatly tripped. Then Digby's sense of humour became clouded.

"Silly ass, Gussy!"

"Bai Jove! Gweat Scott!"

"Shrieking idiot! What did you want to put your foot out like a—a beastly daddy longlegs for?"

"Weally, deah boy, I must wquest you not to considah me in the same bweath as a dadday longlegs. I wefuse—"

"Get off! Someone, gerroff me!"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy. What a wotten— Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus broke off suddenly.

Standing before them was the pretty figure of a girl of about his own age, dressed tastefully as an Italian peasant girl. It was Cousin Ethel, the girl chum of all the St. Jim's chums.

"Steaday, deah boys!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Cousin Ethel is heah!"

Instantly there was silence. Figgins, who had been laughing with the others, felt himself colour. He could feel for his School House rivals lying in a heap on the rink right in front of Cousin Ethel.

Lowther sat up and tried to get up. He failed, because Arthur Augustus happened to be reclining on one of his

legs. Digby was sitting on Arthur Augustus, and so held the key of the position, but Digby's skate had come off.

"Good gracious, what are you three boys doing?" exclaimed Cousin Ethel very gravely. "Arthur, whatever are you doing?"

"T-tying to wise to my feet, Ethel."

"Yes, I notice you are trying," laughed the girl; "but you don't appear to be succeeding very rapidly." "No, Digbay won't wemove himself off my w'etched knee—Bai Jove, that's bettah!"

The three hastily scrambled to their feet, somewhat ruffled, and Cousin Ethel laughed heartily. Arthur Augustus viewed himself in dismay.

"I weally fail to see where the humouah comes in, Ethel; my hair is wuffed, and my clothes are wumped feahfully!"

"Look at my cutlass!" murmured Lowther.

"Bai Jove! Is that your cutlass, deah boy?"

"Looks more like a tin-opener now, doesn't it?" grinned Lowther, who could see the humorous side of every situation. "Skimpy is hard on swords and cutlasses this evening."

"Hah, hah, hah! Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, you shouldn't have all skated after the poor boy," said Cousin Ethel severely. "It was enough to make him drop the weapon. I considah you are principally to blame, Arthur."

"Bai Jove!"

"And in a lesser degree, Lowther."

"My hat!"

"And Digby, of course, is partly at fault."

"Phew!"

"In fact," went on Cousin Ethel, "there isn't much to choose between any of you as to which is to blame. My sympathies are entirely with Skimpole."

The three gasped. Cousin Ethel looked so grave that they really thought she meant it.

"Yes, but I haven't followed you all round the rink to tell you that," the girl went on, before any of them could speak. "I have something else to tell you."

"Fiah ahead, deah gal!"

"Yes, rather! What is it, Cousin Ethel?"

"Humph! I have half a mind not to tell you now."

"Why not use the other half?" murmured Lowther. "I mean—"

But Cousin Ethel only laughed again.

"Well, I will tell you," she said, "although you do not deserve it. Let me see; I am afraid I cannot remember all your names."

"Bai Jove, Ethel!"

"Oh, Cousin Ethel!"

"I will try, then. The Study No. 6 chums; the Terrible Three, who are only terrible in their own estimation—s-sh!—Lowther, and Figgins & Co., are all to come to the Elms to a big party."

"The Elms!"

"Major Pearson's mansion?"

"Yes; I am staying there, you know."

"Are you weally, bai Jove?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"I was undah the impresson you were staying with your bwothah at Cleveland Lodge."

"Well, I am staying there as well; I mean, I am really staying with my brother, but we are all at the Elms for a house-party, and there is to be a splendid party in a day or two, and I am inviting you to that."

"Bai Jove! I considah that wippin' of you, Ethel."

"Yes, rather!"

"We shall have to drive over; it must be twenty miles."

"Vewwy neahly. We will have a coach and foah, deah boys."

Cousin Ethel smiled.

"You can drive over in what you like as long as you come," she said. "Can you accept for all of you, Arthur?"

"Yaas, wathah; I don't think there will be many to drop out, deah gal. Hah, hah, hah!"

"When is the party, Cousin Ethel?"

"Yaas, wathah; I almost forgot. When is the partay, deah gal?"

"Well, that is a point which is not quite settled yet," answered Cousin Ethel. "It will be in a day or two, but I shall have to write to Arthur which day."

"Yaas, wathah; you can twust me."

"We'll see he doesn't lose the letter," grinned Lowthah.

"Weally, Montay, deah boy, I hardly think I am in the habit of losin' my cousin's lettahs."

"Oh, there's no telling with you, Gussy. It's awfully kind of you, Cousin Ethel."

"Yes, I know it is," said their girl chum coolly. "A lot of schoolboys will be dreadfully in the way, but it won't be

for long, thank goodness. Now I must go and see the prizes awarded."

"Yaas, wathah! I am goin' to see the pwizes awarded myself. As a mattah of fact, I wathah think—"

"What do you think, Gussy?"

"Oh, nothin', Digbay, deah boy!"

"I should think not in that rig-out."

"Not likely."

"Oh, I see where the trouble is!" said Cousin Ethel.

"You all think you are going to win the first prizes."

"Well, weally any unprejudiced person—"

"As you say, any unprejudiced person—"

"Exactly; any unprejudiced person—"

"Have you seen the prizes?" suddenly asked Cousin Ethel.

"No, not yet, but I undahstand they are wippin' in the extweme. Someone said somethin' about motah-bicycles and watches. You nevah know with the Amewican people; they are so remarkably go ahead."

"Yes, they are, aren't they?" exclaimed Cousin Ethel.

"I hope you all win first prizes"

And she skated away without another word.

CHAPTER 8.

The Prize Winners.

"DO you know, Digbay, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully as the Fourth-Formers rinked across the room to join Herries—"do you know, I wathah think Cousin Ethel was stwuck with my wig-out, but in her usual wippin' way twied to wag me about it."

"Do you?" said Digby.

"Yaas, wathah! Her laugh wasn't a weal laugh. I feel certain she was stwuck with my wig-out; and as I considah Cousin Ethel has wippin' taste for a gal, I wathah think there isn't any doubt whatevnh as to who will wun off with the first pwize."

"We shall see," said Digby meaningly. "Here's Herries!"

"Yaas, wathah! Hewwies, deah boy, Cousin Ethel has just pwactically said my wig-out is the best on the wink."

"I don't think!"

"Weally, Blake, deah boy—"

"Well, I don't, and neither did Cousin Ethel."

"Not in actual phwasin', perhaps, but her mannah—"

"Oh, do ring off, Gussy!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "Here comes the prize committee."

"Yaas, wathah! What do we do now, deah boys?"

"Rink round with the others slowly, of course. The committee will stand in the middle and give the winners tickets."

"Yes, that's it; a bit like a sheep fair in a way."

"Weally, Hewwies, I fail to see the resemblance, deah boy."

"Look in the glass, then, kid."

"Weally, Hewwies— Bai Jove!"

The chums of Study No. 6 had just completed their second circle of the ring of skaters, and the attendant who had the bundle of tickets in his hand was rinking straight for them.

Arthur Augustus jammed the tip of his boot down on the floor, and hastily dusted his perfectly dustless sleeve.

"Bai Jove!"

"My hat, he's coming for us, you chaps!"

"Yaas, wathah! Am I all wight, deah boys?"

"Get out of the daylight, Gussy; it's me he is looking at."

"Don't be widiculous, deah boy! Bai Jove!"

The floor attendant was up with the four now, and he stopped dead.

"A first prize," he said, handing Arthur Augustus a blue ticket.

"Bai Jove! This is wippin'! What did I tell you, deah boys?"

Arthur Augustus was visibly excited.

The spirit of competition had been present in his breast ever since he had heard that prizes were to be given for the best costume. As a member of the School House Fourth Form he had felt that it was up against him to beat both the New House juniors' and the Shell fellows, and so he had spared no expense.

His costume had left very little change out of a five-pound note, but the swell of St. Jim's did not begrudge that.

Besides, how did he know that the first prize wasn't a motor-cycle?

"As a mattah of fact, I weally believe it is, deah boy," he whispered to Jack Blake, as the man with the tickets consulted a list of names he had. "We will have a wippin' wun wound, Blake, deah boy, because I intend to buy a side-car."

"A second prize!" said the attendant, handing Jack Blake a green ticket.

"Good!"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy! Allow me to offah my congrats."

"And two third prizes for you other young gentlemen," laughed the attendant, handing Digby and Herries red tickets. "If you are from St. Jim's, you haven't done badly."

"No wathah not. I considah we have done wippingly, although I say it. Have any of the other juniors fwom our school won pwizes?"

"N-o. Oh, yes; a young gentleman with glasses dressed as a general."

"Skimpole!"

"Good old Skimmay, bai Jove!"

"Do you know where he is?"

"Yaas, wathah; ovah there, deah boy. He's coming this way now."

"So he is," laughed the attendant. "His costume is better than his skating. Steady, sir!"

"Dear me, yes! I think I must have a wretched pair of skates on!" gasped Skimpole, colliding with Jack Blake.

"Are you the man who is giving the prize tickets out?"

"Yes, and—"

"Then I must request you to examine my costume," said Skimpole. "Pray do not leave go of my arm, Blake! I am a British general, although the profession of arms does not appeal to me in any way, being a Socialist. Still—"

"You have a third prize to come, sir"

"Dear me, have I really? This is very creditable of the judges. Dear me!"

Skimpole was becoming more and more flustered.

"Do stand up, ass!" growled Jack Blake. "I shall have a broken arm to swank with in a sling in a minute. Stand up, ass!"

"Yes, of course. What is the prize I have won?"

"Ah, that's a secret, sir!" laughed the floor attendant. "You will know in a minute or two."

"Well, if it's a motor-cycle, as someone said it was," declared Skimpole, as the attendant skated away. "I shall sell it to help on the work of publishing my great work on Socialism."

"It isn't a motah-cycle, deah boy, because the first pwize is that," said Arthur Augustus. "It may be an ordinary cycle, though."

"Good! I am in need of a bicycle, although I doubt whether I can ride one now. Still, a fellow of my ability could easily learn to cycle. I say, Blake, is that Lowther coming this way?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes, kid."

"Then I shall have to leave you," returned Skimpole hastily. "Let me see, I had something to inform you. Oh, I remember! I shall have to return to St. Jim's in your waggonette."

"Bai Jove, will you weally, deah boy?"

"Yes, I came down in Tom Merry's cab, but as Lowther was, of course, one of the party, I shall be unable to return in the same vehicle. I think it safer not to because Lowther appears to be in a very unreasonable mood."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see that there is anything to laugh at, Blake," said Skimpole, looking puzzled. "I am sorry for Lowther; I bear him no ill will. I suppose you will return to the college as soon as you have obtained your prizes?"

"Of course, kid!"

"Then I will join you at the entrance to this place. You mustn't go without me, because if it is a bicycle I have won I shall be unable to use it in the dark, and shall have to push it all the way. And, of course, it may not be a bicycle at all. It might be some large object I should be unable to carry."

"Yes, a steam-roller, for instance," grinned Jack Blake. "But you can have a seat in our waggonette, kid."

"Thank you, Blake. Ah, there is Lowther! I had better not stay another minute."

He skated away, and Arthur Augustus chuckled loudly.

"He's all in a fluttah, bai Jove!" he exclaimed. "He must be to imagine a third pwize could be a motah-cycle."

"He'll find it'll be more like a pocket-book or a pen-knife," laughed Blake. "And I shouldn't wonder if you get a bit of a surprise, Gussy."

"Weally, deah boy, I can hardly see your weason for that remark. The wink people are wollin' in money, bai Jove, and it's hardly likely the first pwize would be less than a motah-bicycle. Howevah, I believe they are all collecting by the hand to weceive the pwizes."

"So they are!"

"Come on, you chaps!"

"Yaas, wathah! Hah, hah, hah! Don't some of those fellows look upset, bai Jove!"

As everyone on the rink wore masks, there was little of the individual skaters that Arthur Augustus could see.

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But certainly several of St. Jim's juniors were standing about in rather disconsolate groups as the Study No. 6 fellows rinked past, their prize tickets in their hands.

Jack Blake, Digby, Herries, and Arthur Augustus enjoyed their triumph to the full.

They had beaten the Shell, and, what was more, they had beaten Figgins & Co. This was better even than the eucalyptus wheeze would be the following afternoon.

The four joined the throng of skaters expectantly.

The floor manager was standing in the doorway of a small room, ready to announce the award of the prizes.

CHAPTER 9.

The Prizes.

EVIDENTLY the floor manager of Rylcombe Rink was a man of few words, for he did not make a speech.

"Will all the prize-winners please come inside the ring," he said loudly; and a slight confusion followed.

The owners of the various coloured tickets were struggling to get through the ranks of the spectators. Arthur Augustus became flustered.

"Come on, deah boys! Excuse me, sir!"

"Buck up, Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah, only— Excuse me, sir!"

In spite of his natural politeness, Arthur Augustus managed to struggle through the crowd at last, to find himself in the centre of the ring with his chums.

Arthur Augustus glanced round.

"Bai Jove, this is wathah wippin', deah boys! Everyone is lookin' at us."

"Yes, bother 'em!" growled Jack Blake. "Here comes Skimmy at last."

"Dear me! Am I too late? My name is Skimpole."

"Hah, hah, hah! No, you're all wight, deah boy."

"Good!" exclaimed Skimpole, in relief. "I was afraid I should never succeed in forcing my way through the crowd, and I had the misfortune to fall twice."

"Dry up, Skimmy!"

"Yaas, wathah! Wing off, Skimmay, deah boy. They are bwinging the pwizes fwom the woom."

"My hat, so they are! This is a blow for the New House, and no mistake!"

"Rather!"

"Bai Jove, this is wippin'!"

"Beau Brummel!" announced the floor manager. "First prize for gentleman's costume."

"Yaas, wathah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, skating forward. "I'm Beau Bwummel."

The floor manager took the ticket and nodded.

"How will you take your prize, sir? In the basket?"

"In the what, deah boy?"

Arthur Augustus spoke blankly and without understanding. How could a motor-cycle be in a basket?

Perhaps the floor manager meant wicker case?

"I'll take it without the case, thank you," said Arthur Augustus, after a pause.

"You'll have some trouble getting it home, sir."

"Yaas, weally, I suppose I shall. Howevah—"

Arthur Augustus stopped dead. One of the attendants had come from the small room.

He had a fine white goose under his arm.

He skated up to the swell of the School House, and held the goose out.

"Fine bird, sir!"

"Yaas, wathah; wippin' bird! Is it yours, deah boy?"

"No, sir, it's yours now."

"Mine? Weally, deah boy, there must be a mistake somewhere. I wathah think—"

"You have won a first prize, haven't you?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Here it is, then, sir."

Arthur Augustus gasped loudly.

A roar of laughter went up from a group of St. Jim's juniors, who had been watching the prize-winners with envious eyes. Arthur Augustus did not even hear it.

The attendant had thrust the goose in his arms, and the noise the bird made was prodigious.

"Bai Jove! Gweat Scott!"

"You have a second prize ticket, haven't you?" exclaimed the attendant. "A bantam cock is the prize."

Jack Blake started violently.

"A—a bantam cock!"

"Yes, and a fine little bird it is, too. Will you have a basket?"

"Y-yes, I think I'd oetter. My only Aunt Jane, if this isn't the outside edge!"

"Lie down, deah boy! Bai Jove! Lie down!"

The goose under Arthur Augustus's arm was trying to

flap his wings, and the swell of the School House was at his wits' end.

He could hear the roars of laughter now, and he knew they came from the throats of the St. Jim's juniors. Which juniors Arthur Augustus could not say, of course, but he could guess.

The Shell fellows and the fellows from the New House were having the time of their lives.

"The two third prizes you young gentlemen have won are fowls," said the attendant to Herries and Digby. "Spanish fowls."

"Oh!" said Digby wearily.

"Is that so?" muttered Herries.

"Yes, sir. Will you take baskets? Oh, I am afraid you can't, because all the fowls are in one basket. But they are quiet birds."

"Bai Jove—lie down!" gasped Arthur Augustus, struggling desperately with the goose. "My toppah—lie down, deah boy."

It was a long time since Arthur Augustus had been in such a "fluttah," as he afterwards expressed it.

A couple of fine Spanish hens were brought from the room and presented to Herries and Digby. The two Fourth-Formers accepted their prizes as if it had all been a dream, but Digby was not long in awaking to the reality of the thing, for his Spanish fowl suddenly flapped her wings vigorously in his face.

Digby sneezed violently.

"Bai Jove, that's what this goose keeps doin'!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I considah this wotten in the extweme. I shall weturn the bird—"

"My aunt, we can't do that, Gussy!" whispered Blake, going pink. "Pretty bad form."

"Weally, deah boy, I fail to see that it would be bad form—"

"Well, they are prizes which have been given to us, and it would look a trifle swanky to return them, wouldn't it, kid?"

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that!"

"You see it now?"

"Yaas, wathah! I considah it would be wank bad form to offah to weturn the pwizes. Howevah, I will have the basket for this goose atfah all. I say, deah boy, I will have the basket for this goose on second considahation!"

"Basket for the goose?" repeated the attendant. "Sorry, sir, but you are too late now. Your friend has the basket for his bantam."

"Gweat Scott, has he? I say, Blake, you have my basket!"

"Have I, kid?"

"Yaas, wathah; and I must wequest you to hand it ovah."

"I don't think!"

"Weally, Blake—"

Jack Blake grinned. He was a generous fellow, as generous as Gussy himself in a different way, but he meant keeping that basket.

"You go in a home, Gussy," he said pleasantly.

"I must wefuse—don't be widiculous. I wequest you as a fwied to hand ovah my basket."

"And as a friend I refuse," returned Jack Blake firmly. "The old goose'll get tamer when he comes to know you better. Why don't you get a collar and a chain for him?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" suddenly laughed Skimpole. "I consider that really funny."

Skimpole had seen a joke at last, but in the eyes of the swell of the School House it was no joke at all.

Arthur Augustus stared at him indignantly.

"Weally, Skimmay, I have no other course but to considah you in the light of an uttah duffah, not to say a sillay ass. I—lie down! Gweat—Scott!"

His goose had started flapping his wings again, then the

attendant appeared again with the largest of large old roosters.

"For the British general," he said gravely, and he thrust the bird into Skimpole's arms. Skimpole's arms closed round it mechanically.

"Dear me!"

That was all the brainy man of the Shell was capable of at the moment.

The laughter round the ring became tremendous, and the chums of Study No. 6 went from pink to a deep red.

"My aunt!" whispered Jack Blake. "Let's get out of this. Once we are out of the building we can let the beastly birds fly home to their nests or wherever they want to fly to."

"Yaas, wathah! I considah that is the only course undah the cires. Pwess on, deah boys!"

"Wait a minute, Cousin Ethel is going to receive her prize."

"Yaas, wathah—"

"What is it?"

"A puppy dog, bai Jove! Weally, I considah that wathah a wippin' pwize, don't you know. I wondah if she would exchanje with my goose?"

"I shouldn't trouble to ask her," growled Jack Blake. "Come on, you chaps, let's get out of this. Those shrieking lunatics will have fits in a minute."

"This way, deah boys; we can slip through the crowd without bein' seen—bai Jove!"

But Arthur Augustus's opinion proved incorrect, for the moment they had made their way through the crowd, fifteen or twenty St. Jim's fellows in all possible costumes darted off across the rink towards them.

Jack Blake groaned loudly.

"Where's Dig—"

"Here, old man," panted Digby. "Herries and I have got a basket for the fowls, after all. My hat, we shall be surrounded!"

"Stop!" cried Skimpole, dashing recklessly through the crowd. "I cannot skate as rapidly as that—I must request you to stop, because I feel certain Lowther is following us."

"Come on, ass!"

"I shall fall—I feel certain I shall fall—"

"Wire in, you chaps!"

"Yaas, wathah; wace for all you are worth, deah boys!"

"We shall just do it."

The exit was right at the other side of the large rink, and Jack Blake began to have his doubts.

Hampered as they were, Tom Merry, Figgins, and the crowd of other St. Jim's juniors were gaining rapidly. Skimpole was already dropping behind, staggering about in the most reckless fashion.

"Bring Skimmay along," said Jack Blake crisply, and Digby nodded.

Herries happened to be carrying the basket containing the two hens, so Digby's hands were free. He at once obtained a good grip of Skimpole's uniform at the sides of his waist and from behind, and began to scrum him across the rink at a furious pace.

"Let go!" shouted Skimpole. "Blake, Lowther has captured me—let go, Lowther!"

"By your leave," cried Digby, his head well down like a good rugger forward. "By your leave—ball down—ball down!"

And with a rush he steered Skimpole neatly round Arthur Augustus, successfully navigated the doorway and banged his toe down on the passage floor just as Skimpole thought he was about to leave the building by the window in front of him.

"We've got 'em!" came an excited shout from the rink.

"We've got 'em now, kids."

"Hooray!"

"Who are they?"

"Bothered if I know—at them!"

"As hard as you can."

The crowd of St. Jim's juniors were straining every muscle. A glance round told Jack Blake there wasn't a moment to spare.

"Never mind about taking skates off," he exclaimed quickly. "And whatever you do don't cackle, Gussy. They haven't recognised us yet."

The voice behind them became louder.

"Who are they?"

"That looks like Harry Noble?"

"Then it isn't!" roared Noble's voice. "Come on! We have them now!"

Jack Blake gritted his teeth.

"Down the steps, you chaps, like the giddy wind!"

"Bai Jove, look out for Skimmay!"

"Dear me, I must refuse to venture down those steps with skates on, and with this bird in my arms. I don't think I should be able to manage it in safety. Leave go, Digby!"

"Down you go!" cried Digby.

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE ST. JIM'S SURPRISE."

"No, I prefer to allow Lowther to capture me. Digby—"

"It doesn't matter an atom what you prefer, kid; it's what we prefer. If Lowther captures you, he'll find out who we are, and we aren't going to have that if it snows sharks. Look out there!"

Digby flung one arm round Skimpole's waist, then with absolute recklessness, dashed down the steps. However he succeeded in gaining the pavement without falling, was a mystery which he could never understand; but he did succeed, and that was the main thing.

The others, too, got down without falling, then Herries' voice rang out as he brought up against the lamp-post with a thud.

"There's our waggonette, you chaps."

"Yaas, wathah; all aboard, deah boys."

"Drive like greased lightning, coachman!" gasped Jack Blake, scrambling into the vehicle. "Look alive, Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah—bai Jove!"

Skimpole and his fine rooster were bundled in, then the others followed in a heap. Jack Blake slammed the door, and an instant later the waggonette had started.

At the same moment three determined-looking juniors came down the steps, but it was too late now. None of the determined-looking three had had time to remove their skates, and the lamp-post which had saved Herries upset one of them.

He thoughtlessly stretched a leg across the pavement as he fell, and that brought down the other two.

There were some groans, then the three sat up and watched the waggonette rounding the bend in the road.

"My hat!" murmured Tom Merry's voice. "Who were they?"

An able-bodied seaman groaned.

"Blest if I know!"

Manners got up.

"We shall find out as soon as we get to the coll," he said grimly. "They'll get ragged out of their lives for this. Hallo! They are playing the National Anthem, kids."

The other two got up hastily.

The moment the music stopped they kicked off their skates, left them at the skate store and shouted for their fly.

Then they started for St. Jim's, grim expressions on their faces. Tom Merry had forgotten everything for the moment except that he owed it to the Shell to discover who the prize-winners from St. Jim's were.

CHAPTER 10.

Skimpole's Wakefulness.

"Bai Jove!" panted Arthur Augustus. "I wegard—that as a vewwy neah thing, deah boys."

Jack Blake nodded.

"As near as we wanted it, kid. If once those chaps had recognised us we should never have heard the last of it. Gussy, I blame you entirely."

"Bai Jove!"

"Yes, I do. What did you want to go talking about motor-cycles for?" went on Jack Blake severely. "If you hadn't cackled like Herries' old hen, we others would never have been 'asses enough to try for the prizes. I should have remembered, for one thing, that my brother wrote and told me about the rink near our place at home, and that the carnival prizes were live stock. I propose from the chair, that a vote of censure be passed upon Gussy for being a silly ass."

"Hear, hear!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"And so say all of us."

"Bai Jove! I must considah you all as unweasonable in the extreme. Skimmay, deah boy, I must wequest you to wemove your old wooster away fwom my goose, because they are inclined to w'angle."

"Certainly, D'Arcy!" said Skimpole obligingly. "I will sit opposite you. Dear me!"

He jumped to his feet, and the movement unsettled his prize again. The cock began flapping his wings so vigorously that the brainy man of the Shell was almost blinded.

Skimpole dropped the bird and gasped:

"Dear me—"

"Bai Jove! You uttah duffah, Skimmay! Lie down, deah boy!"

In fluttering down the cock had disturbed Arthur Augustus's goose, and the noise that bird made unnerved the two Spanish hens in the basket.

Jack Blake clapped his hands to his ears.

"My hat, talk about 'Chantecler'—"

"Gweat Scott, your w'etched bantam has started now, deah boy!"

"Oh, ring their beastly necks!"

"I pwopose we let them out of the window," exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "What do you say, Skimmay?"

"I must refuse to agree to your proposai, D'Arcy, because I consider it ridiculous," said Skimpole decidedly. "I, for one, would never consent to allow the cock to escape; I intended to present the bird to my friend Taggles, whom I am endeavouring to instruct in the great truths of Socialism. I shall use the bird as an object-lesson, manipulating the conversation in such a way; then when Taggles says he would like the bird, I shall at once tell him that he has a perfect right to him. An object-lesson is necessary to many intellects of a very low order such as D'Arcy's—"

"Bai Jove, deah boy, I must wemark that you exceed at times!"

"Don't interrupt me, please, D'Arcy! As I was saying—"

"You've said it!" exclaimed Blake; "and if you say any more, I shall change my mind, and it will be a stray Skimmay that will be thrown out of the window, and not the birds. It's not a bad idea about giving the birds to Taggles, though."

"Ah, you are beginning to grasp the great possibilities—I may even say, the great truths of Socialism, then, Blake?"

"Ass! I wasn't talking about the Socialistic part of your remark, Skimmay. What do you say, you chaps, about keeping the birds until we get to St. Jim's, and presenting them to Taggles?"

"They make such an awful row."

"And Taggles is a grumpy brute."

Jack Blake nodded.

"Yes, I know; still, it's a pity to let the birds loose," he said. "They are decent specimens."

"Yaas, wathah! I agwee with my fwiend Blake."

"Oh, all right!"

"You all agree?"

"Right-ho!"

"Good!" said Jack Blake. "Now, if only Skimmay will keep his old rooster away from Gussy's goose, we might get a little peace again."

"Yaas, wathah! I agwee with that pwoposal as well, deah boy. I considah Skimmay ought to keep his old woostah away fwom my goose at any cost, because my goose flaps his wings if not."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus looked at Jack Blake loftily.

"Weally, deah boy, I fail to see what there is to laugh at in my goose flappin' his wings. In fact, it's anythin' but a laughin' mattah, bai Jove!"

"Hard luck. We've quieted him down nicely now."

"Yes, for about two minutes," said Digby pessimistically. "Phew! What a time we have had!"

"Yes; but we're out of the wood now. None of us were recognised, and we aren't likely to talk. You mustn't breathe a word, Skimmay!"

"Certainly not, unless I am asked for information."

"What do you mean, ass?"

"Dear me, Blake, what I say. As a sincere Socialist, if Tom Merry, or Piggins, or any other fellow asks for information, I am bound to give it. Don't you see, I have no right to refuse—"

"No, I don't see!" said Jack Blake darkly. "But you'll see if you give any information, kid; you'll see the end of your Socialist career, and every other career you have, and there will be enough slain Skimmay about to supply local colour for a battle scene. Now dry up."

"How remarkably dense you are, Blake! Don't you see—"

"Ring off!"

"I shall certainly do nothing of the kind. I have a perfect right—"

"Gag him, you chaps!"

"Drop him out of the window for Lowther to slay!"

"Yes, that's it! Are you going to dry up, Skimmay?"

"You are missing a great opportunity of hearing from a reliable source what Socialism really is—"

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Tom Merry & Co. Next Week.



"Bai Jove, I am awfully sorry, deah boy, but I was skatin' backwards!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, apologetically.

"Switch off!"

"Lie down!"

"Yaas, deah boy, do wing off!"

"Ah! A remark like that that one would almost expect from the degenerate scion of the bloated and worthless scum we call the aristocracy!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Jack Blake. "You know yourself at last, Gussy!"

"I considah Skimmay in the light of a waving lunatic!"

"You would!" said the amateur Socialist of St. Jim's excitedly. "Without intellect yourself, you are necessarily incapable of admitting intellect in others!"

"Oh, do gag him!"

"For the last time, Skimmy, are you going to dry up?"

"Certainly not—that is, unless——"

"Unless what, ass?"

"Unless," said Skimpole thoughtfully—"unless you others desire silence. If you do, as a sincere Socialist, I cannot, of course, refuse to be silent."

"Good!"

"You do desire silence?"

"We do," said Jack Blake, looking at the excited Skimpole in a puzzled manner. "What a funny ass you are, Skimmy! But we want silence, there's no doubt about that."

Skimpole promptly lapsed into silence.

Jack Blake looked at him in the gloom curiously again, then turned to the others.

"As I was saying before we began discussing politics, you chaps, it will be all right. None of us were recognised, and we shall get to the coll. long before the others."

"Yaas, wathah! Although it appears to me the dwivah is takin' us wound the long way."

"So he is."

"I considah we are all wight now."

"Yes. We've only got to keep mum."

Arthur Augustus nodded. He was very tired, and so were the others.

If the evening had been spent in the ordinary way at the old school all five would have long since been in bed, and, in addition to the late hour had to be added the vigorous exercise of rinking.

Before ten minutes had passed Arthur Augustus was sleeping peacefully in the corner of the waggonette.

A few minutes later Digby and Herries dozed off; then Jack Blake began to close his eyes, and the only one to remain awake was Skimpole.

The brainy man of the Shell was very much awake as it happened, and he began to recast the scheme of the four hundred odd chapters of his great work on Socialism.

That kept his mind so occupied that he failed to notice when the high road had been left, and that they were bearing round to the left a great deal.

The others slept on peacefully

CHAPTER 11.

Tom Merry is Surprised.

"THE burbling young asses!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as the Terrible Three scrambled into their cab at the Rink doorway. "If they think they're going to escape us, they're pretty well mistaken."

"They've got a good start, Tommy."

"Which means they'll get to the coll. before any of the others," grinned the hero of the Shell. "We shall be the second party to arrive. Twig?"

"Rather!"

"We shall drop on them just as they are changing—"

"Just as they are tumbling into bed, you mean," said Tom Merry. "It's pretty late, you know."

Manners glanced at his watch.

"My hat, we shall have to look quick about it then!"

"So it is! I say, driver, don't be afraid of exceeding the speed limit!"

The pace increased, and the Terrible Three were whisked up the long hill in fine style. In less than twenty minutes they were outside the college gates.

Tom Merry sprang out.

"Thank you, sir!" exclaimed the driver, pocketing a substantial tip. "I won't forget the extra bit of corn for the horse," he added, for he knew Tom Merry.

"That's the style! Good-night!"

"Good-night, sir!"

The Terrible Three at once hurried to the porter's lodge, and banged at the window.

"What ho within there!"

"Taggles!"

"Taggles! We want Taggles!"

"Which is what everyone is wanting, it seems to me!" growled the school-porter, putting a very red nose round the door. "Names?"

Tom Merry gave them. They had more important work in hand than ragging Taggles just then.

"Got 'em all, Taggles?"

"In course I have!"

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "Any of the other chaps turned up yet?" he added carelessly.

"Which they haven't, and which it's time they did," snuffed the porter. "A-keepin' of a 'ard-workin' man up when 'e's all but dead beat!"

Tom Merry exchanged glances with Lowther and Manners. All looked surprised.

Tom Merry turned to Taggles again severely.

"Taggles, I believe you have been bribed. You jolly well know five fellows have turned up not ten minutes ago!"

"Which they've done nothin' of the sort, Master Merry."

"Taggles!"

"Oh, Taggles!"

The school-porter bridled up indignantly. To while away the time he had put a little more gin in his evening hot water than usual, and was inclined to resent an imputation on his veracity.

"Which is a thing you've done before!" he said indignantly. "Do I look a man as can't be believed? I'll show you once an' for all, Master Merry, that you've done an honest man an injustice. Look at my book!"

He thrust his name-book under Tom Merry's nose.

Tom Merry whistled. The only names entered for the evening were their own.

"Humph! Strange, you chaps!" he muttered, handing the book back with sixpence between the leaves. "What do you make of it, Monty?"

"I don't make anything of it."

"Perhaps they climbed the wall?" suggested Manners.

"Why?"

"To escape having to give their names to Taggles," explained Manners, dropping into stride with the others. "They would expect us to follow them, and they would expect us to pump Taggles."

"Good for you, kid."

"Yes; that's about it!"

Tom Merry nodded.

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NEW STORY BOOK.

"Wire in, you chaps; we shall just about catch them getting into bed! Which pref. is on duty to-night?"

"Kildare."

"Good! We shall find him in his study."

They hurried in to report themselves to the captain of St. Jim's, and received a friendly nod from one of the finest captains the old school ever had.

"Had a decent time, youngsters?"

"Rather!"

"Ripping!"

Tom Merry hesitated.

"Any—any of the others fellows turned up yet, Kildare?" he asked, after a pause.

"No; you three are the first batch."

Tom Merry whistled again as they left the captain's study.

"My hat, those kids, whoever they are, are going it, and no mistake!" he exclaimed. "They'll get into jolly hot water for not reporting themselves. Must be off their young rockers!"

"They seem pretty keen on not being recognised."

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes; and I don't wonder at it!" laughed Tom Merry.

"Look how they swanked about with their prize tickets, and then to go and jolly well win a small farmyard! I thought I should have had a fit!"

"Ha, ha, ha! It was the limit!"

"It was, Monty, my son, and the wheeze is too good to let die a natural death," laughed Tom Merry. "Think what a jape it would be if the kids happened to be Figgins & Co."

"My hat, yes!"

"Well, let's get on with the washing; let's find the kids!"

The Terrible Three dashed up the stairs and glanced into the bath-room. There was no one there.

Tom Merry grinned.

"I hardly expected they would waste time in the bath-room," he said. "We shall find them in bed!"

"But which bed-room?"

"Humph! We've got to find out. They weren't Third-Formers."

"And they weren't Fifth-Formers."

"Therefore they must be either Shell fellows, or kids from the Fourth," said Tom Merry. "The thing is to go into every Shell and Fourth-Form dormitory in the coll."

"My hat, we shall have to look quick about it then!"

"Wire in!"

The Terrible Three broke into a run, and began their search. They made it a thorough one, for they not only looked into the rooms, but under the beds and into the cupboard.

Not a sign of anyone could be seen.

"My only aunt, this exceeds!" muttered Tom Merry, when every likely room had been explored. "They must be hiding downstairs."

"They've beaten us!" said Manners pessimistically.

Tom Merry gritted his teeth.

It certainly looked as if they were beaten, and although Tom Merry could take a beating as well as anyone, he never took one if trying hard gave a chance of a win.

Manners refused to admit that there were any such chances.

"The other fellows are arriving in dozens!" he growled. "Of course, the kids have been waiting downstairs, and are mixing with the others now."

"What about the farmyard they won?"

"Oh, they've given that to the coachman or someone! Look here, Merry, I don't say you are to blame, but you have managed to bungle this, and no mistake!"

"I like that, Manners—"

"Do you?" put in Lowther. "I don't, myself."

"Silly ass!"

The Terrible Three looked at one another glumly. With twenty or so juniors already in the college, the chance of discovering the particular five fellows they wanted seemed remote.

Tom Merry had to admit that, but he was not quite beaten yet.

"We'll have a look round the dormys. after lights out," he said.

"What's the good?"

"Can't do any harm, anyway. Here come the fellows."

The Terrible Three happened to be in their own dormitory now, and the large room was soon crowded with Shell fellows in all kinds of attire.

All were talking at once, and on the same topic.

Who were the fellows who had won the prizes?

No one knew, so every one began to undress.

"Rotten bungle, I call it!" muttered Manners again, slipping off his things with the others. "If you two had left it to me—"

"It would have been a more rotten bungle still! Now, if you had left it to me—"

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NOW ON SALE.

"You, Lowther?"

"Yes, to me, Manners."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Manners chuckled in rather an exasperating way, and tumbled into bed.

"Silly ass!" growled Lowther; and he also got between the sheets, anything but sorry to find himself there.

"Am I last?" sang out Tom Merry, glancing round the large dormitory. "I—Hullo!"

He stood staring across the room. There was an empty bed near the door.

"Hullo! Who is out of the room?"

"Eh?"

"What's that?"

"Who is out of the room?" repeated Tom Merry, with increasing interest.

"Blest if I know!"

"Why, Skimmy isn't here!"

"My hat, no! Skimpole hasn't turned up!"

Tom Merry slipped on some of his things again grimly.

"Coming, you chaps?" he said to Manners and Lowther.

"Coming where?"

"Down to the Fourth Form-room. The kids will be in bed by now, and I want to see Blake. I want to know what he's done with Skimmy."

"My aunt! Do you think it was the Study No. 6 kids and Skimmy who won the prizes?"

"I do, Manners."

"Phew!"

Manners whistled. If this were so, then the matter would want careful handling.

It would be all right for them to rag the Fourth-Formers and Skimpole, but the affair would have to be kept away from Piggins & Co.

"We can't have this sort of thing up against the School House," said Tom Merry decidedly. "It must be nipped in the bud."

"Rather!"

The Terrible Three gained the Fourth-Form dormitory in safety, and flung the door open.

"Is Blake here?"

There was no need to ask, for lights had not yet been extinguished, although the fellows were between the sheets. There were four empty beds.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Thought as much. I say, you chaps, have any of you seen Blake and the other Study No. 6 kids?"

No one had, and Tom Merry looked grave.

"My aunt! If they aren't in yet there'll be trouble for them in the morning! Hullo, we're caught!"

"No, it's only Taggles."

Tom Merry sighed with relief. Taggles came into the room and glanced round.

"Not here, eh?" he sniffled. "Blake, D'Arcy, Herries and Digby not here, and Skimpole not in the other room, which is unfortunate for 'em, seein' that I am goin' to report them at once, which is my duty."

He shuffled from the room, and a moment or two later the Terrible Three also left. Tom Merry looked puzzled.

"Of all the young asses!" he exclaimed. "They must be in the college somewhere!"

"Doesn't look as if they are."

"Perhaps they are hiding in the stables," suggested Manners.

"They may be—Hullo, there's Taggles again! Found them, Taggles?"

"Which I have done nothing of the kind—"

"Well, look here," exclaimed Tom Merry, slipping a shilling into his hand. "Don't report them until the last minute. The extension isn't up for another quarter of an hour yet, by rights, and they may come in any minute."

"Which they'll have to ring the bell if they do, because I've locked the gates."

Taggles shuffled away again, and Tom Merry led the way to the staircase window.

"May as well see that this is open," he said thoughtfully. "If they are in the grounds, they'll wait until the last minute, then climb the ivy. Young asses, of course, but we don't want them to get gated."

"No, rather not."

"What's to be done now?"

"Get to bed," said Tom Merry, "or we shall get gated ourselves. Blake must have gone dotty in his old age."

The three retired to their room again, but they were more than a little puzzled, and it was longer than usual before they dropped to sleep.

At last, however, a tiring evening had its result, and the old school was silent in slumber.

CHAPTER 12.

"The Elms."

"MY hat!"

Jack Blake sat up with a start.

"Bai Jove! I believe we have awwived, dear boys!"

Arthur Augustus also sat up and blinked sleepily in the mild glare which a lamp outside was throwing into the waggonette.

"Yes, we have arrived," said Skimpole, jumping up. "You have all been asleep. I have been working on my book on Socialism. You see, the difference—Dear me! Where did I put my prize?"

"He's roosting on my boot, kid."

"So he is!"

"Come on!" exclaimed Jack Blake briskly. "Let's get rid of the birds! Out you tumble!"

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove!"

"What's up?"

"Nothin', dear boy; only—"

Arthur Augustus stopped speaking in amazement. Coming hastily towards the waggonette door was a footman of the old school, silk stockings and all.

The swell of the School House stared at him in amazement. Then Jack Blake pushed past him and scrambled from the waggonette, basket in hand.

"My only Aunt Jane!"

"Bai Jove! Gweat Scott!"

"What on earth's the matter, you kids?"

"What's up, young Blake?" And Digby and Herries also scrambled out.

Then they stood staring at the footman. As far as they knew, they had never seen him before.

Arthur Augustus was the first to speak.

"My only toppah!" he gasped. "Where are we, dear boys?"

Jack Blake started.

"Yes, that's it! Where are we?"

Skimpole stepped out of the waggonette now, and answered Blake's question.

"At St. Jim's, of course, Blake! Dear me!"

Being shortsighted, the brainy man of the Shell had blundered into the footman. The footman looked as amazed as Jack Blake and Arthur Augustus.

"Who—who are you?" he said, after a short pause.

"Juniahs fwom St. Jim's, of course, dear boy."

"Juniors from St. Jim's! Then what are you doing here, sir?"

"Blest if I know!" exclaimed Jack Blake, staring at a magnificent old mansion which, however, was as different from their college as it well could be. "Where is 'here,' by the way?"

"The Elms, of course, sir."

"My—my only Aunt Jane!"

"The—the Elms?"

"Not Major Peahson's place, dear boy!"

"Of course!"

"Gweat Scott! How on earth did we get heah? Blake, how on earth did we get heah? I ask you as a fwend! How on earth did we get heah?"

"You may well ask that, sir!" exclaimed the footman in astonishment. "St. James's College is pretty near fifteen miles away!"

"Yes, but—"

"Bai Jove! This must be a wag on the part of the dwivah, dear boys!"

"My hat!"

Jack Blake was round to the front of the waggonette in a flash.

"I say, coachman, where in the name of the great Percy do you think you've brought us?"

"To the Elms," growled the man—"and a journey it's been, too, in this mud! And I've got another journey afterwards!"

"Yes, I know you have—fifteen miles back to St. Jim's."

The coachman looked at the Fourth-Former in silence for a moment, then grinned.

"I don't think."

"What do you mean?"

"That I aren't doing the fifteen miles back to St. Jim's to-night—not if there's earthquakes. 'Sides, I have another job at eleven-thirty, to take a party another ten miles on."

"Bless my old hat!"

"Good gwacious! I don't believe it is the man who dwove us to the wink, dear boys!"

"Of course I'm not! I didn't drive anyone to the rink! But I was told by the guv'nor to call for a party to be taken to the Helms. I've taken a party to the Helms, an' I'm waiting to see if there's anything coming from that party with which to drink their healths."

"But hang it all, man," exclaimed Jack Blake, in desperation, "you've brought the wrong party!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 109.

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE ST. JIM'S SURPRISE."

The coachman thought for a moment or two, then shrugged his shoulders. He was sorry, but he did not see that any remark he could make would be of use.

Jack Blake was at his wit's end.

"But how are we to get back? You must drive us!"

"Sorry, sir, but I can't. I have a party to call for lower down the road, as I said, an' I'm pretty near due there now."

The juniors stood and stared at one another blankly. What was to be done?

"Blest if I know!" muttered Jack Blake. "Are our mackintoshes and coats in the waggonette—no, of course, they can't be! They are in the other waggonette—the one which took us to the rink. Oh, my hat! This is the limit, and no mistake!"

"The limit!" growled Digby. "It's past the limit, long ago! Skimmy, were you asleep as well?"

"No, Digby, of course not—I told you I wasn't."

"Then why on earth didn't you stop the driver when you saw he wasn't going to St. Jim's?" gasped Digby.

Skimpole blinked thoughtfully, looking more than striking in his uniform.

"Because I never noticed he wasn't going to St. Jim's," he said. "In fact, I was under the impression all the time that he was going to St. Jim's. You see, Digby, I was occupied in thinking out the scheme of my great book."

"Gweat Scott! Do you mean to say you nevah noticed that we were driving miles out of our way, Skimmy?"

"Of course I did not notice. I think I have informed you I was thinking out my book."

"You uttah duffah!"

"Dear me!"

"You shrieking lunatic!" gasped Jack Blake. "Didn't notice the difference between a half-hour's drive and a fifteen-mile tour! Oh, you howling duffer, Skimmy!"

"Dear me!"

"I should think you are dear—dear at minus twopence, even with a pound of tea thrown in!" growled Herries. "The worst of it, too, is that I haven't given Towser his supper yet—and if ever a dog liked his meals regularly, Towser is that dog!"

"Bai Jove, deah boy, I hardly think that is the worst of it!" "Oh, Herries is as mad as a hatter!" said Jack Blake. "He must be, to have slept all the way! Skimpole wants boiling in petrol!"

"Dear me! How ridiculous you are this evening, Blake!"

"Yes, but there are others!" said Jack Blake darkly.

"Yes, D'Arcy is absurd, too. But there is really no great difficulty in our position. As a sincere Socialist—"

"Oh, ring off!"

"Yaas, wathah! Dwy up, deah boy, because I must confess that you have caused enough twouble for one evenin', bai Jove!"

"Yes, but I was about to point out that—"

"Go in a home instead!" growled Jack Blake. "Driver, is there any chance of getting a vehicle to take us back to St. Jim's to-night?"

"As a sincere Socialist, of course I shall be able to convince Major—"

"Ring off, ass! Is there, driver?"

"I am afraid not, sir, unless you walk I don't see that there is any chance of your getting back at all."

"Phew!"

"We can't do that, Blakey, in these togs," whispered Herries. "I mean, Gussy, for one, has dress slippers on, and the mud's a foot deep."

Jack Blake nodded.

"Pretty mess that young ass Skimpole has landed us in this time, and no mistake."

"No doubt, as a sincere Socialist, Major Pearson—"

"Oh, do dry up, Skimmy. Where's the footman got to?"

"Cleared off, by the look of it."

"No, deah boys; here he comes from the house again."

Skimpole's face showed the triumph which was within Skimpole's breast.

"What did I tell you!" he exclaimed. "What did I say—"

"Nothing worth listening to, that I can remember."

"No, because you would not listen, Blake. But what was I about to say—"

"How on earth do I know, ass!"

"Don't keep interrupting, please, Blake! I was about to say that undoubtedly Major Pearson is a Socialist, being a man of great intellect."

"Silly ass! He is M.P. for this part!"

"So he is. It doesn't matter, though. I am a Socialist, and as such have a perfect right to demand shelter and food for the lot of us for the night."

Actuated by one common thought, Jack Blake and Arthur Augustus seized Skimpole by the arms, causing his prize to cackle loudly.

"Not a word about that, kid!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 109.

NEW STORY-BOOK.

"Dear me—"

"I shall considah it wank bad form if you hint about sheltah, deah boy."

"As a sincere Socialist—"

"As a sincere silly ass, you mean. Skimpole, if you utter a word about what you consider you have a right to demand, we shall slay you."

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus hastily, and he shuddered at the idea of the thing.

Before Skimpole had time to answer, the footman was up with them again.

"I have been in to see the major, sir," he said to Blake, "and he says you are to come in at once."

"Bai Jove, I considah that wippin' of him! Dwivah!"

"Yes, sir?"

Arthur Augustus slipped something into his hand, and after glancing at it for a moment, the man felt rather uncomfortable. He felt he might have shown a little more concern over the mistake. The swell of the School House did not wait for his thanks.

He turned to join Jack Blake and the others, instead.

"I am weady, deah boys."

"This way, then, please," said the footman. "The major says you had better bring the—live stock in with you."

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, in dismay; but he tucked the goose more comfortably under his arm, without offering an objection.

Herries and Digby went very red, and each grabbed a handle of the fowl basket, while Jack Blake's bantam made such a curious noise in its throat that its new owner almost dropped it in surprise.

The only members of the party who appeared unconcerned were Skimpole and his prize.

The footman led the way into the mansion with stately dignity.

CHAPTER 13.

The Juniors' Reception.

"BAI Jove, deah boy!" whispered Arthur Augustus. "I twust the major has a sense of humouah."

Jack Blake nodded. He felt very uncomfortable indeed, and would have been the first to admit it.

"I say," he exclaimed presently, as the footman led them along a corridor, "couldn't we leave these birds somewhere?"

"The major said you were to bring them into the room, sir," answered the footman respectfully.

"Y-yes, of course, if the major wishes it. My hat!"

Jack Blake had caught sight of Arthur Augustus in the light of the corridor lamp, and he wondered if he looked anything like him.

The swell of the School House certainly did cut a striking figure, now that he had removed his mask, and had screwed a monocle in his eye.

Beautifully as his Beau Brummel costume was made, it seemed very much out of place now, and the goose under his arm completed a picture which rather upset the junior from the broad acres.

"My hat, if I look like that, I don't mind if there's an earthquake," thought Jack. "I don't care what happens. Phew!"

The footman had stopped at last.

"This is the room, sir. Do you mind opening the door."

"Certainly, deah boy!" murmured Arthur Augustus, also stopping. "Undah the cires, Blake, I wathah think it would be wise if I were to do the talkin'."

"I don't think!"

"Yaas, weally, undah the cires—"

"Better let me explain."

"You, Hewwies, deah boy?"

"Yes, me, ass!"

"No," said Skimpole thoughtfully. "It will be better for me to explain our curious position. As a sincere Socialist, I shall not mince matters, and a clear statement—"

"Weally, Skimmy, deah boy, although I wespect you in many ways—"

"Oh, bother it all!" exclaimed Jack Blake, seizing the door-knob. "If you kids are going to wrangle about it, we shall be here all night. My hat!"

Jack Blake had pushed open the door, and the five were in the room. The spectacle which met their astounded gaze held them spellbound.

The large room was brilliantly lighted, and there must have been over a dozen people there, all in evening-dress, about as many ladies as there were gentlemen.

Jack Blake had taken three strides into the room, and Arthur Augustus, Herries, and Digby, had loyally backed him, while Skimpole was only a few feet behind.

"Dear me! I cannot see the major. Is the major there, Blake—"

"Dry up, ass!" murmured Jack Blake, turning pink.

"Bai Jove!"

"My—my hat!"

The chums of the Fourth stood in painful silence. Each was waiting for one of the others to speak.

"Gweat Scott!" muttered Arthur Augustus; and with the hand which was not occupied in holding the goose in position, he attempted to straighten his attire.

Everyone in the room was looking at them in amazement, except a jolly-faced old gentleman near the fireplace. He was chuckling loudly.

Arthur Augustus gasped audibly.

"Bai Jove, deah boys, I am goin' to wetiah——"

"No, you don't, Gussy!"

"Yaas, deah boy. I ask you, as a fwiend, to allow me to wetiah. Skimmay, allow me to wetiah."

Digby had gone from pink to a deep red.

"Fire ahead, Blake!"

"You!"

"No, let Herries."

"Yaas, wathah. I pwopose that Hewwies fahs ahead. I wemembah you were anxious to do the talkin', deah boy."

"You weren't, I suppose?"

"Oh, hang it all!" muttered Jack Blake; and he squared his shoulders. "The fact is, Major——"

"Yaas, wathah! The fact of the mattah——"

Arthur Augustus stopped abruptly, because all eyes were now turned upon him instead of Blake.

There was a slight pause, which Digby broke rather weakly.

"The fact of the matter is——"

Then, like Arthur Augustus, Digby also stopped.

Major Pearson, the jolly-looking old gentleman by the fireplace, jumped to his feet, with a hearty laugh.

"Come inside!" he exclaimed. "Come into the room, my lads."

The five moved forward, then a roar of laughter went up which started their respective prizes cackling at the top of their voices.

To the chums of the Fourth it was a terrible moment; then Jack Blake plunged ahead.

He was very red, but he meant getting this over.

"The fact of the matter is——"

"Yaas, wathah! The fact of the mattah is——"

Jack Blake nudged Arthur Augustus in the ribs.

"Dry up, Gussy! The fact of the matter is, Major Pearson, we have accidentally taken the wrong waggonette, and instead of finding ourselves at St. Jim's, we find ourselves here. We—we are awfully sorry, and——"

Jack's voice tailed out again, but Arthur Augustus was ready to back him up.

"And we offah our apologies for appeahin' in this wemarkable attiah."

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes, it is remarkable. And whatever is that bird you have under your arm?"

"A—goose!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes, I know. But what are you doing with a goose under your arm?"

"It's a pwize I won at the wink!" gasped Arthur Augustus, for this was too much even for his coolness.

His voice tailed out, then, but Digby was ready to take up the running.

"Of course, we had no idea you had guests, sir," he ventured, "or we wouldn't have followed the footman into the room."

"Bai Jove, wathah not——"

"And—and, go on, Herries!"

Herries started.

"And—and if you could suggest any way of getting back to our school at once, we should be awfully obliged."

The major and his guests were laughing so much, that Herries could not have gone on if he had wished to. Suddenly Jack Blake began to laugh.

Arthur Augustus stared at him in amazement.

"Weally, deah boy, I fail to undahstand what there is to laugh at. On the contwawy——"

"Sit down—sit down!" laughed the major.

"Weally, this is wippin' of you, but undah the cires. I wathah think we had better wetiah——"

"Certainly not! Wouldn't think of it for a moment. And, besides, my lads, supper is being prepared for you in the next room."

"Bai Jove!"

"This is splendid of you, major!" exclaimed Jack Blake; "but I am afraid we cannot accept your hospitality. We must get back to St. Jim's as quickly as possible."

"Nonsense! The footman is telephoning through. Ah, there he is!"

The footman came into the room in the same stately manner.

"I have spoken to Dr. Holmes, sir, and he says it will be quite all right if the young gentlemen stay here for the

night, and he wishes to thank you for your kind invitation that they should do so."

"Tut, tut! A pleasure!"

"Bai Jove, what about our attiah?"

"Well, what about it, my lad?"

Arthur Augustus glanced from an elegantly attired young officer to Skimpole, and didn't think the question required any answer.

Jack Blake thanked the major for them all.

"It's awfully kind of you, sir," he said, "and it's all our fault, because we ought not to have gone to sleep in the waggonette."

"I did not go to sleep, Blake."

"Dry up, ass!" muttered Digby. "Skimmy, if you start talking, you'll be slain on the spot."

"Well, well!" laughed the major. "I am pleased the mistake has occurred. The son—sons, I believe—of a very old friend of mine are at St. Jim's. Do you know the youngsters—D'Arcy is the name?"

"Bai Jove, yaas—yaas, wathah!"

"Fourth Form I believe the elder lad is in. Lazy young rascal!"

Digby chuckled loudly. Arthur Augustus went pink again.

"I hardly think that, sir," he murmured. "As a mattah of fact——"

"All Fourth-Formers are very hard workers, eh?" laughed the major. "You are all in the Fourth Form, I should say."

"No, sir," exclaimed Skimpole. "D'Arcy and these other three are in the Fourth, but I am in the Shell."

"D'Arcy—is your name D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah—I mean——"

"Then I am doubly pleased the mistake occurred, Arthur," said the major heartily. "You and your friends are always welcome at the Elms. Why didn't you tell me your name before?"

"Well, weally, I was in wathah a fluttah, and—and——"

"I understand," smiled the major, patting Arthur Augustus on the shoulder. "Ah, here is James again to take you into supper. We shall expect you here again within the half hour, my lads!"

And the five trooped from the room not nearly as awkwardly as they had entered it.

Three of that five, at least, understood why Arthur Augustus had not given his name to the major before—understood quite as well as the major did.

The swell of the School House was not the fellow to ask for invitations.

The supper was a splendid one, and enjoyed by all, and afterwards they all retired to the drawing-room again, to spend a splendid hour, and to discover that Cousin Ethel had arrived a few minutes after them.

"Arthur," she exclaimed severely, as the chums of the Fourth clustered round her, "how dare you take our waggonette?"

"Weally, deah girl, it was a mistake!"

"Well, I was seriously annoyed."

"Bai Jove, if you will look at the mattah——"

"I was even furious."

"Yaas, wathah, and I don't wondah, undah the cires."

"I am still furious, too."

Jack Blake grinned.

"You'll get cyer that, Cousin Ethel," he said, with unusual coolness. "Did you find yourself at St. Jim's?"

"Certainly not," laughed the girl. "Directly we saw we were taking the wrong turning, we stopped the driver. I wonder you didn't think of that yourselves. S-sh! Miss Pearson is going to sing!"

And there was silence on the part of the guests while one of the old-world songs, which cannot be beaten, filled the room with its pleasant melody.

After that there were many more songs, and the chums from St. Jim's helped to supply the music, while the time passed with astonishing rapidity.

The evening came to an end at last, and James, the footman, showed the juniors to their respective rooms; and as they sang out cheery good-nights to one another, the same thought was with each.

Major Pearson could not be as pleased the mistake had occurred as they were, however much he was pleased.

CHAPTER 14.

The Return of the Prize-Winners.

"RATS!" growled Manners sleepily. "I've only just dropped to sleep!"

Lowther grinned.

"First bell went ten minutes ago, anyway. Are you going to get up, Merry?"

Tom Merry sat up in bed and rubbed his eyes. He was as sleepy as Manners; and, like Manners, was also labouring

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 109.

By

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

under the delusion that he could not have been asleep for more than a quarter of an hour.

"I believe Taggles has risen with the lark, and——"
"And rung the bell in the middle of the night for another lark," suggested Lowther. "Perhaps he has, because I feel as sleepy as an owl."

Tom Merry suddenly jumped out of bed. He remembered what had happened the previous night, and he was anxious to discover what had befallen the Study No. 6 fellows.

"Skimpy!"
There was no answer, so Tom Merry crossed the room.

Skimpole's bed was in its usual place, but Skimpole was not. There was no sign of the brainy man of the Shell anywhere.

"And his bed hasn't been slept in, either!" exclaimed Manners.

"My aunt, he hasn't been in the room at all by the look of it!"

"That he hasn't!"
The fellows stood staring at the empty bed in astonishment.

Tom Merry broke the pause after a time, looking anxious. "I say, I hope the young asses weren't locked out all night!"

"Oh, they would have rung up Taggles!"
Tom Merry shook his head.

"I doubt if they would if they had been messing about in the grounds," he said.

"Well, there's that window we left open."

"Yes, Monty. But suppose Taggles fastened it when he went round the coll. after lights out?"

"My hat!"
"Mind you, it's not likely, because Taggles isn't particular to a window or two; but he may have done so."

"Anyway, we can easily see."

"Yes. Wire in, kids. This looks serious for old Blake."

Tom Merry was more than a little concerned, and dressed with unusual speed. Manners and Lowther kept pace with him.

In less than ten minutes they were hurrying down the corridor.

"Good!"
"Is the window all right, Tommy?"

"Yes, rather! It hasn't been touched. The kids are in the coll. somewhere."

There was a good deal of relief in Tom Merry's voice, for his only concern now was that the Study No. 6 fellows managed to get in time to save trouble about exceeding the extension.

"And you can trust Blake to look after himself, young as he is," grinned the hero of the Shell, who was a few months Jack's senior. "He's a silly young ass, I know; but he wasn't born yesterday. Jove, there goes the bell!"

"Yes, we haven't any too much time, have we?"

"My hat—no!"

The Terrible Three hurried into breakfast, but the meal was nearly over before they noticed anything wrong. Tom Merry whistled then to himself, and glanced round the table.

Skimpole's place was vacant.

"My aunt, Skimpy isn't here, Monty!"

"Great Scott—no!"

Manners looked sympathetic. He could guess where Skimpole was.

"In the doctor's den, having the last word of a time," he said. "Blake and the others are probably with him."

"My hat! I wonder what time they did get in, after all?"

"Goodness knows!"

Tom Merry looked puzzled again, and finished the meal in silence.

There was half an hour's recreation before first school began, and all the Shell moved out into the quadrangle. It was a beautiful morning, but Tom Merry never noticed that.

He began to make inquiries as soon as the Fourth-Formers came out.

"Where's Blake this morning, you chaps?"

No one knew. They were all as puzzled as Tom Merry was; for the chums of Study No. 6 also had not been in their places at breakfast.

"Shure, and it's jolly funny, and no mistake!" said Reilly, the junior from Belfast. "They aren't in the study, either!"

Manners shook his head.

"No. They are in the doctor's study instead."

"Shure, and they are nothing of the sort, me bhoy! I had a peep in there as I came along."

"Phew!"
"There's Taggles!"
"Good! I say, Taggles!"
Taggles snuffled, but he stopped, and that was all Tom Merry wanted.

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NEW STORY BOOK.

"THE EMPIRE" LIBRARY.

NOW ON SALE.

"What time did Blake and the others turn up last night, Taggles?" he asked. "Pretty late?"

"They didn't turn up at all, which is nice goings on for boys of their ages, and no mistake, say I!" growled the porter. "They stayed out all night, they did!"

"Rats!"
"Which it is nothing of the sort. You can ask Dr. 'Olmes."

"My aunt! Does the doctor know about it?"

"Of course he does, seein' I reported them, as was my duty! Them five will get expelled; and a good job, I say—bother the bell!"

The quadrangle was fairly full of fellows of all Forms by now, and most of them turned to look at the gates. Someone was ringing the bell violently.

"My aunt, it's a waggonette!"

Tom Merry wheeled round.

He knew Jack Blake had ordered a waggonette the previous afternoon to convey his party to the rink. That was enough for the hero of the Shell.

He dashed for the gates with a whole crowd of juniors after him.

Then a well-known voice caught their ears.

"Huwwy up, dwivah, deah boy, because we want to get into the coll. without bein' wecognised!"

Tom Merry uttered a shout.

"That's Gussy!"

"The one and only!"

"Good old Gus!"

"Bai Jove, half the coll. are weady to meet us, deah boys!"

Then a growl came from the interior of the waggonette.

"It's all right, driver; they've seen us, so it's no use driving up to the door. Out you tumble, you chaps!"

And Jack Blake scrambled from the vehicle.

The gates had been wrenched open by willing hands, and a crowd of thirty or forty juniors stood staring at the waggonette. Amongst them were Figgins & Co.; and if they hadn't exactly got their mouths open, they looked as if they were about to open them.

Then Herries, Digby, Skimpole, and last, but by no means least, as far as attire went, Arthur Augustus stepped out on the road.

They stood for a moment in dead silence, then Jack Blake tried to carry the situation through.

"Cheer-ho, you chaps! Are—are we late for lights out?"

It was a dismal failure, and Jack knew it.

The fellows were not even listening. They were staring at Arthur Augustus, in his Beau Brummel costume and the goose under his arm, in amazement.

Then they turned to look at Skimpole, and in doing so, caught sight of Herries and Digby with their fowl-basket between them, and Jack Blake with his bantam cock.

It was too much for the juniors of St. Jim's, and they roared with laughter—School House fellows as well as New House. Arthur Augustus looked at them with dignity.

"Weally, deah boys, I fail to see what there is to laugh—"

Tom Merry gasped.

"My only aunt! Do you really, Gussy—"

"Look at them!" roared Figgins. "Only look at them to die!"

"Shure, and look at their clothes, me bhoy!"

"Weally, Weilly—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The previous evening, the costumes chosen by the chums of Study No. 6, had been rather admired, but now, in the broad daylight, when everyone else was dressed in ordinary things, their attire was startling. But what really staggered the other fellows were the prizes they had won.

Figgins, for one, thought he would never forget his first sight of Arthur Augustus with the goose under his arm, or Skimpole with his fine rooster held well out in front of him in case it should recommence flapping its wings.

Even Skimpole was rather disconcerted by the roars of laughter, and he forgot all about his original intention of using his prize as an object lesson in the Socialistic education of Taggles.

He turned to the porter hastily.

"Taggles," he said, "I present this bird to you!"

"Thank you, sir!"

"And here's a goose, deah boy!"

"Not to mention a bantam cock!"

"And two fowls!" said Digby and Herries together.

"You may be able to sell the lot!"

"Which I shall be able to do at once to Farmer 'Odges."

Then Jack Blake squared his shoulders.

"Come on, you chaps!" he said, with an attempt at carelessness. "What on earth these young asses are cackling about, I don't know!"

"I wathah think they must be off their wockahs, deah boy!"

"Come on, Skimmy!"

"Dear me—yes! Certainly, Blake, if you wish me to, I will come along."

The five strode forward, and although the walk to the school doors was only a matter of a hundred yards or so, it was a walk the Study No. 6 fellows were a long time forgetting.

"An escort!" shouted Figgins. "They must have an escort!"

"There's someone who'll get a thick ear if he isn't careful!"

"Why, that's young Blake—young Blake of the School House!"

"So it is!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"When's the show begin? We want to know when the show begins!"

"Weally, Lowthah, if you considah you are funny, you miss the w'etched mark, deah boy!"

"Come on, you chaps; the prize-winners have returned!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who are you young asses?"

"What's up?"

Fellows came flocking in from all aides. Jack Blake led his small party steadily on.

"Let the asses cackle, Gussy!" he whispered, his face crimson. "They are all off their rockers!"

"Yaas, wathah; I considah they are off their wockahs myself, deah boy! Lowthah, deah boy, do you want me to administah a feahful thwashing?"

"No; we want you to do a dance or something."

"Don't take any notice of the frabjous idiots, Gussy!"

"No; wathah not, Dig, deah boy! Bai Jove, Weilly, if you come any neahah, I shall have no othah course open to me but to thwash you!"

"Don't talk to them, idiot!"

"No, wathah not, Hewwies! Tom Mewwy, wemove yourself fwom my path, or I shall lose my tempah!"

Arthur Augustus was becoming flustered. The way the fellows crowded round, pushed in nearer even than they wished by the crowd behind them, considerably upset the swell of the School House.

He did his best to remain calm, but his best was not very good in the circumstances.

"Stop, Blake!" he suddenly exclaimed wrathfully. "Stop, deah boy!"

"What for, ass?"

"To give me time to thwash Mannahs!"

"Ass!"

"Oh, do come along, Gussy!"

"I must refuse, Digbay, deah boy! I cannot come along until I have thwashed Mannahs for wecklessly gettin' in my way! Stop, deah boys—stop!"

But the "deah boys" did nothing of the kind. They kept on steadily, and because Arthur Augustus had no intention of remaining in the quadrangle by himself, he followed.

Suddenly one of the study windows was flung open, and the somewhat exasperated face of Mr. Railton, the School House-master, appeared before the juniors.

"Boys, what is the meaning of this disturbance? Good gracious!"

Mr. Railton had caught sight of the returned prize-winners, and a change came over his face.

A smile took the place of the previous expression of exasperation, then a distinct laugh was heard, and the window was closed down again.

Jack Blake glanced about him quickly.

"We'll make a dash for it in a minute," he whispered to Herries, and Herries nodded.

He passed the word on to the others, then Jack Blake gave the signal.

"Like the giddy wind!" he panted. "Now for it!"

And away the five darted, bursting through the juniors in front of them like a well-trained rugby pack.

Fatty Wynn, the New House Falstaff, was bowled over in spite of his great weight; Kerr was sent spinning against Manners, and Manners brought up against Tom Merry with such vigour that the hero of the Shell rolled completely over.

"My hat!"

"Stop them!"

"Collar them, you chaps!"

But it was too late.

Reilly dashed into the breach with true Irish recklessness of consequences, but he met Jack Blake's shoulder when on one leg, and the last the chief of Study No. 6 saw of the junior from Belfast was that he was lying on the ground, upsetting all who were attempting to step over him.

Jack Blake smiled grimly and went on.

It would have taken a good deal to stop Jack at that moment, and his chums were as determined as he was.

"Wush them, deah boys—wush them with all your stwength!"

"Into 'em!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"How do you like that, Figgy, my son? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove!"

Panting and red-faced, the prize-winners of St. Jim's were through the crowd at last, and had gained the steps.

Jack Blake was leading.

"Up you go, kids; we've beaten them to the world!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"My hat, just look back!"

The five were at the top of the steps by now, and they all turned round.

The spectacle which met their gaze was a pleasing one in the circumstances. Quite a third of the enemy were on the ground, and the rest were in such a hopeless tangle that there could be no question of pursuit.

Jack Blake chuckled.

"That comes of oxing about with Study No. 6 fellows, kids," he said. "Is that how you like it done, Merry?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah! Hah, hah, hah!"

And, laughing loudly, the five disappeared through the doorway.

CHAPTER 15.

Tom Merry's News.

"LOCK the door, one of you!"

"Yaas, wathah; it is already done, deah boy!"

"Good!"

And Jack Blake dropped, panting, into the easy-chair. The others, with the exception of Skimpole, who had gone to his own room, also dropped into chairs, and there was silence, except for heavy breathing, for quite a long time.

Arthur Augustus was the first to break the pause.

"What's to be done now, deah boys?"

"Change like one o'clock!"

"Yaas, undah the circs., I wathah think we ought to change like one o'clock myself!"

"What's to be done afterwards, though? That's a matter we've got to arrange."

"Yaas, wathah; I agwee with Digbay that we must



awwange what is to be done aftahwards, because I shouldn't be surprised if the fellows try to wag us about this."

"Shouldn't you, Gussy?"

"No, Hewwies, deah boy."

"What a head you must have! What do you think can be done, Jack?"

Jack Blake thought for a moment or two, then got up.

"There's only one thing to be done, and that's push on with the great wheeze against the New House," he said. "What we must do is to give the kids something to talk about and help them to forget this."

"Yaas, wathah! I considah that quite a bwainy wemark, deah boy!"

"Oh, ring off for a moment, Gussy! Now, the thing is, how can we tackle Tom Merry without getting ragged?"

"Bai Jove, we shall be feahfully wagged if we go neah Tom Mewwy, under the circs! I feel pwactically certain we shall!"

"Ass!"

"Couldn't we send him a note?"

Jack Blake shook his head.

"He'd twig we were finking it. No, Dig; I'll wander into his room directly I've changed, and if he starts fooling

"I say, deah boy—"

"Dry up, Gussy! We'll come with you, of course, Blake!"

"Good!"

"Yaas, but—"

"Oh, do lie down!"

"I must wefuse to— Pway don't be widiculous, Hewwies!"

"Dry up, then!"

"I wefuse to dwy up! Pway why do you want to see Tom Mewwy, deah boy?"

"About the wheeze we've got up against the New House this afternoon, of course!"

"What has Tom Mewwy to do with it, Blake? I undahstand that the hot-watah pipes in the Shell woom haven't to be wepaired."

"Of course not, ass!"

"Then Tom Mewwy won't be able to help us, deah boy!"

"Oh, you raving lunatic, Gussy!" exclaimed Jack Blake.

"We don't want him to help us! Is it likely? All we want are his bottles of eucalyptus!"

Arthur Augustus waved his arm in shirt-sleeve loftily.

"There is no need, deah boy!"

The others looked at him in surprise.

"No, need! What do you mean, ass?"

"I must wequest you not to address me in that mannah, Blake, deah boy!"

"Well, what do you mean, Gussy?"

"I have awwanged it all, deah boy!"

"Arranged all what?"

"About the eucalyptus!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"I awwanged it last night on the wink."

"My hat!"

"You know, we pwoposed that it should be awwanged on the wink—that we were to wequest Tom Mewwy to let us have his eucalyptus, and I made the wequest!"

"My hat!"

"What's the mattah, deah boy?"

"You're a brick, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Yes, Gus; you're coming on in your old age!"

"Weally, Digbay, deah boy—"

"Oh, you are great," exclaimed Herries, "and I would never have thought it of you!"

"It was nothin', weally, and I awwanged the mattah with Tom Mewwy in a few words!"

"Good! What did he say?"

"That we could have all the eucalyptus he possessed, and

Bai Jove, that reminds me!"

"Reminds you of what?"

"That Tom Mewwy left me in a vewy abwupt mannah aftah our conversation."

"Ass!"

"Weally, Hewwies, I have wequested you befoah not to address me in that wough-and-weady mannah! Howevah, I shall wemonstwat with him when we meet latah!"

"You can wemonstwat—bother it, remonstrat as much as you like, kid," grinned Jack Blake, "as long as the eucalyptus is safe!"

"That is all awwanged!"

"Hallo!"

There was a hasty tap at the door.

"Who is there?"

"I—Merry!"

"Well, I—Merry can go and eat coke!"

"Don't rot, you chaps! I've some ripping news, and I can't stay a minute!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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"No; it isn't a rag! Honour bright!"

"Unlock the door, Gussy!" said Jack Blake instantly.

"Anything happened, young Merry?"

"Yes, rather, young Blake! What's up now, Gussy?"

"I wegwet to say I shall have to wepwove you for what I considah wathah bad form, deah boy!"

"Some other time, then!"

"No; now, deah boy!"

"S'mother time, ass!"

Arthur Augustus got up.

"I wegwet to say that it cannot wait until some othah time, Mewwy! I wish to wemonstwat with you for the vewy abwupt mannah in which you left me last night on the wink!"

"Abrupt manner in which I left you! Abrupt manner in which you left me, you mean, kid! You ought to be boiled in oil for not telling me what Blake was dressed as!"

"I am not wefewwin' to that occasion, deah boy!"

"Well, I don't remember any other occasion, and I haven't got time to stay talking to a silly young ass who ought to be in a home, because I've got an appointment with Lathom, and he might object to be kept waiting!"

"He would, kid!" grinned Jack Blake.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Now, if you'll gag the one and only, I'll tell you news which will make you chuckle!"

"Fire ahead!"

"Get on with it!"

"It happened on the rink," explained Tom Merry. "One of the New House kids—Figgins, I should think it was—came up to me and began talking about a great rag they are going to play off on us this afternoon."

"My hat! This afternoon?"

"Yes. It seems that the hot-water pipes have gone wrong in their Fourth Form-room, and they'll have an hour off."

"My aunt, it's the same with us!"

"Yes, so Reilly said. I suppose the pipes are connected in some way. Well, I couldn't think what on earth Figgins—if it was Figgins—was driving at, because I didn't recognise him as a New House ass at first, and before I could stop him he told me the whole wheeze."

"Gweat Scott!"

"Dry up, Gussy!"

"What is the wheeze, Merry?"

"Oh, a natty one, and no mistake!" grinned the Shell fellow. "It seems Kerr has painted a lot of rotten posters—silly-ass sort of affairs—er—libelling us, and the kids mean to sneak into our House and plaster the place up with them. I can't stop a minute to talk things over, and so shall have to leave it in your hands."

"It couldn't be in better," said Jack Blake simply.

"No, wathah not!"

"Anyway, as we shall have to swot at maths, while you youngsters of the Fourth are wasting your young lives, it's up against you to settle the hash of the New House people!"

"It shall be done!"

"Yaas, wathah, the eucalyptus will do that, deah boys!"

"Yes; they are rather fed about eucalyptus, aren't they?" grinned Tom Merry. "Anyway, try and keep our end up!"

"Try?" said Jack Blake coldly.

"Of course, Fourth-Formers can't be expected—"

"What's that?"

"What did you say, Tom Merry?"

"Well, do your best, youngsters!" said Tom Merry, making for the door rather hastily. "I expect you'll make a horrible bungle of it all, but so long as you do your best, I sha'n't say anything. When you've finished ragging the New House kids, you might boil Gussy in petrol for me, if you have time, will you?"

And Tom Merry left without waiting for an answer.

"Bai Jove! Of all the w'etched cheek—"

"Ring off, Gussy—"

"I wefuse to wing off. I shall wemonstwat with Tom Mewwy about his wudeness the moment I see him."

"Good! Ring off now, then; your three minutes are up. My hat, you chaps!"

"What a ghastly sell for Figgins & Co.!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How is it to be worked?"

Jack Blake looked puzzled, then the bell for first school sounded.

Jack Blake rammed on his coat.

"We'll think it over, kids. My hat, if this is worked properly, the New House will have the time of its life!"

"Yaas, wathah! I considah the mattah ought to be left entially in my hands, deah boys—"

"Consider away, kid, then have a sleep. Think hard, you chaps."

"Rather!"

And the four hurried from Study No. 6 in thoughtful silence.

CHAPTER 16.

Arthur Augustus Has His Own Way.

"MY idea is to make a double barrell'd job of it, you chaps."

"Hear, hear! I agree with you, Blake, deah boy—"

"How do you mean, Blakey?"

Jack Blake pushed open the study door and sat on the table before answering. Morning school and dinner were over by now, and so there was only German to be got through before the matter of turning the tables on the New House juniors had to be settled.

Jack thought for a moment or two.

"Why, this?" he exclaimed. "Figgins & Co. and all the rest of them in the plot intend to sneak in here, don't they?"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"

"Well, how many of them do you think will come?"

"Not many."

"Figgins & Co. may be carrying the thing through off their own bats," said Digby.

Jack Blake nodded.

"Yes, that's what I thought. Of course, they have no idea that we sha'n't be in class, and think they will have the studies to themselves."

"Yaas, wathah! I considah that is how mattahs will materialise, deah boy."

"Well, what do you think all the New House kids will be doing?"

Digby and Herries looked at Jack Blake without understanding.

Arthur Augustus thoughtfully polished his monocle.

"Weally, deah boy, I wathah think they will be doin' a lot of different things—playin' footah; going for walks; wowing on the wivah—"

"Exactly—all will be out of doors?"

"Yaas, wathah; seein' what a wippin' aftahnoon it is—"

"Good! Then what's to prevent our slipping into the New House and playing the eucalyptus wheeze as arranged off on them?"

"Nothin', deah boy."

"Oh, isn't there?" exclaimed Herries. "What about Figgins & Co. slinking here with their rotten posters?"

"Yaas, wathah; I nevah thought of that."

Jack Blake grinned.

"Well, I did, kids," he chuckled. "My proposal is that we divide forces. Two or three of us slip into the New House with Tom Merry's eucalyptus, and the rest guard the studies."

"Bai Jove! I wegard that as a wippin' idea!"

"Not so dusty for Blake."

"No, it isn't; is it, Dig?" said the chief of Study No. 6.

"What do you say, Herries?"

"Oh, it's all right; in fact, I was going to make the same proposal myself—yes, I was, Blake!"

"Go on, kid!"

Herries looked indignant.

"I was just about to make it," he said aggressively. "I was thinking it over in my mind. There's one drawback, though."

"To your mind?"

"Silly ass! What about our eucalyptus party meeting their poster party at the communicating-doors?"

"You think their party will use the communicating-doors?"

"Of course."

"Then we'll use the other door—it only means crossing the quad, and we can slip along by the wall without being seen."

"Yaas, wathah. I considah that a wippin' ideah also."

Herries growled.

"It might work."

"It will work, kid," said Jack Blake decidedly. "Nothing can prevent it."

"Well, say it does work, what happens?"

"Why, we jolly well saturate their kennel with eucalyptus and we collar their poster party."

"Bai Jove! Ha, ha, ha! Watling."

Digby nodded his approval.

"What do we do to them? Tar and feather the kids, or scalp 'em?"

Jack Blake chuckled triumphantly.

"Neither, my son."

"What then, kid?"

"Make them change their clothes."

"Make them—change—their—clothes?" repeated Herries blankly. "What on earth for, ass?"

"Bai Jove, I fail to see the point in makin' them change their attah, Blake, deah boy! I considah it would be bettah to tie their hands behind their backs, blindfold them, and send them out into the quadwangle."

"Do you, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy; I considah that would be a wea' markably funnay wag."

Herries and Digby looked at Jack Blake keenly.

They knew the leader of the School House Fourth Form, too well not to know that there was something behind all this.

"What's the idea, Blakey?"

"Blindfold them, and send them into the quadwangle, deah boy."

"Switch off, Gussy!"

"What's the wheeze, Jacko?"

"The only thing to be done in the circumstances, kids," grinned Jack Blake. "Make them change their clothes and dress up in our fancy-dress costumes."

"Phew!"

"My hat!"

"Gweat—Scott!"

"Like the idea?"

"Bai Jove, yaas, wathah, Blake, deah boy! As a mattah of fact, I was about to pwopose the same thing myself. We can tie their hands behind them—"

"Yes, we could do that as well."

"They wouldn't change their things."

"Wouldn't they?" said Jack Blake grimly. "They've had the laugh at us to-day and no mistake. Don't you really think they would change their clothes if we were to ask them nicely?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"My hat, Jack, this is great!" exclaimed Digby, with unusual praise. "It fairly knocks them at their own game; and directly it gets about afterwards, I shouldn't think they'd dare to think about fancy dress, let alone rag us about it."

"That's the idea, of course—to bottle the New House people up."

"Yaas, wathah! Now to awwango who shall form the eucalyptus party, deah boys. I pwopose—"

"Oh, do you, Gussy?"

"Yaas, Digby, deah boy, I pwopose—"

"I don't think!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Dry up, you kids!" said Jack. "We should all like to play the eucalyptus wheeze, but as it is our study and Tom Merry's eucalyptus & Co. are going to rot about in, I think we four ought to stay behind."

"Bother."

"Still, we sha'n't be altogether out of the fun, kids."

"No, there is that—"

"But on the othah hand, who can we send into the New House, deah boys? It will be wisky work, and will want careful considahation—bai Jove!"

"Cornstalk & Co. would jump at the chance."

"Yaas, wathah; but are they weally weliable enough—"

"Reliable—Cornstalk & Co. reliable?"

"Oh, of course, I wecognise that they are weliable as anythin' in one sense, but I must say I wathah think they might not cawwy the wag through successfully, deah boy, without some guiding hand—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause for laughtah, Blake."

"Look in the glass, then, kid—but I see your idea, Gussy. You think I ought to go with them."

"On the contaway—"

"Of course not; he thinks I ought to go with them."

"On the contaway, Digby—"

"He means me, you asses!"

"On the contaway, Hewwies, deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus in exasperation. "I was wefewwin' to myself."

"To yourself?"

"To yourself, Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah, and why not? I wathah think there isn't a more weliable fellow in the School House than myself when it is a wag that has to be cawwied through successfully. I must remark that if I do not go with them we are wunnin' a gwave wisk."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But we want you to help us look after the studies, kid."

"Yaas, wathah; but I considah I should be of bettah service with Cornstalk & Co., to look aftah them."

Jack Blake grinned.

"Have it which way you like, Gussy," he said, "only don't blame me if it snows eggs."

"And he'd have been in the way here, anyway."

"Bai Jove, Hewwies, I have no othah course but to considah that wemark in the light of wudeness in the extweme."

"Considah it in what light you like, kid, but it's true. Hallo, there goes the bell for German!"

"Bother!"

"Well, it's all arranged, then," exclaimed Jack Blake, jumping down from the table. "Gussy looks after Cornstalk & Co."

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE ST. JIM'S SURPRISE."

stalk & Co., and we others stay here and collar the New House kids. We must borrow some fancy-dress costumes, and get some of the other kids to help us in case a small army comes from Ratty's kennel."

"Yaas, I considah that a good idea, deah boy."

"All my ideas are good, Gussy," said Jack Blake simply. "Look here, kid, if you wreck this rag you'll be slain on the spot."

"Weally, Blake, I wathah think I am not in the habit of wrecking wags."

"Well, don't wreck this one, anyway. My hat, we shall have to put on a spurt!"

The four hurried from the room, longing for the time when the dismissal bell at three-thirty would sound.

CHAPTER 17.

The New House Raid.

THE New House clock struck half-past three loudly.

A moment or two later the door of the Fourth-Form class-room was flung open, and Figgins & Co. came out at a run.

"We'll slip along and get the posters, kids," panted the long-limbed leader of the New House juniors. "My only aunt, you are sure it wasn't a rag, Kerr?"

The Scots junior shook his head.

"Gussy was the kid who gave the show away, and Gussy isn't the fellow to rag off his own bat. I tell you, Figgy, Gussy came up to me and asked me if he could have Tom Merry's eucalyptus to soak the New House in."

"My aunt, like his beastly cheek!"

"I couldn't make out what on earth he was talking about at first, and when I tumbled to it, that he thought I was Tom Merry, it was too late to stop the young ass giving the game away."

"Ha, ha, ha! What luck!"

"It wouldn't have been luck if they'd brought the rag off," shuddered Fatty Wynn. "If there is one thing that takes away my appetite it's eucalyptus."

Figgins also shuddered.

"But we've scotched that all right," he chuckled. "The thing now is to let them come into our studies—then pounce on them. I've got about a dozen fellows waiting on the stairs for them."

"Good!"

"Slip in and get the posters, Fatty. I tell you, Kerr, we've got the School House in the cart, and no mistake, this time."

"We have, my son."

"It's something they'll never get over," chuckled Figgins. "Coming after the prize-winning biz, too. My aunt, Blake and his kids haven't half been ragged this morning about that!"

"Ha, ha, ha! I shall never forget when they got out of the waggonette."

Figgins chuckled again when Fatty Wynn appeared, some more posters under his arm.

"These are really good," he said modestly, "although I was hungry at the time I painted them."

"My hat, you've been long enough!"

"Yes, I had a bun. I say, suppose the School House kids see us, Figgy?"

"We've got to risk that, my son."

Kerr nodded.

"But it isn't very likely," he said. "We'll just saunter through the doorway, have a glance round, then slip into Tom Merry's room. Anyway, Tom Merry and the other Shell-fish are in class, and it's a good way from Study No. 6."

"Yes, I should say it was pretty safe."

Figgins nodded, and led the way at a smart pace.

He had laid his plans carefully, and, as far as he could see, there was little chance of them going awry.

The School House Fourth-Formers were at liberty, it is true, according to Kerr, but the chance of their being hanging about near the Shell studies was a remote one.

Most of them would be in the grounds, in fact, except those who had been selected to carry out the eucalyptus wheeze, and Figgins had arranged a nice surprise for them.

On the whole, Figgins was rather pleased with his plot.

"This way!" he said gleefully. "Now's the time to keep your eyes open."

"Yes, and verra wide open, too," said Kerr, with national caution.

Fatty Wynn looked about him.

"There doesn't seem to be anyone about, Figgy."

"There isn't, kid."

"Good! By Jove, I wish we were going to tea with Tom Merry instead, because I feel painfully hungry! It's this chilly weather."

"Dry up!"

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"Yes, mum's the word."

Figgins & Co. were in the School House by now, the communicating doors open behind them, in case a hurried retreat had to be made.

But it seemed unlikely they would have to be used, for there was not a sign of anyone about. Figgins became more pleased than ever with his plot.

He crept on silently.

"Don't make such a hefty row, Fatty. That's Tom Merry's study."

"Yes, rather! Slip in quickly."

Figgins pushed open the door and hurried into the room. The others followed as rapidly as possible.

To all appearances the study was as deserted as the corridor.

"Shut the door!" breathed Figgins. "It's a thousand to one now we sha'n't be seen."

"What was that?"

Kerr's voice rang out sharply. There had been a sound behind him.

He wheeled round. Standing with their backs to the door were Jack Blake, Herries, and Digby.

"Cheer-ho, kids!"

"Come to tea, you chaps?"

"Rather early if you have, because Tom Merry won't be disengaged until four-thirty."

"Where were you?" gasped Figgins.

"Under the table, kid."

"My hat!"

Figgins glanced from the grinning School House fellows to the closed door behind them. How to reach that door and get it open was the question.

"Rush them!" suddenly shouted Kerr. "Bundle 'em out of the way!"

Jack Blake put his hand in his pockets and grinned. Kerr looked round with a gasp.

A School House Fourth-Former was crawling out of the cupboard under the bookcase.

"Four to three!" muttered Figgins. "They're only School House kids; it's about equal."

"Rush 'em!" said Kerr again.

His suggestion was not carried into effect, for the raiders' eyes were fixed on the sofa. Another School House junior was crawling from under that.

"My only old hat!"

"L-look at the curtains!"

Two more defenders were stepping from behind the curtains, and Figgins knew the cause was lost. But Figgins was on his mettle.

He was beaten, he knew, but he meant to make a good game of it.

"Come on!" he cried. "Rush 'em!"

And with a rush Figgins and his loyal lieutenants flung themselves towards the door.

Jack Blake clasped Fatty Wynn round the neck, and regretted his rashness. The Falstaff of St. Jim's was nothing of a light weight, and for a moment Jack Blake thought he was about to be pushed bodily through the door.

"My only aunt!" he gasped loudly, then managed to wriggle to one side. Fatty Wynn brought up against the door with a sounding thump.

Digby was tackling Kerr in fine style, and Figgins found he had an awkward handful in Herries, who was as tenacious once he had a hold as his own bulldog, Towser.

"Bump 'em! Bump 'em!"

"Yes, that's the ticket!"

"Break the door down!" panted Figgins. "Break the door down!"

But at that moment the fellows from the curtains arrived on the scene, and although Figgins & Co. offered a splendid resistance, they were too hopelessly outnumbered to hope for success. In less than three minutes they were lying on their backs on the floor, with School House juniors sitting on them.

Jack Blake chuckled.

"How do you like it done, Figgy?"

"Comfy, Kerr?"

"Lemme get up!"

"I don't think!"

"Rotters! All right, Digby! All right, you young rotter!"

"What's the matter, Fatty?"

"I feel faint. I haven't had anything to eat since dinner except a bun, some apples—only three—and a small plum-cake. Oh!"

Fatty Wynn was groaning. Much unexpected exertion had that effect on him.

Jack Blake glanced round at the others.

"Fit?"

"Rather!"

"Good! Undress them."

"My hat, I'd like to see you try!" spluttered Figgins. "Leave my collar alone, you young ass; it's the only clean one I have!"

"I sha'n't dirty it, kid. Off with their waistcoats! That'll do nicely."

"My hat, Blake, I'll flay you alive for this!"

"Good!"

"Lemme get up! I believe I feel faint. Digby, if you don't let me get up I'll—I'll roll on you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If Kerr's going to wear a pierrot's costume you needn't take his togs off."

"No, it goes on nicely over his ordinary things."

"Save time in case any of the other kids turn up," chuckled Jack Blake. "My hat, we've got you in the cart this time, Figgy, and no mistake."

Figgins maintained as dignified silence as he could while being forcibly dressed in Arthur Augustus's Beau Brummel costume.

Jack went on genially:

"Bit of luck our learning your plans, wasn't it, Figgy?"

Figgins started. Until this moment he had thought the thing was a chance affair, if he had thought about it at all.

Now that the point was raised, it staggered him to remember that the School House fellows had been hidden in the room.

"Figgins's fault," grinned Herries.

"Mine?"

"Yes, yours, kid. Comes of not using your eyes, a failing you New House kids have, I've noticed. Fancy mistaking Tom Merry for a rat!"

"Like his blessed cheek!"

"I mistook Tom Merry for one of our fellows."

"On the rink, Figgy."

"My only Aunt Jane!"

The School House fellows roared with laughter. They could see by Figgins's face that he remembered now. But before he could speak again the enemy had yanked him to his feet.

"Now you are all right, kid."

Figgins glanced at himself and differed. He looked quite as ridiculous as Arthur Augustus had looked that morning when stepping from the waggonette.

"Where's Gussy?" he suddenly demanded.

"Having a constitutional in the New House," chuckled Blake.

"Eh?"

"With some eucalyptus, and Cornstalk & Co. to keep him company."

"Ha, ha, ha!" suddenly roared the chief of the New House contingent. "My aunt! Ha, ha, ha!"

Jack Blake looked at him suspiciously.

"What's up now? What are you cackling about, ass?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, they are off their rockers!" growled Digby. "Kerr is guffawing like an old hyena. Tie their hands behind them."

The laughter died out of the faces of Figgins & Co.

It wasn't likely they were going to inquire their fate, but they were anxious all the same.

They were not kept long in suspense, however.

"That's the style!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "Now tie what clothes we have removed into separate bundles, and strap them to their owners' backs. My aunt, this is something like a rat!"

"How's that?"

"Ripping, Dig! Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co. certainly did present a striking spectacle, dressed, as they were, in costumes of the wildest mixtures. Figgins, for instance, had Arthur Augustus's Beau Brummel costume on, but he was wearing a pierrot hat, while Kerr was a pierrot's pure and simple, except in one detail.

On his head an old tall hat had been jammed.

Fatty Wynn was trying to wear Skimpole's uniform and his own trousers, and he was not succeeding. None of the buttons of the uniform would meet, and to form a sort of fancy waistcoat, Digby had used one of Wynn's own posters, with the names altered in red ink.

When Figgins & Co. looked at themselves in the glass they felt upset.

"Now to start them on their tour!" roared Jack Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Just look at them!"

"This way to London!"

Figgins & Co. still maintained a dignified silence, but

when they had been led along the corridor, and saw what was about to happen to them, they forgot their dignity.

"All right, you young rotters!"

"Turn them loose! Ha, ha, ha! Drive them across the quad!"

"Outsiders!"

"School House rotters!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All right, Blake; just you wait—just you jolly well wait!"

"I am—for you to start across the giddy quad, Figgy."

"Yes, that's it. We can't have freaks like this wandering about the School House."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins glanced round. He saw that further resistance was out of the question, and that he would have to submit. He gritted his teeth.

"All right, kids," he said grimly; "our turn will come."

"It has, my son—to wander across the quad."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Then, without another word, Figgins & Co. vanished down the steps, and tried to make a dash for it.

But it was no good. The fellows outside caught sight of them, and the cry which Figgins himself had raised that morning was raised now by Reilly.

"An escort, you chaps! They must have an escort!"

And the last Jack Blake and his chums saw of Figgins & Co. for the time being was that they were running as hard as they could, followed by a whole crowd of yelling juniors.

Jack Blake chuckled pleasantly.

"Good! I shouldn't think Figgy will have much to say about fancy dress after this."

"I shouldn't think he'd care to mention it."

"No; we've bottled them up about—about our own little jaunt across the quad, this morning, and no mistake."

Jack laughed heartily.

"But there's more to follow!" he exclaimed. "Let's slip down to Study No. 6, and see if Gussy has turned up."

"Right-ho!"

And the four scudded up the stairs at their best.

CHAPTER 18.

The School House Raid!

IN the meantime, Arthur Augustus had hurried across a corner of the quadrangle, a large bottle under each arm.

"Hallo, deah boys! I wathah think I am a twifle late."

"A trifle—eh?" grumbled Harry Noble. "We thought you weren't coming."

"Yaas, wathah! I was undah the impwession myself that I had been wathah longah than I meant to be, but I couldn't find the wotten eucalyptus."

"Anyway, have you got it now?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then we may as well get a move on. Humph! I suppose you are certain this couldn't have got to the ears of Figgins, aren't you?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That's all right, then."

"How are we going to work it?"

"In a remarkably simple manner," explained the swell of the School House, dropping into stride with the Cornstalk & Co. "We just hawwy into the New House and satwate their things with the stuff, then we hawwy away again."

"My aunt! Yes, we shall do that last part all right."

"Yaas, I have the whole thing worked out in my bwain."

Clifton Dane growled. He wasn't quite satisfied, nor was Harry Noble, for that matter.

"Oh, Blake's working the thing, so it will be sound enough!" said Bernard Glyn decidedly. "Blake doesn't bungle much."

"No; but the One and Only does."

"Weally, Noble—"

"Yes, really, kid!"

"Oh, don't start gassing! Let's get on with it!"

The four had gained the approach of the New House by now, and after a hasty glance both ways, slipped in. Arthur Augustus struggled to screw his monocle in his eye, still keeping the bottles under his arm.

"Now, if you fellows will put the mattah entially in my hands we shall be all wight," he said. "You can wely upon me, deah boys."

"Yes, I know we can—rely upon you to make an ass of yourself. Figgins's room first, in case there isn't time to trouble about any of the others."

"There'll be plenty of time, deah boys."

"Humph! I'm not so certain about that!"

"Yaas, weally, there will be plenty of time," persisted Arthur Augustus. "There is no chance of our being discovered—"

ANSWERS

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE ST. JIM'S SURPRISE."

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MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Oh, isn't there?"

"No, deah boy; because I have the mattah in hand. You can west assured—"

"Well, I sha'n't rest at all until I'm out of this," said the young Australian. "I've run up against Figgins before now."

"Not when I have had the mattah in hand, deah boy. Now, I wpose—"

"It doesn't matter an atom what you propose, Gussy."

"Weally, Noble, as pwime movah in the affair—"

"Which you aren't."

"Weally, Glyn—"

"Oh, dry up, or we shall have the whole House about our ears!" grumbled Clifton Dane. "Which staircase shall we take, Noble?"

"This one."

"No, deah boy, the othah would be bettah—"

"Rats!"

"Really, Glyn—"

"More rats! Up you go, Harry!"

Arthur Augustus stared at Cornstalk & Co. loftily. He did not relish this, but as he saw there was little chance of inducing the three chums to use the other staircase, he followed them.

Harry Noble led the way, stopping at last before the sanctum sacred to Figgins & Co.

"Open the doah, deah boy."

"S-sh, ass! There may be someone inside!"

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that!"

The Australian junior listened cautiously, then pushed open the door. The room was quite empty.

Arthur Augustus chuckled.

"Wipin'! I wgard this as wipin' in the extweme!"

"Well, don't cackle about it, Gussy!"

"Weally, deah boy, I am not in the habit of cackling about anythin'."

"Well, stop cackling about nothing, then."

Clifton Dane glanced round the room.

"What shall we soak first with the stuff, kids?"

"There's a lot of blottin'-papah there, deah boys."

"Good for you, Gussy. Blotting-paper is the very stuff."

"Soak that whole sheet, and put it behind the bookcase."

"Good egg!"

Arthur Augustus took the cork out of one of the bottles.

"And aftahwards I wpose—"

The swell of the School House stopped speaking, a puzzled expression flashing across his face.

"What's up, Gussy?"

"Get on with it!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus sniffed loudly. Then he placed his nose against the mouth of the bottle and sniffed again.

"Gweat Scott!"

"What on earth is the matter with the young ass?"

"Got the flu coming on, Gussy?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Take the bottle from him!"

"Gussy, what is the matter?"

"Weally, deah boy, I don't quite know, but I hardly think this smells like eucalyptus."

Harry Noble took the bottle from him, and smelt. Then he put it down, and stared at Arthur Augustus.

"My hat, if this is a rag on your part, Gussy—"

"Far fwom it, deah boy."

"Then what's it mean?"

"Bai Jove, I weally don't know!"

Suddenly Clifton Dane uttered an exclamation:

"My aunt, this isn't eucalyptus at all, you young ass!"

"Of course, it isn't!" agreed Noble. "It's plain water, I should say!"

"Yaas, watah! I considah it is plain watah myself."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The four jumped to their feet. There was a distinct chuckle at the doorway.

"Who—who is there?"

"Gweat Scott!"

"My hat!"

And Cornstalk & Co. and Arthur Augustus stood staring across the room.

The door was open now, and in the doorway stood quite half a dozen New House juniors. They came into the study briskly.

"Collar the raiders!"

"Like their cheek!"

"On the ball, you chaps!"

And before Cornstalk & Co. could raise a hand to defend themselves they were surrounded.

"My only toppah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Wemove your hand from my shouldah, deah boy; you are wumplin' my collah!"

"We'll rumple you before we've finished," chuckled the New House fellow. "Bump them!"

"Welease me instantly! I wefuse to be bumped! Welease me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, I shall have no othah course but to administah a feafuh thwashin' in a minute, deah boy. You will wouse my tempah—"

But whether Arthur Augustus's temper was roused or not never transpired. Before he could speak again he found himself on the floor just as Figgins & Co. were finding themselves in the same position in the rival House.

"Welease me—welease me instantly!"

"Where's the eucalyptus, kids?"

"Here you are, old man!"

And, to the horror of the swell of the School House, one of the juniors produced a large bottle of the evil-smelling oil.

Harry Noble saw it and understood. A New House fellow had been to Tom Merry's study, and had spent a quiet time changing bottles and labels.

The young Australian glanced at Arthur Augustus once.

"You shrieking young ass, Gussy!"

"Weally, deah boy—"

"You frabjous idiot!"

"Bai Jove—"

"You raving young lunatic!"

Then New House fellows chipped in:

"Mind their clothes!"

"That's all right!"

"Rub it well into the roots!"

"That's the style!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, if you wub the beastly stuff on my hair, I shall thwash you—I shall thwash you all—"

Then Arthur Augustus gasped. The fellows were rubbing eucalyptus into his hair with great glee.

It did not take long, and Cornstalk & Co. awaited their turn in grim silence.

Their turn came quickly enough, and in quite a short time the heads of the four reeked of the oil to such an extent that the New House juniors were wildly anxious to get rid of them.

"Turn 'em out!"

"Phew!"

"If they catch the flu now they cught to be boiled in eucalyptus."

"Turn them out into the quad."

And, amid roars of laughter, the four were driven out into the famous old quadrangle just as Figgins & Co. failed in an attempt to escape their escort.

CHAPTER 19.

Arthur Augustus's Letter.

"MY only aunt!"

Harry Noble gasped loudly. Then he turned to Arthur Augustus.

"Only wait until I get this stuff off my hair, Gussy—only you wait until then!"

"The man I want to slay is Gussy!"

Clifton Dane spoke grimly. Arthur Augustus stared at him loftily.

"I blame you entiahly, deah boys—"

"What!"

"Blame us! Oh, let me get at him!"

"Don't intewwupt, deah boy. I blame you entiahly for not goin' up the othah staircase. If we had gone up the othah staircase we should have seen the young wottahs hidin'."

Cornstalk & Co. gasped in one voice.

As a matter of fact, Arthur Augustus was correct in his remark, for the juniors had been hiding on the stairs. But Cornstalk & Co. were not in a mood for making concessions.

"What shall we do with him?"

"Yes; that's the point."

"What's to be done with the young ass—"

Bernard Glyn stopped speaking in astonishment. Quite a large crowd was coming towards them, struggling vigorously.

It was Figgins & Co. on their return journey from their raid. The rival contingents met in the centre of the quadrangle.

"There's Gussy at last!"

It was Jack Blake's voice, and he, Herries, and Digby raced up to join the party. Everyone stopped and began to sniff.

"Who's got some of that beastly eucalyptus here?"

"Kick the kid into the river!"

"Who is it?"

"Not a word, deah boys!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Perhaps they won't discovah who it is!"

"My hat, look at Gussy's hair!"

Reilly uttered the exclamation loudly, and everyone turned to look. As a rule, Arthur Augustus parted his hair very carefully in the exact centre.

At the present moment it was standing on end like a blacking-brush.

"It's Gussy!"

"And Cornstalk & Co.!"

"They've rubbed it on their heads, the young asses!"

Figgins actually grinned, the first time since he had left the School House.

"It's been rubbed on their heads for them, you mean."

"Yaas, wathah! A lot of young wottahs collahed us, and

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see what cause there is for laughtah, Digbay, deah boy—"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

The fellows were yelling with laughter, but none of them came near the four.

They could smell the eucalyptus badly enough standing yards away. The noise the juniors were making even attracted one or two seniors to the scene.

Then suddenly a well-known voice rang out across the quadrangle:

"Cheer-ho, kids! What's up?"

It was Tom Merry, followed by Lowther and Manners.

The Terrible Three glanced at Figgins & Co., then roared with laughter. After that, they noticed the odour of eucalyptus, and guessed what was the matter with Arthur Augustus's hair.

"Hard luck, kid!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hard luck!" growled Harry Noble. "It's nothing to the luck he's going to run up against when I've got this rotten stuff out of my hair."

"Weally, deah boy, I considah you unweasonable in the extweme."

"Oh, you do, do you?"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy! Bai Jove, is that Tom Mewwy?"

"It is, kid."

"Then I must say I blame you entiahly for what has happened."

"You blamed us just now, you young ass!"

"Yaas, wathah, Noble. I blame you as well, but it is weally all Tom Mewwy's fault."

The hero of the Shell grinned.

"Is it, kid?"

"Yaas, wathah, and undah the cires. I wathah think I shall have to administah a feahful thwashin'. You promised to let me have your eucalyptus, and then you pwesented it to Figgay."

"What's that?"

"Yaas, you did, deah boy! And I must say I considah it wathah wepwehensible of you—"

"The last thing I gave to Figgins was a thick ear!" grinned Tom Merry. "Wasn't it, Figgay?"

"Well, you allowed Figgay to obtain the wotten stuff, and afaah having promised it to me—"

"Promised it to you! Promised what to you?"

"Gweat Scott! The eucalyptus, deah boy!"

"I never promised any eucalyptus to you, ass!"

"Yaas, wathah! On the wink last evenin'."

Tom Merry looked puzzled.

"You're off your rocker, Gussy!" he exclaimed. "I never spoke to you on the rink about eucalyptus. We talked about that young ass, Blake. You're dreaming, kid!"

"Bai Jove, what a wotten memoway you have, Mewwy, deah boy! Don't you wemembah you said I could have all the eucalyptus you possessed?"

"What is the young ass raving about, Blake?"

"I am not in the habit of wavin', deah boy. I nevah wave!"

"You are now, anyway."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Everyone turned to look at Figgins. He was chuckling loudly.

"Weally, Figgay, I fail to see the cause for laughtah in the fact that Tom Mawwy has lost his memory."

"It's you who has lost your head."

"Weally, deah boy—"

"So you have. You never spoke to Tom Merry about eucalyptus, last night on the rink."

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy! I distinctly wemembah sayin'—"

"Yes, only you said it to Kerr, instead. Didn't he, Kerr?"

Kerr nodded.

"Yes, you gave the plot away, Gussy. Was Tom Merry dressed as Sir Walter Raleigh, as well?"

Tom Merry chuckled.

"No, kid; I changed my mind at the last moment."

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gweat Scott!"

Arthur Augustus stared at Kerr in blank amazement. Jack Blake laughed heartily.

"There, Gussy, you see what a young ass you are!"

"Weally, bai Jove! Gweat Scott!"

"My hat!" suddenly laughed Tom Merry. "What a good old mix up it's been. Everyone seems to have been ragging everyone else."

"Yaas, wathah! My only toppah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Manners. "Buck up, Gussy! You'll soon wear that smell off your hair. A couple of weeks, and I promise to come within a yard of you. Oh, there was a letter for you, so I brought it along with me."

"A lettah for me, deah boy! Bai Jove, I am all in a fluttah!"

Arthur Augustus took his letter—a neat little blue envelope, addressed in a neat, girlish handwriting. He opened it just as Figgins & Co. were preparing to slip away unobserved.

"Stop, deah boys! The lettah is fwom Cousin Ethel."

Figgins stopped at once, turning a trifle red.

"Is—is she all right, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah, Figgay, deah boy! And she w'ites to say that the party she invited us to takes place this evenin'—"

"My aunt!"

"Hooray!"

"What time, Gussy?"

"We are to be there at six, Blake deah boy!"

Jack Blake cheered at the top of his voice, Lowther waltzed with his sworn foe, Kerr, and Figgins forgot his attire.

Cornstalk & Co. looked on enviously.

"My hat, we shall have to look sharp!"

"Rather!"

"Slip in, and get permission, Gussy."

"Yaas, wathah! You can wely upon me to get permish. Oh, there's a postscript!"

"Is there, by Jove?"

"Yaas, wathah! Cousin Ethel says Major Peahson hopes I'll bring any other chums I want to, up to the numbah of thwee."

"That's ripping of him!"

"Who shall you take, Gussy?"

"Well, Mewwy, undah the cires, I wathah think I shall ask Cornstalk & Co. to come with us."

Harry Noble gasped.

"Do you mean it, kid?"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"

"Hooray!" shouted the young Australian; and not another word was said about the various raids which had come to grief.

Figgins & Co. rushed into the New House to change. Cornstalk & Co. pelted away in search of clean collars, while Arthur Augustus raced for the bath-room to wash his head.

At least four of the guests knew what to expect in the way of entertainment which would be supplied at the Elms!

THE END.

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READ THIS FIRST!

Oswald Yorke, a youth of eighteen, whom peculiar circumstances have forced to become a highwayman, one night holds up the carriage of Admiral Sir Sampson Eastlake. He is overpowered, however; but the good old admiral offers him a chance of serving the King in the Navy instead of handing him over to justice. Oswald, therefore, joins the frigate Catapult as a midshipman, under the name of John Smith.

The first day at sea, Oswald is feeling very seasick, and retires to his hammock. The master's mate, a burly man named Rumbold, offers to assist him into his unaccustomed couch, and gives him a powerful heave.

(Now go on with the story.)

Oswald's First Fight.

At the same time as Rumbold gave Oswald a hoist up, he drew the hammock towards him, with the effect that Oswald went clean over, and fell to the floor again.

The middies were by this time doubled up with laughter; but Oswald could not see the joke. He was bruised and sore, and the feeling of deadly sickness was becoming insupportable.

Rumbold was apologising profusely, and he looked so concerned that Oswald was quite taken in.

"I think I'll stay where I am!" he groaned.

"Impossible, believe me—impossible!" said the master's mate. "My dear fellow, you will have the rats running all over you and making their dinners off your face! Come, make one more effort!"

It is probable that Rumbold would have given Oswald another tumble; but Maxwell, divining his intentions, went round to the other side of the hammock and saved Oswald from going overboard again.

"You'd better leave him alone," whispered Maxwell to Rumbold. "He's just a size too big for you, old chap, and when he shakes off the sea-sickness, he'll be paying you back in your own coin if you worry him now!"

"Upon my word, I believe you are right!" said Rumbold. "Gad, I don't know what the Service is coming to, letting great hulking brutes of six feet take their rating as middies! It's positively sickening!"

Rumbold was an inveterate bully and practical joker. To the youngsters he was a terror, and woe betide a newly-joined midshipman, if he was at all undersized or weakly, for then Rumbold allowed his propensities full play. It seemed, however, that he took Maxwell's hint, for he went away and left Oswald to himself.

For about an hour Oswald suffered the agonies of excruciating torture, at the end of which time he fell into a troubled sleep. He dreamed that he was waiting at the cross-roads again with Dick, and presently they saw the lights of Maydew's carriage appear through the darkness as they had on that never-to-be-forgotten night. Nearer and nearer came the carriage, then, as the horses galloped wildly past him, Oswald drew back in sudden horror, for the moonlight fell

full upon the coachman's face, and revealed a fleshless death's-head. His horse, too, had seen the horrible apparition, for, giving a shrill neigh of terror, it reared up on its hind legs with a suddenness that sent Oswald backwards from the saddle. He was falling. He made a desperate effort to save himself, but failed, and struck the ground heavily with the back of his head.

So far, he had been dreaming; but the fall and the heavy blow on the head were no dream. He had indeed fallen, and he was conscious at the same time of smothered laughter, and the sound of stealthy footsteps.

He had just time to see the master's mate stealing softly away, when he became lost in wonder at his own position. He was lying with his legs high in the air, and his head resting on the deck. His hammock had given way at the head, thus letting him down upon the deck with a shock that effectually awakened him.

Oswald was on his feet in a moment, feeling rather dizzy, but more angry than hurt, for he saw instantly that it had been cut clean through with a sharp knife.

A brief examination of the rope by which the head of the hammock had been suspended proved this to him, for it had been cleanly cut through with a sharp knife.

"Who did that?" he asked.

The laughter ceased instantly, and Oswald could just catch a glimpse of a dark figure trying to steal away behind the bulkhead.

In a moment he had cut off the man's escape, and grasped him firmly by the shoulders.

"Here, hands off, youngster!" said Rumbold. "Hands off, or you'll find yourself in the wrong box!"

"Did you cut down my hammock?"

"Me! Good heavens, no! You are dreaming! If anyone cut down your hammock, it must have been Mr. Cheeks, the marine—"

At this the giggling recommenced, for "Mr. Cheeks, the marine," was ship-slang for nobody.

"You lying scoundrel," said Oswald, "you have got the knife in your hand now that you did it with!"

"Steady, my lad! Go lightly with your names, or it will be the worse for you!" said Rumbold, puffing out his cheeks.

By this time the other middies had jumped out of their hammocks, and one of them lighted the big lantern that swung from the centre beam.

"Here, make a ring! Fight fair!" shouted Hunter.

"Fight fair! You're fairly copped this time, Rumbold!"

Rumbold uttered a curse loud and deep, then suddenly launched out a blow at Oswald's head.

Unexpected as the attack was, Oswald managed to avoid the blow.

The next moment the two were at it hammer and tongs in the centre of a ring, formed by the delighted middies.

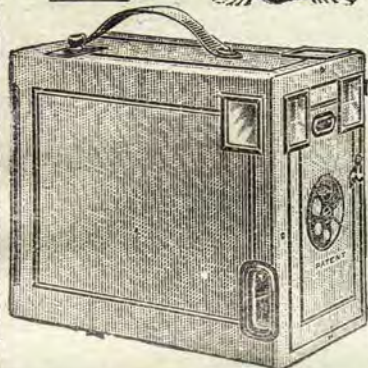
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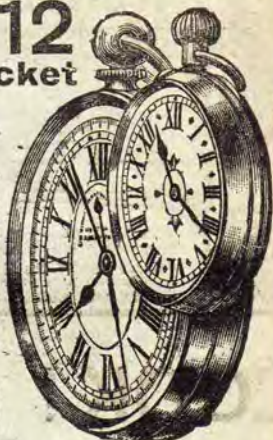
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