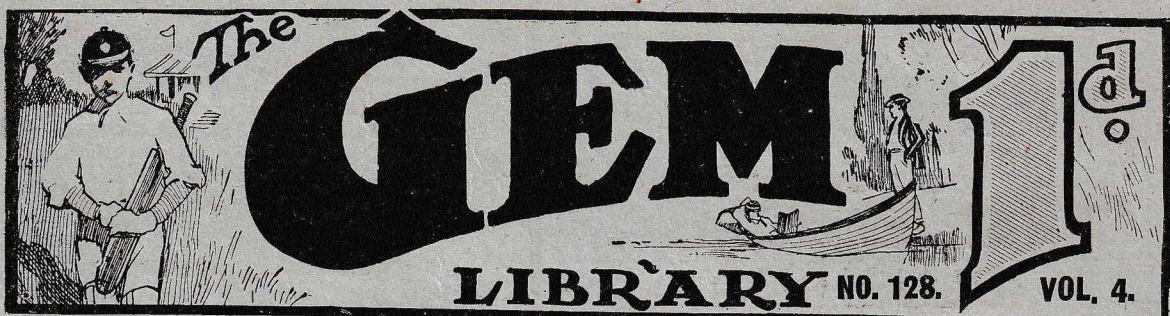


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by
MARTIN
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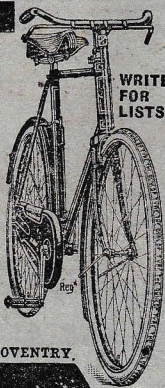
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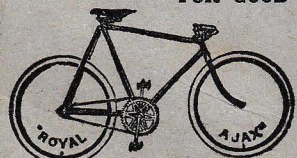
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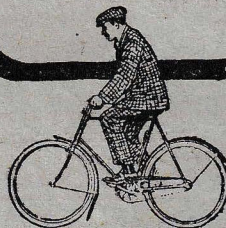


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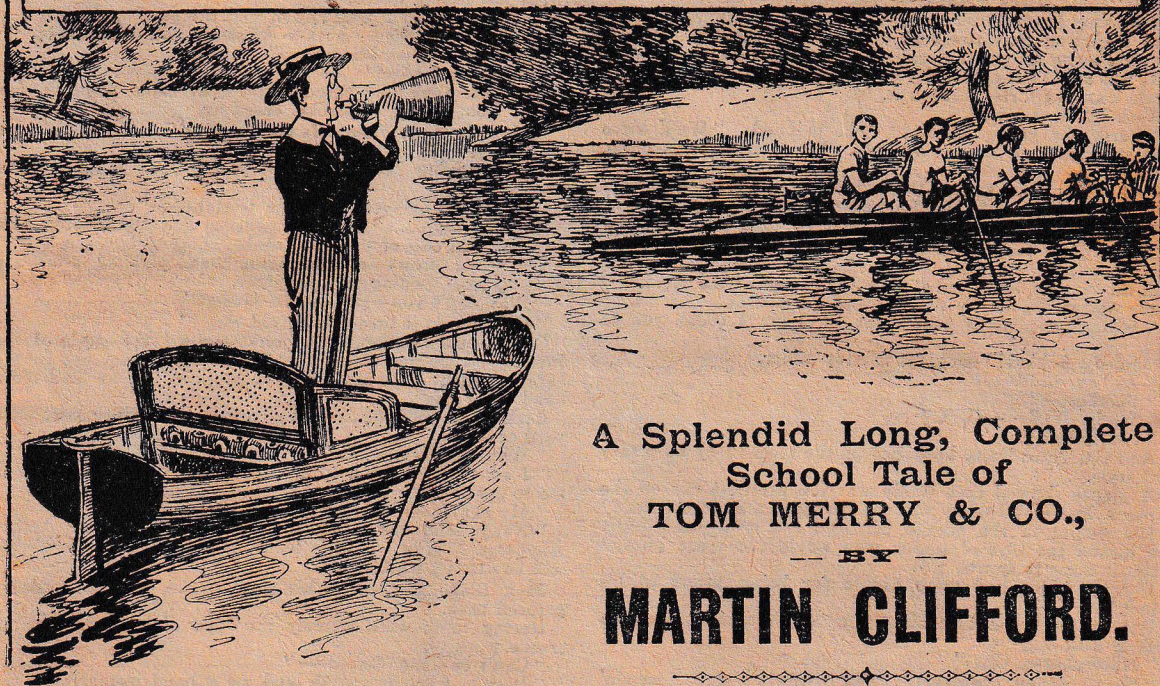
THURSDAY

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A Splendid Long, Complete
School Tale of
TOM MERRY & CO.,

— BY —

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

The Beginning of the Trouble.

"COME ashore, Gussy; we've got the boat ready."

"Weally, Blake, deah boy—"

"Oh, don't be a young ass, kid!" exclaimed Jack Blake, leader of the School House Fourth Form at St. Jim's. "If we have to wait for you there'll be pieces of a slain kid to be swept up."

"Weally Blake, pway don't be so widie. I have alweady told you I shall be unable to take my place in the wacin' boat this aftahnoon, as I considah the weathah much too warm foah wovin'—"

"Slacker—"

"Frabjous duffer!"

"Weally, Hewwies—weally, Digbay— Howevah, I sea that you are only waggin', deah boys, as I am weally vewy bizzay coachin' the Third-Formahs."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth, paddled his light river skiff round again, glancing loftily at a racing four stroked by his younger brother.

D'Arcy minor was arranging his stretcher straps.

"Hallo, Gus! Get out of the way, kid!"

"Weally, Wally, as I am goin' to spend my aftahnoon coachin' you youngstahs—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"What's he going to do, kid?"

"Coach us, Dud—"

"Yaas, wathah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus went rather pink. He rose cautiously to his feet in the light skiff, holding a megaphone in his hand.

"Pway get undah way, deah boys—"

"Rats!"

"And whatevah you do, Dudlay, you weally mustn't hold the sweeps as if they were cwicket bats or hockay sticks," went on the Fourth-Former. "The hands should be about eight inches apart, and the gwip firm but not tight. In fact—"

"Are you going to take your place in the boat, Gussy?"

"Pway don't intewwupt, Blake, deah boy—"

Jack Blake rushed to the edge of the landing-stage.

"Yank the young ass ashore with a boathook, someone. Gussy, for the last time, are you coming ashore to change—"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Jameson, you have a wotten leg-dwive. I twust you have made up your mind to impwove it befoah the wace against Glenside Third-Formahs—"

"Oh, go end eat coke!"

"Gweat Scott, Wally, as your eldah bwothah—"

"Are you coming to take your place in the boat, duffer?" yelled Jack Blake wrathfully.

"Bai Jove, Wally, you have no ideah how to get your ship undah way—"

A DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

No. 128 (New Series).

Copyright in the United States of America.

"Ass! We're only paddling."

"No talkin' in the boat. I shall ordah you all off the watah if there's talkin' in the boat—"

"Order away, kid! Steady there, Dud; we don't want the ship to go round in a giddy circle."

But, in spite of his words, there was a delighted grin on D'Arcy minor's face as he spoke.

Dudley of the Third was a big fellow, with even more strength than his rather shambling form suggested. It was only within the last week that the president of the Third-Form boat had discovered he could pull an oar.

Wally rather prided himself on his discovery.

Dudley's style made Arthur Augustus cringe.

"Gweat Scott, Dudlay, you are wowin' wottenly! Pway make the actions quite sepawate, and don't use the slide so soon—"

Jack Blake, Herries, and Digby stood on the landing-stage ceiling.

"Ass—"

"Come and take your place in the boat, Gussy—"

"You'll be boiled in oil if you don't!"

Arthur Augustus languidly waved his hand.

"Pway don't get in a fluttah, deah boys. The weathah is much too warm to wow this affahnoon, and I considah it is my dutay to coach the Third-Form boat— Bai Jove, Wally, stop! Back watah— Bai Jove!"

In taking his hand from the scull to wave, Arthur Augustus had forgotten that rowlocks are open at the top. Almost as soon as he let go, the scull slipped into the river.

It was now drifting rapidly down stream. Arthur Augustus made frantic efforts to reach it.

Jack Blake chuckled.

"Serve the young ass right!" he grinned. "We'll leave him struggling as long as he likes. Will you take his place, Reilly?"

"Shure, an' that's what I'm hanging about for, me bhoys!"

"Tumble in, then! Ha, ha, ha! Look at Gussy!"

The Fourth-Formers looked.

The swell of the School House was trying to row with one scull, but there was a lot of water in the Ryll that afternoon, and the current kept him well in the centre of the river.

He was calling loudly to the Third-Form boat.

"Wally! Wally, as your eldah bwotah, I ordah you to stop—"

"Ready, behind?" sang out D'Arcy minor.

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Paddle—"

"Wally, Wally—"

"Let her go!"

And the Third-Form boat shot up the river in by no means bad style.

A glance showed that Wally was the prettiest oar on the thwarts, and that Dudley was the strongest man in the boat.

His weight in the middle balanced the crew beautifully. He looked the sort of junior who would not spare himself when it came to spurts, too.

D'Arcy minor had some excuse for being proud of his "find."

But at the present moment the Third-Form stroke was yelling with laughter.

"Hard cheese, Gus!"

"You young wascal! Stop wowin'—stop wowin' instantly—"

"Jolly fine coach you are, and no mistake!" chuckled Wally, beginning to quicken.

"We're only going about a mile up the river, and if you haven't got your scull by the time we get back we'll lend you a hand. Sorry we can't stop!"

"Wottahs! Wally, as your eldah bwotah—"

"Look out, there!"

The warning shout was uttered loudly, but Arthur Augustus failed to hear it. As he would have expressed the situation himself, he was all in a flutter.

He was standing up in his skiff trying to reach the missing scull with a floorboard.

"Look out! Steady—"

Arthur Augustus heard this time, and turned round.

"Weally, deah boy, I must wequest you not to shout at me— Bai Jove!"

"Get out of the way, Gussy—"

"Gweat Scott!"

And Arthur Augustus dropped down on his seat again in wild excitement.

Three huge trunks of trees were drifting down the river towards him, being drawn by a small motor-launch.

Jack Blake had got his boat afloat, and was shouting advice.

"Pull, ass—"

"Get the skiff round— Ha, ha, ha!"

The School House Fourth-Form crew yelled with laughter.

Arthur Augustus was rowing wildly with one scull, while

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 128.

result that he was describing rapid circles. The tree trunks were coming nearer.

The man in charge of the motor-launch did his best, which was not much. He got his boat clear of the skiff easily enough, but it was more than he could do to drag the floating trees from the centre of the river.

"Bless me 'at!" he gasped, and he slowed down.

"Bai Jove— Gweat Scott—"

"Scull her, ass!" yelled Jack Blake. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Jack Blake's advice was good, and Arthur Augustus tried to act upon it. But it was too late, and he was on his feet again the next moment.

The floating trees were dangerously close.

"Bai Jove— Gweat Scott—"

Then there was a thud. The first of the trunks had caught the skiff amidships, and the light craft swung round.

Arthur Augustus gave vent to a wild shriek, and commenced swaying about recklessly. Then he made a wild grab at nothing in particular.

"My hat—"

"Sit down, ass—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Look at him! My only Aunt Jane—"

Another despairing shout had gone up from the skiff; then Arthur Augustus's elegantly-clothed form declined from the perpendicular.

He was falling overboard.

An instant later a loud splash told the gasping juniors that he had already fallen. Arthur Augustus had disappeared.

"Look out there, Blakey—"

"What's up, kids?"

And the Shell four-oared racing-boat came along in fine style. Tom Merry, at stroke, eased up.

"My only Aunt Jane! Is Gussy going in for life-saving in his old age—"

"Yes; saving his own life!" yelled Jack Blake. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"You wottahs—you wuffianly wottahs—"

Arthur Augustus came up panting and spluttering. He was between two of the tree trunks, clinging to them.

The rival crews in the racing-boats paddled after the drifting trees, yelling with laughter.

"Why don't you swim ashore, Gussy?"

"Did you do it on purpose, old chap?"

"You uttah duffah, Lowthah!" gasped the swell of the Fourth, struggling desperately. "I twust I am not in the habit of behavin' widiculously on purpose. Pway lend me a hand, someone."

Jack Blake stopped laughing, urging his dainty boat on a yard or so.

"Why, what's up, kid?"

"I am caught in the wotten bwanches. It is imposs. foah me to get free."

"My hat!"

"Pway lend me a hand, deah boy!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "The watah is feahfully chillay, and my clothes will be uttably wuined—"

Jack Blake glanced at his rival stroke, and Tom Merry glanced back.

Racing fours were scarcely the type of boats to attempt rescue work in.

"Can't be done, Gussy—"

"Wats! I ordah you to lend me a hand instantly, as the watah is becoming more chillay every minute. Figgay, pway lend me a hand."

Figgins & Co. of the New House had also come up at an easy paddle, hot and panting after a hard pull in their new racing four.

"Ha, ha, ha! What's the wheeze, Blakey?"

"What's the one and only Been doing this time, kid?"

"Trying to drown himself, and has changed his mind at the last minute," grinned Jack Blake. "He wants us to rescue him."

"I ordah you to wescue me, you wottahs, as the watah is weally wearmarkably chillay foah the time of the yeah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Can't be done, kid! I say," added Tom Merry, shouting to the man in charge of the small motor-launch, "you knocked the kid in, so you'd better haul him out again."

The man looked puzzled. Experience told him that if he once allowed the trees to run into the river bank his subsequent work in freeing them would be something to be remembered.

It was quite likely the trees would get stuck, and his small boat would not be nearly powerful enough to haul them clear again.

He removed his cap, and appeared to be thinking.

"I'm afraid you'll have to stay where you are, sir, until I land the lumber," he said apologetically. "It isn't far down the river, an' I'll 'aul you along as fast as I can."

"I wufuse to be hauled along—"



"You're a disgrace to the neighbourhood," choked Sir Caleb, waving his stick wildly in the air, "It is little ragamuffins like you that make life on a country estate intolerable!" "Wagamuffin!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Good gwacious!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes, that's the wheeze! Get on with the washing!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy! Pway stop! I ordah you to stop the motah-boat and lend me a hand——"

"We're just there, sir, an' if the trees once got stuck——"

"Bothah the wotten twees!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"I uttahly wefuse to be dwagged along in this widiculous mannah! Blake, I wequest you, as a fwriend——"

"That's all right, kid. My hat, now we're off!"

"Tom Mewwy, as a fwriend——"

"You're comfy. enough, Gussy. Soon be over. Ha, ha, ha!"

And, to Arthur Augustus's dismay, the motor-boat was started at top speed again, just in time to prevent the trees running into the bank.

The three rival crews paddled on behind, and a moment or two later they were joined by a fourth.

The Third Form boat was back again.

"My only Aunt Jane! Where's Gus?"

"Heah I am, deah boy; and I ordah you, as an eldah bwothah, to lend me a hand——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My only aunt! Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Third Form crew joined in the yells of laughter.

Arthur Augustus went a deep red, in spite of the chilliness of the water, and made desperate efforts to free himself.

But it was no good. In some way he could not quite understand, he had become securely wedged between the trees, the few branches of which had not been lopped off, holding him in a vice-like grip.

The juniors rolled about on their sliding seats in reckless fashion.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get on with the washing, Gussy!"

"Serves you jolly well right, for slacking!" yelled Jack Blake.

"You wuffians—you w'etched wuffians! Stop! I ordah you to stop, as I must wefuse to be dwagged through the watah in this wotten mannah!"

"You're all right, sir."

"I wefuse to considah I am all wight."

"It's only a few yards," grinned the motor-boatman.

"I'm just landing down by the summer-house."

The rival crews looked ahead.

They saw where the trees were to be run into the bank, and understood why they were in the river at all.

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"A RANK OUTSIDER."

Another Splendid Long, Complete
School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

They must have come from Sir Caleb Ashton's woods, and they were to be landed at another portion of the estate. But Tom Merry saw something else.

A tall, austere figure was standing on the river-bank.

"My hat, Monty! Who's that?"

Lowther twisted further round on his thwart.

"Sir Caleb, Tommy!"

"So it is! Blake, look ahead!"

Jack Blake and Figgins, the long-limbed leader of the New House juniors, looked ahead at the same moment.

"Phew!"

"Steady, there!"

But it was too late to even think of attempting a rescue now. Arthur Augustus was being towed rapidly towards the tall, austere figure.

The juniors exchanged glances.

There had been trouble between Sir Caleb Ashton and the St. Jim's juniors in the past, and, knowing Sir Caleb as he did, Tom Merry thought he could detect some more trouble in the near future.

The leader of the Shell hesitated for a moment, then got forward with his slide.

Arthur Augustus must be backed up, whatever happened. The Shell boat flashed past Jack Blake's four in a way that would have troubled the Fourth-Former a good deal at any less exciting moment.

Arthur Augustus had his back to Sir Caleb, and was still making desperate struggles to get free.

CHAPTER 2.

Arthur Augustus's Surprise.

"TOM MEWWY, I ordah you to wescue me, foah the last time!"

"Dry up, Gussy!"

"I uttahly wefuse to dwy up!"

"Almost imposse, isn't it, Gussy," grinned Lowther, "when you're up to your neck in water?"

Lowther would have jested at the stake.

None of the others smiled, and the remark only added to Arthur Augustus's indignation.

"Unless you lend me a hand instantly, I shall wefuse to considah any of you as fwends in the future!"

"Do ring off, ass!" whispered Jack Blake anxiously.

"Sir—"

"I wefuse to wing off. I— Bai Jove, I am fwee!"

And, with a great wriggle, the swell of St. Jim's managed to scramble clear. He struck out for the river-bank with a gasp of relief.

Tom Merry, Jack Blake, and Figgins watched in horror.

Arthur Augustus was making directly towards a small inlet of water which Sir Caleb Ashton used for experiments in trout rearing.

For the moment the juniors were too dismayed to speak.

"Gussy!"

"Come back, Gussy!"

"For goodness' sake, old chap—"

"Wats!" spluttered Arthur Augustus, swimming on in fine style. "Wats and wabbits!"

"Gussy!"

Tom Merry shouted in despair. Then another voice was added to his.

The man in charge of the motor-boat saw what was about to happen.

"You mustn't land there!" he shouted. "Bless me 'at—"

"Wats!"

And Arthur Augustus swam on.

He had not been able to see Sir Caleb while wedged in between the trees, because his back had been turned towards him, and he could not see the tall, austere figure now, on account of a clump of bushes.

For the same reason, Sir Caleb had been unable to see where Arthur Augustus was making for, but there was an angry flush on his thin face all the same. At the sound of his man's warning shout, he stepped towards the clump of bushes.

"Good gracious!"

Tom Merry and the other juniors gasped.

They had often glanced towards the inlet of water and at Sir Caleb's rather elaborate fish-rearing contrivances. Now Arthur Augustus had swum right into them.

"Bai Jove—"

"Boy, how—how dare you! Good gracious!"

"Bai Jove, what a wotten landin'-place!" gasped Arthur Augustus, as he clambered on. "Gweat Scott! I am feahfully scowatched!"

Sir Caleb was still trying to recover himself when the Fourth-Former scrambled from the water. He had not succeeded, but Arthur Augustus noticed nothing.

He merely started a little at finding Sir Caleb there at all.

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NEXT THURSDAY: "A RANK OUTSIDER."

"Bai Jove, I must apologise foah appeahin' in this weally wegvetable state, sir!" he said hastily. "I twust I have not startled you in any way."

Sir Caleb gasped.

"Bai Jove, it almost appeahs as if I have," went on Arthur Augustus politely. "I know how weally wotten it is to be startled, my deah sir, but I twust you will soon get ovah the fusthah."

"I—I— Good gracious!"

"Yaas, wathah! I must be in a feahful state!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in alarm. "As it is a good walk fwom heah to the coll., I wondah if you would lend me a wig-out? I feah it is rathah wude to ask, sir, but, undah the cires—"

"Barlow, throw him off the ground!" suddenly yelled Sir Caleb. "Kick him off the estate! I will put the young rascal in a reformatory!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus gasped in blank amazement. He could see no reason for a storm, as the others could. He had been under the impression Sir Caleb's silence was due to surprise.

The outburst flustered the swell of St. Jim's.

"Weally, sir—"

"If you were older, I would send you to prison!" choked Sir Caleb, waving his stick wildly in the air. "You're a disgrace to the neighbourhood!"

"Gweat—gweat Scott!"

"It is little ragamuffins like you that make life on a country estate intolerable!"

"Wagamuffin!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Waga-muffin! Good gwacious!"

"Don't you dare to answer me, boy!"

"No, sir; but— Gweat Scott!"

Arthur Augustus was completely bewildered. He stood, his arms well out on both sides to allow the water to drain from his once elegant coat, and stared blankly at the excited landowner.

Sir Caleb was waving his stick again.

"If you are not off the estate in two minutes, I shall thrash you within an inch of your life!" he thundered.

"You hear me, boy?"

"Yaas, wathah; but—"

"Two minutes!"

"Yaas, certainly, eir; only—"

"Are you going?" roared Sir Caleb, stepping forward. And Arthur Augustus retreated.

It was not often the swell of St. Jim's gave ground in that mild fashion, but it was not often he found himself in such an unpleasant position.

He could not think clearly.

Tom Merry and Jack Blake had exchanged another expressive glance; then Digby leant forward, and touched his stroke on the shoulder.

"Kangaroo is coming, Blakey."

Jack Blake glanced up the river, and heaved a sigh of relief.

Harry Noble, the Australian junior, was coming along at a fine pace in a light river skiff. He was sculling rapidly towards the racing boats.

"Thought I'd better bring out a lifeboat for Gussy, chaps."

"Good kid. It's needed, too."

"I should say so," muttered Tom Merry seriously. "Gussy's on the verge of being assaulted. Get closer in, Kangaroo."

The Cornstalk nodded and got his boat round.

Figgins gave a loud hail.

"Come on, Gussy!"

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Another Splendid Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

"Yes; come along, old chap," added Harry Noble, urging his boat closer to the bank. "Look alive!"

"Yaas, wathah; but——"

"Are you going, boy?" demanded Sir Caleb, flourishing his stick still more aggressively. "I shall not ask you again."

"I will wetiah instantly, sir," gasped Arthur Augustus. "Kangaroo, did you hear him call me a wagamuffin? Gweat Scott!"

The Cornstalk grinned a little as he helped Arthur Augustus into the boat; then he rowed him out to where the racing crews were resting on their oars.

Sir Caleb was still raving to his man Barlow.

Tom Merry looked rather serious.

"The sooner we get out of this, the better, Blakey."

"Just so. Steady, there!"

"Bai Jove! Gweat Scott!"

"Get on with the washing, Figgy. This isn't a funeral procession at Venice, kid."

Figgins got away in fine style, and Tom Merry and his crew followed. Jack Blake paddled at an easy pace, so as to give Harry Noble a chance of keeping up with him.

Harry Noble was still chuckling.

"Shouldn't wonder if the one and only has a fit or something," he grinned. "He's jibbering to himself."

"Gweat Scott! Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus certainly looked very flustered. Jack Blake and Digby and Herries stared at him severely.

"There, Gussy, you see what comes of slacking."

"You've only yourself to blame," added Digby gravely. "If you will go at about in a river skiff without someone to look after you, you must take the consequences."

"Bai Jove! He called me a wagamuffin! It seems imposs. that he can have been wewefwin' to me. Gweat Scott! I am all in a fluttah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus turned, and stared as loftily as he could under the circumstances.

"Weally, Blake, I fail to see any weason foah wibald laughtah in the fact that I am all in a fluttah."

"Don't you, kid?"

"Ha, ha, ha! He doesn't see any cause for laughter, Dig!"

"I—I weally do not, Hewwies!" panted Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove, now I come to think it ovah, I considah we have all had a vewy nawwow escape!"

It was Jack Blake's turn to stare now.

"Oh, if you're satisfied, Gussy——"

"I may say that I considah we have had a weally remarkable escape, deah boys."

"Shure, and are you certain you haven't escaped yourself, me bhoy?"

"Weally, Weilly—— Howevah, I see you are only waggin'. Bai Jove, there can't be any doubt about it, deah boys!"

"Doubt about what, ass?"

"He must be as mad as a hattah, bai Jove! I wondah you nevah noticed it, deah boys."

The crew of the racing four turned and stared at the bow oar. Reilly went rather pink.

"Look here, Gussy, me bhoy——"

"We are looking," said Jack Blake solemnly. "There is certainly a funny light in his eyes, chaps."

"And he rows a bit like a Colney Hatch blue——"

"Ye spalpeens!" shouted Reilly, whose warm Irish blood made it impossible for him to stand their steady stares, "if it's thick ears ye're looking for——"

"Thanks, Gussy, for pointing it out."

"Quite mad, of course! Mind he doesn't bite you, Dig."

"Bai Jove! Weally, Blake——"

"When did you first notice he was off his rocker, Gussy?"

"When he called me a——a wagamuffin!" answered the swell of St. Jim's, with a shudder. "I shouldn't wondah if Barlow is weally his keepah, bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, you're talking about Sir Calab, then, ass?"

"Yaas, wathah! And though I have no othah wesource but to considah his remarks as wude in the extweme, if he's as mad as a hattah, I suppose——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Frabjous ass——"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Sir Caleb Ashton is an awfully clever bird, Gussy," laughed Jack Blake, steadying his crew. "He's written all sorts of brainy books."

"Skimpole also wites bwainy books, deah boy."

"Ha, ha, ha! And Arthur Augustus has been known to contribute learned articles on neckties to the 'Weekly,'" chuckled Digby. "I admit you can't go by appearance."

"Pway don't wag, Digbay, deah boy, as I considah this a weally sewious mattah," exclaimed Arthur Augustus

anxiously. "As Sir Caleb is as mad as a hattah, I almost considah it is our duty to inform the police."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't laugh, deah boy. There can be no doubt that he is as mad as a hattah, or else he would nevah have waded at me in such a wotteu mannah foah nothin'."

"For nothing?"

"My hat! Do you call smashing up his fish rearing outfit nothing, Gussy?"

"Weally, Hewwies, I wathah fancay I am not in the habit of smashin' up fish weahin' outfits——"

Jack Blake grinned, easing down again.

"You mayn't be in the habit of doing it, ass, but you jolly well did it that time."

"Bai Jove——"

"When you pranced through the water in the inlet, kid."

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, I considah you must be entiahly w'ong, deah boy, as the affair was an accident on my part, and no weasonable gentleman would call anothah a wagamuffin on account of an accident. No, deah boy, I am afraid Sir Caleb is as mad as a hattah, aftah all."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! I fail to see any weason foah wibald laughtah——"

"Well, ring off, and think it over, kid. Look out, young Merry!"

"Right-ho, young Blake!"

"We don't have bumping races at St. Jim's."

Tom Merry did not answer. He was watching Jack Blake manœuvre his boat instead.

At the same moment, Figgins & Co. were watching Tom Merry, and Jack Blake was keeping a watchful eye on both crews, looking for weak points.

The rivalry which existed between the three Co.'s was to be continued on the river with increased keenness during the next few days.

But as Tom Merry, Jack Blake, and Figgins watched one another, very much the same thought was passing through their respective minds.

Race No. 5 on the regatta programme was going to be a close affair.

Presently Tom Merry uttered an exclamation.

"By Jove, there's Cousin Ethel, kids!"

The crews screwed round on their seats.

"My hat, so it is!"

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry bent to his oar.

"Paddle altogether, chaps; show 'em what we can do."

"Steer for the landing-stage, Pratt!" exclaimed Figgins, colouring deeply. "Steady, there!"

Within half a minute, all four boats, including the skiff, were making for the landing-stage. All were steering a good course for a pretty, girlish figure in a light summer frock.

"Bai Jove! Stop! I ordah you to stop instantly, Kangahwoo!"

"What's up now, ass?" grinned the Cornstalk, rowing hard. "Want another swim?"

"Stop! Gweat Scott! Stop, or I shall have to administah a feahful thwashin', Kangahwoo!"

Arthur Augustus was almost as flustered as he had been a few minutes before.

Harry Noble saw that, but he did not stop to inquire the cause.

He bent to his oars in spite of Arthur Augustus's excitement.

CHAPTER 3.

Cousin Ethel's Promise.

"STOP wowin', Kangahwoo! Stop wowin' instantly."

"Right-ho, kid!" chuckled Harry Noble.

"When I get to the landing-stage!"

"You wottah! You wank outsidah!"

"You don't say so, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to wegard you as a fwiend! I considah you in the light of a wastah of the first watah!"

"Go hon!"

Arthur Augustus became desperate.

He jumped up and tried to wrest the sculls from the Cornstalk's hands. Harry Noble went on rowing.

"And this is gratitude!" he said severely. "After I have saved your life, too, Gussy!"

"Wats, you wottah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Uttah wats! I ordah you to stop."

"Order away, then, old chap. Ordering chaps to stop rowing is about all you've done this afternoon, except make an ass of yourself. What do you want me to stop for, anyway?"

"Because it's uttahly imposs. foah you to go on!"

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"Eh?"

"I mean, it is utterly impossible for me to allow you to go on!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's. "I absolutely refuse to meet Cousin Ethel in this attitude!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You wank outside, Kangahwoo!"

"My hat, I forgot about your togs!" chuckled the Cornstalk, rowing harder than ever. "Perhaps she won't notice, Gussy."

"You weekless ass! Bai Jove!"

Harry Noble had skilfully dodged in between the racing boats, the skiff bringing up with a bump against the neat little landing-stage.

He was out of the boat in a flash.

"How do you do, Cousin Ethel?" he grinned, raising his cap.

Cousin Ethel laughed pleasantly; then every trace of a smile vanished from her pretty girlish face.

She was looking at Arthur Augustus in a manner which convinced the swell of St. Jim's there was little chance of her failing to notice the state of his clothes.

The other juniors scrambled from the racing boats, but Cousin Ethel took no notice of them for a moment or two. She was still looking in bewilderment at Arthur Augustus.

"Good—good gracious! What have you been doing, Arthur?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's been having a swim, Cousin Ethel," said Lowther solemnly. "He would do it; we couldn't stop him."

"Weally, Lowthah— Bai Jove! Gweat Scott!"

Arthur Augustus glanced down at himself. He looked very slimy, and what had once been a beautiful white waistcoat was now green with river weed.

One glance was enough for the swell of St. Jim's.

"Bai Jove! Pway excuse me, Cousin Ethel!"

And he turned and fled.

The juniors chuckled loudly, but Cousin Ethel stopped them. She made Jack Blake tell the whole story.

"And if you could only have seen Gussy tramping through the fish-rearing water!" he concluded, with a chuckle. "He didn't know Sir Caleb was there, and we did. It was great!"

Cousin Ethel looked rather grave.

"You ought to have been more careful," she said severely.

"Sir Caleb might make things very unpleasant for you all."

"But it was an accident, Cousin Ethel."

"Rather! Gussy hadn't any idea where he was going."

"No, I don't suppose he had," laughed the girl chum.

"Anyway, I sha'n't blame Sir Caleb if he gets very cross about it all. He is only staying at the Towers this summer for the fishing. Still, I don't want to talk about that."

"No, Cousin Ethel?"

"No, I want to talk about something quite different," said their girl chum, becoming severer. "Arthur told me all you deadly rivals were going to race against one another?"

"Rather!" grinned Jack Blake. "I'm getting a crew from the School House Fourth; Tom Merry & Co. are going to try and uphold the honour of the Shell, and Figgins is turning out a set of New House kids."

"Who'll walk away from you, Blakey," said Kerr pleasantly.

Cousin Ethel smiled at their obvious keenness.

"But how will you get the boats?"

"We're going to row in these," explained Tom Merry.

"Will Kildare let you?"

"Yes, rather!" grinned the hero of the Shell. "Item No. 5 on the programme is our race, for it happens to be just the time when the seniors will be holding swimming races up the river. No one wants to see the seniors try to swim, so I thought it would be a good idea to have a three-handed race."

"You thought it, Tom Merry?"

"Yes, Figg; had you forgotten?" asked Tom Merry blandly. "Don't you think it's a ripping idea, Cousin Ethel?"

"Not so bad—for boys!" said the girl chum musingly. "Is the river broad enough for three racing boats, though?"

"Yes, just, if the course is past Sir Caleb's ground; there's a fair amount of room there."

"I see. Who is going to steer for you, Figgins?"

"Pratt."

"Tom Merry?"

"Kerruish or—"

"And for your boat, Jack Blake?"

"Reilly or—"

"I see," murmured Cousin Ethel, looking thoughtfully across the river. "Of course, I know I steered frightfully badly in the race against Glenside, but—"

She stopped speaking musingly.

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The juniors stared at her, Figgins suddenly becoming a brilliant red.

He remembered the race against Glenside College, when Cousin Ethel had acted as cox. in splendid style. In fact, one or two authorities said afterwards her steering had had as much to do with winning the race as Tom Merry's work at stroke.

There was an expression of horror on Figgins's face.

He felt he had missed one of the great chances of life.

Tom Merry was staring blankly, and Jack Blake was almost as red as Figgins.

"By Jove!"

"My hat!"

"Phew!"

"What is the matter, Tom Merry?"

"Well, you see, Cousin Ethel," gasped the hero of the Shell, "we only decided the other day to have this particular race, and—and I haven't really made up my mind to let Kerruish steer—"

Figgins started violently.

"Pratt isn't going to steer for us, Cousin Ethel?"

"But you said he was just now, Figgins."

"Y—yes; only I've changed my mind."

"And we wouldn't have Reilly at the ropes for a pension," put in Jack Blake. "Wouldn't think of it."

"Shure, an' you might have broken the news to me, Blake, me bhoy," grinned the junior from Belfast.

"Rather not."

"Reilly would about lose the race for us."

Jack Blake pushed Digby aside unceremoniously.

"I say, Cousin Ethel—"

"Cousin Ethel—"

"I say—"

Tom Merry, Jack Blake, and Figgins were all speaking at once. Cousin Ethel glanced from one to the other patiently.

"Is anything the matter, please?" she asked.

"Yes, rather; that is to say—"

Figgins was stammering, getting redder every second.

Jack Blake suddenly pushed him aside as well.

"Cousin Ethel, will you steer our boat in the race?"

"Of all the cheek, Blake—"

"Look here—"

Figgins and Tom Merry gasped.

Jack Blake looked very grim.

"I asked first, Cousin Ethel!" he exclaimed. "Ours will be the winning boat, too."

"No, you didn't ask first. I was asking all the time."

"Rats, Figg!"

"Look here!"

"Look here!"

"Look here!"

"Yes, I am looking," said Cousin Ethel. "I can see quite a lot of excitement about nothing, too."

"Yes, but—"

"But—"

Cousin Ethel put up her little hand.

"Good gracious! Please don't begin all over again," she laughed, "because I have already made up my mind about the steering."

"Good!"

"Thanks, awfully, Cousin Ethel!"

"We'll row like anything with you at the ropes, Cousin Ethel."

And Tom Merry, Jack Blake, and Figgins stared loftily at one another.

Cousin Ethel laughed in great amusement.

"Yes, I have thoroughly made up my mind what I am going to do on Regatta Day."

"Yes, Cousin Ethel—"

"Thanks awfully!"

"Yes," smiled their girl chum. "I am going to sit in a deck-chair near the winning-post, and watch every race."

The juniors' faces fell. They all looked very blank.

Cousin Ethel laughed again.

"But that isn't what I wanted to talk about!" she exclaimed.

"By Jove, I don't believe you would have steered for any of us, even if we'd had time to ask you."

"Of course, I wouldn't, Tom Merry, because I couldn't have steered for you all."

Tom Merry & Co. looked rather blank for a moment or two, then all chuckled loudly.

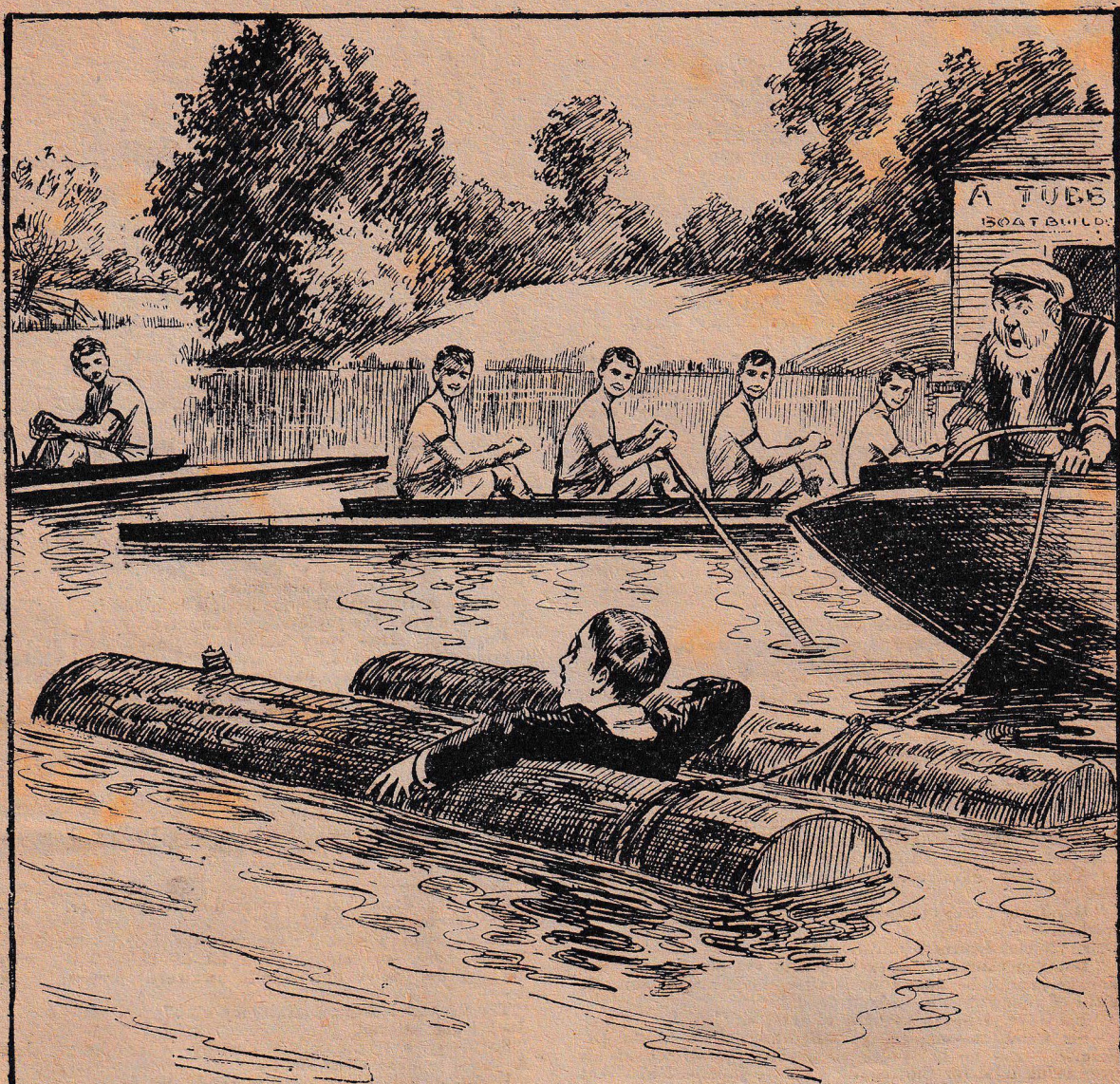
None of them minded being taken down by their girl chum.

But they were still looking at her. Somehow they felt more was to follow.

Cousin Ethel was putting on her gloves, and Figgins was wondering whether it would be quite the thing to offer to button them for her.

"What prize are you three crews going to row for?"

Figgins started, and forgot about the glove button problem.



"I'm afraid you'll have to stay where you are, sir, until I land the lumber," bawled the man on the launch.
 "I'll 'aul you along as fast as I can."

"Oh, there isn't a prize, Cousin Ethel!"

"I thought there wouldn't be."

"No, rather not. We got up the race ourselves, and we had rather a bother to get Kildare to consent to it, let alone asking the committee for a prize."

"But we don't mind about the prize a bit."

"Rather not—"

"Still there ought to be a prize," said Cousin Ethel. "I think I shall give one."

Figgins was colouring again."

"Yes, I am certain I shall give one," went on their girl chum coolly. "I shall ask the winning crew to come over to Cleveland Lodge to join a picnic party which is going to motor down to the coast the day after the regatta."

The juniors gasped.

A motor picnic to the coast. Silver cups could not be compared with a prize like that.

"Ripping!"

"Hoorah!"

"It—it's awfully kind of you, Cousin Ethel!"

"Yes, Figgins, I know it is," said Cousin Ethel. "A lot of schoolboys at a picnic is very trying. I hope you mean to train hard."

And, with a laugh, she hurried away.

The rival juniors looked at one another. There were very

grim expressions on the faces of Tom Merry, Figgins, and Jack Blake.

"My—my hat!"

"Hallo, deah boys! I have been lookin' all ovah the place foah you."

Arthur Augustus came up breathlessly. No one took any notice of him.

"Bai Jove, Blake, deah boy!"

"Ring off, ass! Tom Merry, if we don't massacre you kids—"

"If we don't give you the backwash in the first five minutes—"

"If we don't make a procession of it—"

"Weally, deah boys, as I have somethin' of great importance to tell you."

"Dry up, ass!"

"I wefuse to dwy up!"

"Ring off, then!"

"I wefuse to wing off!" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

"Look, you uttah wottahs!"

And the juniors looked.

Walking along the path leading from the college was a tall, stern-looking mah.

It was Sir Caleb Ashton.

"My hat! What's he doing here?"

"He's been up to the coll.!" panted Arthur Augustus.

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NEXT
THURSDAY.

"A RANK OUTSIDER."

Another Splendid Long, Complete
School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

"He awwived soon aftah I did, and he has been in the doctah's woom."

"My aunt!"

"And he was in an awful wage, too!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's. "Mellish said you could heah his voice wight at the end of the cowwidor. He must have been wavin'!"

"Phew!"

"What—what can he have come for, kids?"

There was no need to answer that question.

Without another word, the juniors commenced to run for the college.

Arthur Augustus looked fearfully anxious.

CHAPTER 4.

A Big Disappointment.

"**B**AI JOVE, there is the doctah, deah boys!"

Arthur Augustus made the remark in a gasp. The other juniors stopped.

They wished now that they had not been quite so anxious to follow the matter up. Dr. Holmes was walking directly towards them, a stern frown on his usually kindly face.

"Bai Jove, I believe there's goin' to be a wow, deah boys!"

"Humph! Shouldn't wonder!"

"No, wathah not. Hadn't we bettah wetiah, Tom Mewwy?"

"Ass! The doctor's seen us!"

"Yaas, wathah, only I nevah thought of that!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Besides, we must think of our dig."

"Think of five hundred lines and detention, you mean."

"Weally, Figgay—Howevah, the mattah only requires tact and judgment, and I wathah think I am the fellow—"

"D'Arcy!"

Arthur Augustus started.

The doctor's voice had rung out very clearly across the intervening stretch of quadrangle.

"Yaas, sir!"

"Taggies tells me you returned to the college just now in a drenched state?"

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

"Was it you who caused the damage in Sir Caleb Ashton's fishing water?"

"Weally, sir—"

"Was it you, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah, sir, only the whole affair was an accident, bai Jove!" ventured Arthur Augustus. "I wegwet to say I was w'ecked—that is to wemark, I fell in the wivah."

"You may have caused a great amount of damage, D'Arcy."

"Bai Jove, I wegwet that, sir, and I will of course make good the—"

Dr. Holmes frowned impatiently.

"But you cannot!" he exclaimed in exasperation. "The damage cannot be known until after the fishing-season. It is out of your power to make it good."

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that, sir!"

"Sir Caleb is very angry—justly angry," went on Dr. Holmes, "and he has protested against the stretch of his river being used for the regatta. I have promised him that it shall not be used."

"Oh, sir!"

"Bai Jove!"

"It is your own fault, boys," said Dr. Holmes sternly. "I have told Kildare that a fresh course will have to be mapped out."

"But—"

"Well, Merry?"

"But—but there isn't another stretch wide enough for three four-oars to race, sir."

"You should have thought of that before. D'Arcy, how did your accident happen?"

"I was w'ecked—that is to wemark, I fell in the wivah, sir."

"Were you playing tricks on one another?"

"No, sir, wathah not. I was coachin' the Third-Formahs when some floatin' twees dwawn by a motah-boat w'ecked me—"

"You give me your word it was entirely an accident, boys?"

"Yes, sir."

"Yaas, wathah—"

"Then the matter ends here!" exclaimed the Head. "I trust we shall be able to arrange the races satisfactorily on another stretch of the river."

And the Head strode away before the juniors had recovered from their dismay.

The moment he had gone, Tom Merry wheeled round.

"That's snatched the whole thing baldheaded!" he exclaimed wrathfully. "Gussy, you ought to be boiled in oil."

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"A RANK OUTSIDER."

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, bump the young ass, someone!"

"Weally, Digbay, deah boy—"

"Ass!"

"Frabjous lunatic!"

"Bai Jove, Kerr—"

"Oh, it's too rotten!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "We sha'n't be able to have the race now. There isn't another stretch for miles, where we could row three boats abreast."

"Rotten!"

"Yaas, wathah, I considah it wotten in the extweme, deah boys."

"And it's all your fault, ass!" growled Jack Blake. "If you hadn't slacked and had taken your place in the boat—"

"Oh, Gussy ought to be chained up!"

"I say, isn't it rotten?"

The juniors were too disappointed at that moment to slang Arthur Augustus as they would have done under less trying circumstances. They were all thinking of Cousin Ethel and her promised prize.

Tom Merry looked desperate.

"We shall have to arrange a bumping race or something, Blakey!"

"Will Kildare let us use the boats for bumping?"

"Oh, hang it all!"

And Tom Merry strode away, followed by Manners and Lowther.

"Bai Jove, deah boys!"

Jack Blake, Digby and Herries were also moving off, their hands in their pockets.

"Bai Jove, deah boys, pway— Figgay!"

But Figgins & Co. had also gone.

Arthur Augustus had the quadrangle to himself.

He stared after the juniors in amazement.

"Bai Jove! How vewy wude to wetiah when I was in the middle of a wemark," he mused. "I must say I wathah wondah at Jack Blake. Bai Jove! It appeahs that I shall have to intahview Sir Caleb by myself!"

And the swell of St. Jim's commenced a thoughtful saunter down the path.

CHAPTER 5.

Jack Blake's Visitors.

"**T**HUMP away, kids!"

Curly Gibson, Jameson, and Dudley thumped.

D'Arcy minor began to kick.

"Open the door, Blake—"

"Look here—"

"Open the door, kid!" repeated D'Arcy minor. "Important bizney—honour bright!"

Jack Blake growled and flung open the door.

"Look here, we can't have a lot of Third Form kids bothering us; we've got a jolly awkward thing to work out—"

"The Sir Caleb Ashton affair, my son?"

Jack Blake started.

"So it's all over the college already, is it?" he growled.

"Anyway, you can clear, Wally!"

"Right-ho, kid—when we've finished. Sit down, chaps!"

And the Third-Formers coolly took the chairs Jack Blake & Co. had just risen from.

Jack Blake & Co. glared at them.

Wally nodded pleasantly.

"Thought you'd be glad of some help," he said cheerily. "It's all a lot of piffle; Gussy never meant to do the damage."

"Of all the giddy cheek—"

"It isn't likely Gus would go and fall in the river on purpose. As a matter of fact, it was Sir Caleb's own man who upset him—"

Jack Blake grimly opened the study door.

"Take your choice, Wally," he said tersely. "The window or the door!"

"Oh, don't come the old fogey wheeze with us, my son; we're here to lend you a helping hand in a very difficult biz—"

"Are you going to clear?"

Jack Blake & Co. had gone very red. It wasn't likely Fourth-Formers were going to listen to advice from fags.

Wally glanced from one to the other pleasantly.

"My only Aunt Jane, aren't they raty, kids?"

"They'll calm down when they hear our plan—"

"Are you going?" yelled Jack Blake.

ANSWERS

Another Splendid Long, Complete
School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

"It's a ripping fine plan——"

"Bump 'em! Bump 'em, kids!"

"And, if you'll agree to help us, we'll jolly well make Sir Caleb sing small, and no mistake!" went on Wally, as cool as ever. "You see——"

"Altogether!" growled Jack Blake. "Now!"

And there was a general rush.

Wally dodged round the table.

"Don't goat, Blakey! You're as bad as Tom Merry in the old fogey line. All you Fourth-Formers and Shell-fish are jealous of the Third Form——"

"Collar them!"

"Bump the young sweeps!"

"Turn the soda-water on them, kids!"

D'Arcy minor glanced round. There were ~~two~~ syphons of soda-water and one of lemonade on the cupboard. Digby was making towards them.

Jack Blake dashed for Wally.

"Out you go, kid! Ha, ha, ha!"

And Wally went, sitting down with a thump on the passage floor.

The next instant Jameson also came out and sprawled over his leader.

"Ha, ha, ha! That's the style!"

"On the ball, chaps!"

And Dudley also left the room, a violent charge from Herries' shoulder knocking him off his balance in fine style.

Wally tried to scramble to his feet but it was no good. He got up as far as his knees, when the last of the fags left Study No. 6.

Curly Gibson was being carried out by Herries and Jack Blake.

"Drop him on top of them!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is that how you like it done, Wally?"

And the door of the Fourth-Form Study was slammed to. For an instant or two the Third-Formers lay in a confused heap, then a groan came from Jameson.

"Lemme get up, Dud—lemme get up——"

"What about my ear?"

No one seemed to know anything about Dudley's ear. Eyon Dudley himself was feeling it gently, as if he doubted its existence.

Wally sat up with a growl, rubbing the back of his head.

"This comes of trying to help the rotters!" he exclaimed indignantly. "Talk about gratitude——"

"O-oh!" groaned Curly Gibson. "O-o-oh!"

"Outsiders!"

"They haven't got the spirit to stand up for the old coll. themselves," went on Wally darkly; "and they're jealous of any one else who has!"

"Oh—o-oh!"

"Dry up, Curly. We'll jolly well show them, chaps!" went on Wally, with rising indignation. "We'll show them St. Jim's isn't going to knuckle under to an old fogey like Sir Caleb!"

"Rotters!"

The Third-Formers scrambled to their feet. Curly Gibson was still groaning, holding his nose with both hands.

He stopped suddenly and peered round the corridor.

"My hat, look, kids!"

They looked. Six juniors were approaching Study No. 6.

"My only Aunt Jane, it's the Terrible Three!"

"And Figgins & Co.!"

D'Arcy minor wheeled round with a chuckle.

"This is where we square accounts, kids," he whispered. "They haven't seen us yet!"

"But——"

"Don't cackle! In here like a greased flash, chaps!"

And he darted into the room opposite Study No. 6.

The other Third-Formers followed him, but how accounts were to be squared by entering that room, none of them could see.

Still, the Fag Form of St. Jim's was always ready to back up its youthful leader. In the case of Dudley, the big Third-Former, it was a little more than mere backing up. There was something almost approaching devotion in the way he accepted his keen-witted chum's lead.

All four were within the room before Tom Merry & Co. could have caught sight of them.

"What's the wheeze, Wally?"

"Ring off—not a giddy word!"

The others grinned and peered round the slightly open door with Wally.

Tom Merry & Co. were approaching rapidly.

They reached the door of Study No. 6, less than a minute after the eviction of the Third-Form juniors.

Tom Merry banged loudly on the door panel.

None of them were talking. They were too worried about the regatta trouble to talk much.

There was no answer to the Shell junior's knock, so Figgins began to kick.

D'Arcy minor had to stuff his handkerchief in his mouth. That kick was likely to be the one thing needed to make his plan succeed. The next instant proved it was so.

The door of Study No. 6 had been flung open once again.

"All right, you young sweeps!"

"Let 'em have it!"

And to the lasting joy of the Third-Formers, three streams of liquid shot out into the passage. Wally knew that two of them were soda-water and the third lemonade.

The Study No. 6 chums were using the syphons.

"Wow—ass!"

"My only Aunt Jane——!"

"Oh! Waroo——!"

There were few juniors in St. Jim's more partial to lemonade than Fatty Wynn, the Falstaff of the New House. He liked it better than anything on a warm, summer afternoon, but he did not appreciate his present method of taking it.

An apparently unlimited supply of the cooling drink was dashing into his face.

Another stream—soda-water this time—caught Tom Merry in the ear. Tom Merry gave vent to a yell and ducked.

The stream went on, rushing down Kerr's neck. Kerr yelled and jumped back, then Manners yelled still louder. The Scots junior had trodden on his foot.

"Ass! Idiot! Frabjous lunatic——"

Manners' shouts died away in a gurgle. The lemonade which had been staggering Fatty Wynn, now staggered him. It was splashing on the end of his nose with great force.

"Rotters!"

"Rush them!"

Tom Merry gasped and dodged the stream of soda-water.

"Altogether! Now we have them!"

And the others backed him up loyally.

With a wild rush the six burst into the room, banging the door wide open with their combined weight.

"Oh!" yelled Herries. "O-oh!"

And he dropped the syphon to grasp his nose much as Curly Gibson had done. He had not been ready for the sudden opening of the door.

"On the ball!"

"Snatch them bald-headed! Now we have them!"

And the six hurried themselves on Jack Blake & Co.

For a moment the Study No. 6 juniors were too surprised to offer much resistance, but they were not long in recovering from that.

"It's all right, kids——"

"A beastly mistake! My hat!"

But Tom Merry & Co. were not in the mood for listening to explanations.

They had come to Study No. 6 on a peaceful errand, and their reception had nettled them. They collared the Study No. 6 juniors in good old Rugby fashion.

"Bump them!"

"Is that how you like it done, young Blake?"

"That's the style, kids!"

Tom Merry and Figgins, usually the greatest of rivals, flung themselves on Jack Blake. Jack Blake made a wild grab at the first thing that came to hand, which happened to be the table-cloth.

It came away from the table with a rush, bringing the remains of an afternoon tea with it.

"My hat!"

"Turn the young ass over!"

"Right-ho! Here's the syphon, Tommy!"

Tom Merry seized the syphon, which still contained a fair amount of soda-water. Jack Blake was lying on his face on the study floor, and it was a chance of a lifetime.

Tom Merry inserted the spout of the syphon between the Fourth-Former's collar and his neck, and drew down the handle.

"Yah! Ow! Rotter!"

There was a loud fizzing sound.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Manners yelled with laughter.

"Good wheeze! Turn him over, Fatty!"

And Herries was also rolled over. The next instant lemonade was pouring down his neck.

Kerr and Lowther were equally taken with the idea, and Digby was already on his back. Lowther flashed to the door for the third syphon.

In his excitement he failed to notice four inky faces peering through the doorway.

D'Arcy minor was choking with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha! Hadn't we better clear, Wally?"

"Let's see old Dig have his bath. My only Aunt Jane!"

Digby's share of soda-water was the largest of all. He squirmed and yelled, but it made no difference to Kerr and Lowther. They stuck to their work until the last drop of soda-water was down Digby's neck.

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NEXT THURSDAY: "A RANK OUTSIDER."

The Third Form juniors were rolling about.

"Oh, it's great, Wally!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They mistook Tom Merry & Co. for us. Ha, ha, ha!"

Wally chuckled in great glee, but it was time to go. Explanations would be forthcoming in a minute, then a day of reckoning might be in store for the fags.

They turned from the door and flashed off along the corridor.

Wally's inky face wore an expression of intense happiness. All four of them were within the Third Form common-room before the disturbance in Study No. 6 looked like coming to an end.

Wally dropped into a chair with loud chuckles.

"What price our luck now, kids?"

"Ripping!"

"Fancy Tom Merry & Co. coming along just at that moment!"

"And fancy old Wally hitting upon the wheeze of letting them knock at the door!" grinned Dudley. "Jolly good!"

"Oh, for an utter ass, Wally does get hold of a wheeze sometimes," said Jameson, looking at Dudley rather curiously. "Most of them are back numbers, though."

"What's that, Jameson? Did I hear you ask for a thick ear? I say, we've got to go through with it now in first-rate style."

The other juniors looked inquiringly.

"About the Sir Caleb affair, kid?"

"Of course! We've gassed enough to Tom Merry and Jack Blake about our idea, and now we've got to get the idea," chuckled Wally. "It's decided that we rag Sir Caleb, isn't it?"

"Rather!"

"Like his cheek to come sneaking to the doctor, and getting him to promise the races shan't take place on the best stretch of the whole river."

"Especially when we've been training on that giddy stretch."

"Pretty good cheek, and no mistake."

"He might think the river belonged to him."

The Third-Formers spoke indignantly. It was not that the alteration in the course meant a very great deal to them, but it was the principle of the thing.

The idea of a portion of a river being barred by one man went very much against the grain of the scamps of the Third.

Wally began to pace up and down the room.

"Whatever we do, it'll have to be done at once."

"Rather!"

"To-night, I vote."

Wally nodded.

"Yes, to-night's the time," he said darkly. "We'll show Sir Caleb he doesn't own the earth, and we'll show Tom Merry and the other old foreys how to stick up for the school. We've got all the evening to work something out, chaps."

And silence fell on the common-room.

The fags were in dead earnest, and when D'Arcy minor and his lieutenants were in earnest, things generally happened.

Of all of them, Dudley was perhaps the least concerned. But he was not good at thinking things out. He was quite content to let Wally do that, and then back him.

To what extent Dudley would have backed up the leader of the Third would have been a problem to the fags, if they had not been wise enough to leave problems alone.

The lines of thought on Wally's brow at that moment almost suggested physical pain.

CHAPTER 6.

Gussy's Trying "Posish."

"BAI Jove, deah boy, is Sir Caleb Ashton at home?" Arthur Augustus asked his question hastily, flicking a speck of dust from his coat-sleeve. The man he had addressed turned away from the flower-bed.

"Yes, he's at home, sir, but—"

"But what, deah boy?"

"But aren't—aren't you the young gentleman as got upset in the river this afternoon?"

Arthur Augustus started.

"Yaas, wathah, and I weally believe it was you who w'ecked me, bai Jove!"

"I—I'm sorry about that, sir," said Barlow. "It was an accident."

The swell of St. Jim's waved his hand loftily.

"That is all wight," he said gracefully. "You have apologised, and there is nothin' more to be said. It has made mattahs wathah awkward foah us, though."

"Yes, sir, I was afraid it would. I—I did my best after

you had gone, sir, and explained how the accident happened."

"Bai Jove, did you weally?"

"Yes, of course, sir; but it didn't make no difference to the master. He was really angry about it."

"Yaas, wathah! However, I must say I wegard your action as wippin' in the extweme, Barlow—absolutely wippin', as it was neahly as much my fault as yours, because I should have been watchin'."

Barlow coloured under his tanned skin. There was something rather pleasant about the young man's face at that moment, a weakness of mouth and chin being lost sight of in an engaging smile.

"Oh, I only did my duty, sir."

"Yaas, wathah; only we don't always do our dutay, bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus heartily. "I twust you did not get into a wow ovah the mattah?"

"The master was upset. He is still upset, for that matter."

"Bai Jove, that's wathah awkward, as I am about to intahview him, if he will see me."

"You aren't going to call on him, sir?"

"Yaas, wathah; to apologise, and explain that it was all a mistake."

"I—I wouldn't do that, sir."

"Weally, it is a mattah of dig. with me," returned Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove, there he is in the gweenhouse! I may see you latah."

And before Barlow could stop him the swell of St. Jim's was hurrying away.

Sir Caleb was standing with his back to the greenhouse door as Arthur Augustus approached, a large bulldog not unlike Herries' famous Towser coiled up asleep at his feet.

The bulldog opened one eye as Arthur Augustus came up.

"Ahem!"

Arthur Augustus coughed politely. Sir Caleb did not

trouble to turn.

"What is it?"

"Pway excuse me, sir, but I wathah fancy I have an

apology to oflah you. I should like to wemark—"

Sir Caleb wheeled round then. He recognised Arthur Augustus's voice instantly.

"How dare you? How dare—"

"Bai Jove!"

"Barlow, come here instantly!" shouted Sir Caleb.

"Barlow!"

Barlow did not answer. As a matter of fact, he had slipped away at great speed to another portion of the garden.

Arthur Augustus looked amazed.

"Bai Jove, sir, I twust nothin' is the mattah!"

"What do you mean by coming here? How dare you?"

"Weally, sir, I have come here to apologise foah what happened this aftahnoon, and to ask you, as one gentleman to anothah, to wescind your desiah to bar the stwetch of wivah in fwont of your estate. I am weally vewy sowwy that—"

"Leave my garden! Leave my garden instantly!"

"Yaas, sir; but I should like to wemark—"

"If I have any more of your impertinence, boy—"

"Impertinence! Weally, sir, as I have come here to apologise," began Arthur Augustus, in amazed dignity, "I wathah fancay you cannot descwibe what I have said as impertinence."

Grrr-r!

The bulldog at Sir Caleb's feet began to growl. He had already got up.

The raised voice of his master excited him.

Arthur Augustus noticed nothing.

"Pway twy to be calm, sir," he said politely, "and I think I shall be able to pwove—"

Grrr-r!

Arthur Augustus heard the growls this time. He looked down.

"Bai Jove!"

Grrr-r!

"Bai Jove! Befoah we go any furthah with this discussion, sir, do you considah your bulldog safe. Gweat Scott!"

The bulldog was walking towards him. Without further thought for Sir Caleb, Arthur Augustus retreated.

The bulldog began to trot, and Arthur Augustus broke into a run. The next moment the swell of St. Jim's was careering wildly across the garden, with the bulldog after him.

Sir Caleb's face was still flushed with anger, and he made no attempt to call the dog back. He knew the dog would not bite, and he really thought Arthur Augustus's visit had been paid out of impertinence.

He strode into his greenhouse again, and left Arthur Augustus to look after himself.



Arthur Augustus was rowing wildly with one scull, with the result that his skiff was describing rapid circles, while the launch drawing the tree-trunks drew rapidly nearer.

The way Arthur Augustus did that was to dash wildly across the lawn and out of the gate.

"Good dog!" he gasped. "Lie down, deah boy! Gweat Scott, he will have my twousahs in a minute!" He was through the gateway now, and a hedge lay before him.

The cause of all the trouble was that Arthur Augustus had considered it too hot to row seriously that afternoon, but he did not consider it too hot to attempt to jump the hedge now. He took it in great style, and obtained a trifling start while the bulldog looked for an opening.

"Bai Jove! Wescue, deah boys! Wescue!"

In the distance a few well-known figures could be seen. They were coming across the field towards him.

Arthur Augustus could hear the pattering of the bulldog's feet behind him. He gave vent to another terrific shout.

"Wescue, Hewwies! Jack Blake, wescue, deah boy!"

He pelted on, then gasped in horror.

Another bulldog was coming for him from the opposite direction, dragging a chain.

It was the famous Towser, who had broken away from Herries. Arthur Augustus glanced about him wildly for cover as he ran

Towser, he knew of old, had no respect at all for a fellow's trousers.

"Gweat Scott, what an awful posish! My only toppah!"

Towser came thudding along. He was almost up with Arthur Augustus now, then suddenly he swerved to the left. Herries' bulldog had deliberately dodged the swell of St. Jim's.

"Bai Jove!"

Then a series of growls rang out, tremendous growls which made Arthur Augustus shudder. He glanced over his shoulder.

Towser was rolling Sir Caleb's bulldog over and over in a mud patch, and the noise they were making was terrific. Herries came pelting up in great excitement.

"You ought to have stopped him, Gussy, he may get bitten by that awful mongrel."

"Gweat Scott! Bai Jove!"

"I shall blame you entirely if Towser is bitten—Towser, come here, old boy! Catch hold of the other brute, Gussy."

"You uttah ass, Hewwies—"

"Catch hold of him, duffer! Put your leg between them."

"Wats—uttah wats—"

"My aunt! Come here, Towser—Towser, old chap!"

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"A RANK OUTSIDER."

But Towser took no notice. The rival bulldog had broken away, and was making off. Towser did not hesitate. He was after him in a flash.

Herries yelled until he was hoarse.

"Come here, boy! Good dog!"

"My only aunt Jane!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Towser drove the enemy right across to the horse pond, and Sir Caleb's dog stopped at the edge of the high bank. He made a great effort to double on his tracks, but it was too late.

With a rush Towser sent him into the water, then came trotting back. He trotted right up to Arthur Augustus, and began wagging his stump of a tail.

"Bai Jove!"

Herries' eyes were sparkling with pride.

"There, what do you think of that, Gussy?"

"Bai Jove!"

"He may tear your bags in fun," went on Towser's master with increasing pride, "and he's a bit rough in his play sometimes."

"Yaas, wathah!"

But when there's a common enemy, Towser's the dog. You ought to be jolly thankful to Towser, Gussy."

"Yaas, wathah," panted Arthur Augustus, dropping down on the trunk of a tree. "I considah he has behaved in a weally wippin' mannah, and I twust he will let me buy him a new collah—I mean—"

"You trust Herries will let you buy him a new collar," grinned Jack Blake. "You might get the young ass a necktie as well. He's wearing one of mine now."

"Pway don't be widic, deah boy! Bai Jove! I am all in a fluttah."

"It's nothing to what you would have been in if Towser hadn't rescued you, kid."

"No, wathah not; I am weally vevy thankful to Towsah, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "But I have had a vevy twyin' time—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, you look as if you had."

"Bai Jove! My clothes are feahfully wumped, and I shall have to wush upstairs and change my attiah. I wegwet to say, deah boys, it's no good."

The juniors stared.

"What isn't any good, ass?"

"What are you raving about now?"

"I wegwet to say it is no good placin' the mattah in Sir Caleb's hands," explained Arthur Augustus. "I have just come fwom his place, and I cannot say he tweated me with the wespect due fwom one gentleman to anothah."

"Did he kick you out, Gussy?"

"Weally, Digbay. However, he was certainly wathah abwupt in his mannah, and I am afwaid it is also useless witin' a lettah. Bai Jove!"

Jack Blake nodded gloomily.

"Yes, it is all that," he said as Arthur Augustus hurried away. "I say, kids, fancy the one and only bearding the lion in his den."

"Jolly decent of Gussy, anyway."

"Oh, trust Gussy," grinned Digby. "There's nothing vevy slack about that kid. Isn't it rotten, though?"

And the gloomy expression returned to their respective faces.

CHAPTER 7.

Breaking Bounds.

"NOW'S the time, kids."

"Right-ho!"

About a dozen juniors sat up in bed. Wally was across to the window in a flash.

"It's all right, chaps, there isn't a sign of a moon yet."

"Good egg!"

"What about pres., though?"

D'Arcy minor shrugged his shoulders.

"Bother the pres., Curly. We shall have to dodge them, anyway. Hurry into your togs."

The Third-Formers grinned in the darkness. They had not a great deal of dressing to do, coats and shoes being the only things to be put on.

Under Wally's direction they had gone to bed all standing, as they say out West. The clock struck ten just as they moved towards the door.

"My hat, we shall have to be careful; Selby won't be in bed yet!"

"Bother Selby!"

D'Arcy minor refused to listen to any words of caution. To his way of thinking, Sir Caleb had acted unfairly to St. Jim's, consequently, Sir Caleb must be japed.

Wally felt very sure of his ground on the point.

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NEXT
THURSDAY!

"A RANK OUTSIDER."

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"What are we going to do, Wally?"

"Going through the Caleb bird's grounds and think of some way of ragging him. Squirt water through his bedroom window if there's a hose handy—anything like that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, it's all very well to chuckle, Dudley, but what about the row?"

"Bother rows!" muttered Wally. "Ring off, or we shall be snatched bald-headed."

Dudley pressed on by Wally's side, and Curly Gibson and Jameson were not far behind. Those three, at any rate, were ready to back their leader, but one or two of the younger members of the party felt a little uneasy. They kept cautious eyes turned towards the prefect's studies as they crept along the corridor.

But the journey to the passage window was made in safety, and Wally soon had the window open.

"Down the ivy, kids!"

"Rather! Shall I go first, as I'm about the heaviest?" Wally nodded, and Dudley started. He did not consider the recklessness of Wally's plan.

There was a time when Dudley had been one of those accidental outcasts in the school—a fellow no one seemed to notice or want to notice.

Wally had chummed in with him somewhat against public opinion, and Dudley had not forgotten. He was not likely to forget, either.

The moment his feet touched the ground, he gave the signal.

"All right, coast clear!"

"Good!"

And the fags came down in rapid succession. Wally ran his eye over them.

"All here, then—now for it!" And he flashed away across the quadrangle.

The others followed as hard as they could, and the road was gained. They ran along this for a short distance, then Wally called a halt by a gate well decorated with barbed wire. He pointed at the wire with a grin.

"That shows the sort of bird it is we're going to stir up."

"He's got barbed wire all over the place."

"Yes, and he jolly well thinks it will keep us out of his rotten grounds," chuckled Wally, vaulting the gate. "Here goes, and remember, we wait for each other in the quad, if we get separated."

"Y—yes!"

"Right-ho!"

Some of the answers were not very enthusiastic. The younger portion of the party did not like the idea of being separated in the dark, gloomy woods.

They crept silently amongst the trees, listening for sounds of keepers. The place seemed deserted enough.

"It's all right, Curly, I don't believe there's a giddy keeper about."

"Anyway, don't make a row. My hat!"

A distant, but not very distant, growl sounded through the night air. The woods were not so deserted, after all.

Wally stopped dead.

"Don't make a noise, kids, it'll be all right."

"Right-ho!"

"Get on with the washing, Wally. My only Aunt Jane!"

A crash rang out followed by a yell. Curly Gibson had stumbled into a rabbit hole.

"Ass!"

"Dry up, Curly!"

"My only aunt!"

Then a loud shout sounded behind them, followed by footsteps on the dried twigs. Some one was approaching—a keeper most likely.

"My aunt—"

"Scud for it!" panted Wally. "Separate!"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when three men burst through the undergrowth, guns under their arms. The sight of the guns did not add to the younger juniors' peace of mind.

With a wild rush the youngsters scattered in all directions.

"We have them—come on, men!"

Wally chuckled.

"That's Barlow's voice," he gasped as he ran on between Curly Gibson and Jameson. "They take us for poachers."

"Good egg!"

"We won't half lead them a giddy dance."

There was pleasure to the scamps of the Third in the knowledge that the mere fact of their being in the woods at all would anger Sir Caleb.

D'Arcy minor glanced over his shoulder. He caught a glimpse of a lantern one of the men was carrying, then he dashed on again. Where he was making for he did not know, and he did not care much. The scamp of the Third was a reckless youngster, but he knew it would never do for any of them to be caught by the keepers.

"We'd better separate, chaps," he whispered. "As hard as you can."

And he pelted off alone. That would divide the pursuit, and minimise the chance of capture.

The man with the lantern came on with a rush. He was not far behind Wally, and he knew the ground.

Wally glanced back again, and saw the situation was becoming desperate. The man, whoever he was, could run.

"My only Aunt Jane!"

Wally gasped and glanced about him. Then he acted with the coolness which so often amazed his chums. He quietly dropped down behind a clump of bushes.

The man with the lantern lumbered past him. If Wally had put out his hand he could have touched him.

"My hat, that was close!" chuckled the Third-Former to himself. "This just about suits me."

He waited a moment or two, then scrambled to his feet. The woods seemed fairly quiet again.

For a moment the scamp of the Third hesitated, then he made up his mind. It would be safer to follow in the footsteps of the man with the lantern than double on his tracks.

Wally acted promptly, but he stopped almost as promptly the next moment.

Someone had flashed past him. For an instant Wally thought he was caught, then he grinned.

"Dud for a pension!"

But it was too late to warn the big Third-Former he was following the man with the lantern, for Wally knew it would be madness to shout. Besides, an instant later, D'Arcy minor had to think of himself.

Another keeper burst through the undergrowth with startling suddenness.

"Got you, my man!"

"I don't think!" gasped Wally, and he flashed away.

The keeper followed with a rush.

It was going to be a near thing once more for the leader of the Fag Form of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 8.

A Brush with the Keepers.

THE shock when Wally caught sight of Dudley was mutual.

Dudley had only seen the outline of his leader, and it had made him redouble his efforts to get out of the woods.

He dashed on almost recklessly, but the luck was with him. He managed to escape the many treacherous branches which bestrew his path.

Presently he pulled up with a start.

There was a light ahead.

The keeper with the lantern was in front of him.

"By Jove!" gasped Dudley, and he swerved to the right.

Then he dashed on.

It was intensely dark in the woods, and the trees grew closely together at that spot. Dudley did not like the idea of being chased just at present.

Presently he gave vent to a gasp of relief. It had suddenly become lighter, and the trees had disappeared. He was out of the wood.

In reality it was a very dark night, but there might have been a moon, so great was the contrast with the pitch-black woods. Dudley distinctly saw a haystack ahead of him and he pelted for it.

He could crouch down there and figure out his bearings.

A moment or two later he was kneeling amongst the loose hay. The keeper with lantern had defeated his own ends.

If it had not been for the light Dudley knew he would have run right into the man's arms.

But the big Third-Former was not to have the haystack to himself for long, for he had scarcely taken cover when someone else dashed up.

Dudley crouched lower amongst the hay, then suddenly the runner stopped dead. For an instant Dudley thought he had been seen, and got ready to scud for it.

Then he peered through the darkness in surprise.

The new-comer was groping about on the ground.

Dudley watched in surprise. It must be a keeper. None of the fellows would waste time in the open like that.

Suddenly Dudley started up. It was Wally who was at the other side of the haystack.

The big Third-Former was certain. His eyes had become accustomed to the dark, and the groping figure had only been a few feet away at one moment.

"Wally—"

Dudley muffled his cry almost as soon as it rose to his lips. The keeper with the lantern had come out in the open.

In the same instant Wally dashed away. Dudley did not hesitate.

The keeper was between Wally and himself, so there was nothing for it but to make off in the opposite direction. He pelted across the field as hard as he could scud.

For a moment he thought he was to be free from pursuit, then the sound of heavy footsteps undeceived him. He was being followed by a man who ran well.

The big Third-Former looked anxiously.

Wally was probably having an exciting time as well, for the man who was following Dudley was without a lantern. The other keeper must have seen Wally.

"But trust the kid to look after himself," thought Dudley, with a grin. "It'll take a good many keepers to catch him."

Dudley raced on, then suddenly a cry of alarm rang out behind him. The keeper had stopped.

Dudley went on for a few yards further before turning, then he glanced back again. To his amazement a tremendous fire was raging at the other side of the field.

It looked almost at first as if some huge house were in flames.

"My hat!"

A gasp of astonishment rang out behind him, and Curly Gibson and Jameson peered over the top of the hedge.

"Thought it was you, Dud."

"What on earth has happened?"

"The haystack has caught alight in some way," answered the big Third-Former, wetting his lips. "Isn't—isn't it blazing all right?"

"Haystack! Is there a haystack there?"

"Rather! I was hiding behind it."

The three juniors crouched down behind the hedge and watched. None of them talked much.

Curly Gibson looked a little scared.

"I—I say, Dud, none of our chaps have been mad enough to fire it, have they?"

"Of course not, Curly!" exclaimed Jameson.

"But how did it catch alight, then?"

Jameson, too, looked rather scared now.

"I say, Dud, if you were hiding there you must have seen it catch fire!" he exclaimed. "We watched you come across the field."

There was a curious expression on Dudley's face, but he did not answer. Could it have been Wally who had set fire to the stack? Wally seldom shirked doing things because they were reckless.

But to fire a haystack was more than reckless. That was the sort of thing the scamp of the Third was very unlikely to do.

Still, in spite of his conviction, Dudley said nothing about having seen Wally.

They stood watching the three keepers, endeavouring to put the flames out for quite a long time, and it was Dudley who at last turned away.

"Let's scud for the coll.," he said abruptly. "The others ought to be about there by now."

"Right-ho!"

"My hat, what a rare old blaze, kids!"

"I've never seen a haystack on fire before."

Curly Gibson and Jameson turned longing eyes towards the flames. They would have liked to stay a little longer, but it would be scarcely safe to do that.

Dudley seemed rather glad to turn his back on the spectacle.

CHAPTER 9.

The Burnt Haystack.

"HALLO, kids!"

The juniors addressed started as they scrambled over the college wall. Then they chuckled loudly.

"Is that you, Curly?"

"Rather, and Dud, and Jameson!"

"Good egg! Were any of us nabbed, do you think?"

Curly Gibson shook his head as he scrambled over the wall as well.

"No saying. Where's Wally?"

The Third-Formers looked at one another. There were nine or ten of them in the quadrangle by now, all more or less dishevelled as far as clothes went.

D'Arcy minor was not amongst them.

"My hat, I hope Wally isn't caught, chaps!"

Jameson spoke anxiously. Curly Gibson shook his head.

"Trust Wally—Hallo!"

Someone was pelting along the road towards the college. The Third-Formers peered over the wall.

"It's Wally, chaps!"

"Yes, that's Wally all right. Cheer-ho, Third!"

"Cheer-ho!" came back Wally's voice in low tones. "Any-one caught?"

"We don't know—"

D'Arcy minor and two other fags were over the wall in a flash. The leader of the Third Form glanced at his party.

"My only Aunt Jane, what a piece of luck; not one of us snatched!"

"Good egg!"

"I met these kids just down the road," grinned Wally. "They've been hiding in a ditch. My aunt, we stirred things up some!"

"Rather! I say, what about the fire, Wally?"

"Fire! What fire?"

"My hat! Didn't you see the flames?" exclaimed Jameson in surprise. "A whacking great fire and no mistake! I never saw such flames!"

"Phew! Whereabouts?"

"In the field at the other side of the woods," said Dudley gruffly. "Someone set fire to the haystack there?"

"My aunt! Was there a haystack there?"

"Yes, a large one, Wally," went on Dudley.

"Rats! None of our chaps would have done a thing like that. Sure it wasn't a rubbish heap, or something the keepers fired on purpose? I don't believe Sir Caleb runs to a haystack."

"No, it was a haystack all right."

"How do you know, Dud?"

"I was hiding behind it just before the thing caught alight—"

Wally shrugged his shoulders.

"Anyway, it hadn't anything to do with us," he said coolly. "I hope it jolly well burns down to the ground so long as the ripping old woods don't catch fire. I say, we'd better get in."

"Yes, rather!" observed Jameson. "I say, there may be a row about that haystack if inquiries are made."

"Bother the haystack, and bother inquiries!"

"Oh, it's all very well to say that—"

"Well, it's no good worrying about what may happen," said Wally, getting ready to clamber up the ivy. "I lost my cap, and my beastly name is printed inside; but I'm not going to worry about it. Ten to one it won't be found, and ten to one the haystack Dudley saw was a rubbish heap the keepers fired to frighten us or something."

"I tell you it was a haystack."

"All right, kid, only don't get ratty," chuckled Wally. "It wasn't your haystack. Up you go, my sons!"

And they commenced their journey up the ivy.

Luck was still with them, for the corridor was deserted, and they got past the prefect's rooms safe. A few moments later they were in the Third Form dormitory again.

Wally sat down on the bed with a chuckle.

"My hat, what a spree!"

Dudley was looking across the dark room towards the junior who had made such a vast difference in his life. Wally would never know what his careless act of chumming in with the big Third-Former had meant to Dudley.

Dudley knew, though, although he had never said anything.

The other juniors were whispering their experiences, all excepting Dudley. There was a curious expression on his face as he listened.

"But we didn't do so much after all, Wally," he said at last; "that is, if none of us had a hand in firing the haystack."

Wally laughed.

"Dud's blessed old haystack—of course we hadn't anything to do with it, ass!"

"Who had, then?"

"Never mind who had, who hadn't is good enough for us," said Wally coolly. "To set old croaker Dud's mind at rest, kids, did any of you fire the haystack?"

"No."

"Of course not."

"Dud, ought to be bumped for suggesting we might have done it."

"There you are, Dudley," grinned Wally. "We'll wander round to-morrow, and I'll jolly well prove to you your haystack was a rubbish heap."

"No, I think it was a haystack all right."

"So do I, Curly," said Jameson. "We saw it flare up, you know."

"And I saw it before it flared up at all, Wally," said Dudley deliberately. "I was hiding amongst the hay for quite a long time—"

"Go hon!"

"Oh, it won't be such a laughing matter to-morrow!"

"Bother to-morrow!"

Dudley jumped to his feet. His temper was not of the best, and his eyes were sparkling a little now.

"You've done nothing all the evening but say 'bother things'!" he exclaimed, in a lowered voice which was only audible to Wally. "I tell you, I was hiding amongst the hay for a long time, and someone else came up and hid at the other side."

"My hat! Who was that?" asked Wally.

Dudley did not answer. Wally went on, with a careless laugh:

"I believe that about settles it, then," he said. "It was a rubbish heap, after all, and the other bird you saw was a keeper setting fire to it. Anyway, it wasn't one of us."

"No; that's so."

"Not much."

"It was jolly dark, you know, Dud."

"Yes, Curly," said Dudley dully; "it was jolly dark."

And that was the last word he said. He scrambled into bed and covered himself up, and a few moments later the others were following his example.

Then heavy breathing told of sleep, with one exception.

Dudley did not fall asleep; he did not even doze. He lay on his side, staring at the wall.

Wally had lost his cap.

He wondered where Wally could have lost his cap. And was it the scamp of the Third he had seen by the haystack? In his heart Dudley was certain it was.

Then Wally must have told him a lie when he said he had not seen a haystack; that he did not believe Sir Caleb had one. Dudley had never known Wally to speak falsely before.

The heavy breathing became more regular. There was no doubt about it, the juniors were asleep all right.

Dudley listened, then slipped out of bed.

"Anyone awake, chaps?"

There was no answer. Dudley hurried into his clothes again, his mouth set firmly.

Wally's cap had his name printed on the lining. It might mean a very serious thing to the scamp of the Third if that cap were found by a keeper.

Dudley did not hesitate.

He crept steadily enough along the corridor again, making for the window which looked out from the ivy-covered wall.

CHAPTER 10.

Wally's Cap.

THE fact that he had embarked upon a wild-goose chase did not occur to Dudley until he had gained the wood.

As he clambered over the gate and slipped away amongst the trees, the improbability of his ever being able to find Wally's cap struck him.

But the improbability did not strike him as thoroughly as might have been expected, for he was not so deadly in earnest to find the cap as to discover whether it had been dropped anywhere near the haystack.

That was Dudley's real reason for his second journey into the woods.

Dudley thought his sole motive was to discover whether Wally had spoken falsely in saying he had not seen the haystack, but there was another motive at the bottom of it all.

The big Third-Former was painfully anxious to find the cap before any of the keepers did so. Nothing could very

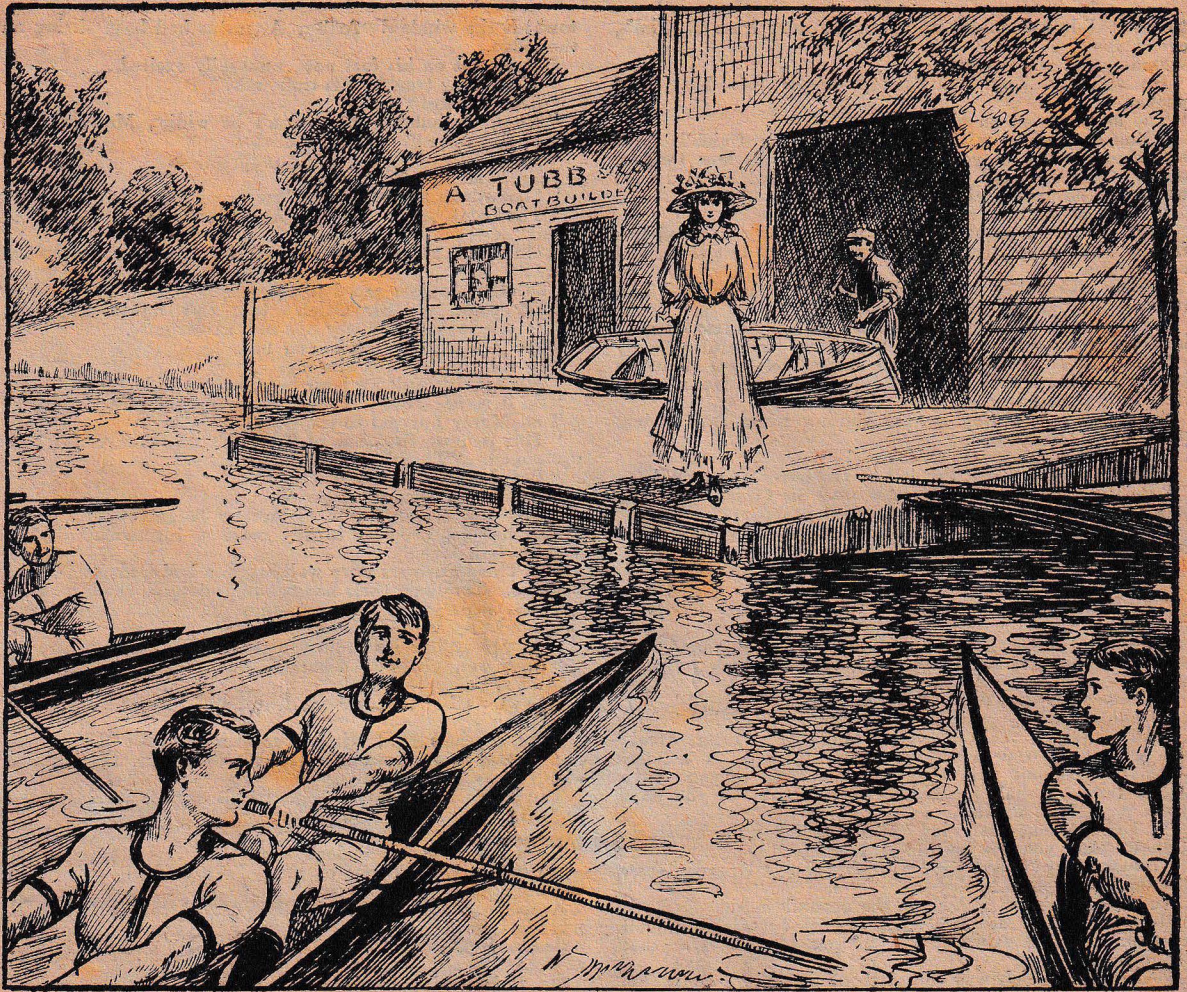
"WUN LUNG'S LOSS."

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PRICE ONE PENNY.



"Paddle all together, chaps!" sung out Tom Merry; and the four racing-boats made straight for the landing-stage where Cousin Ethel stood.

well be proved against Wally unless the cap happened to be found near the haystack.

"After all, there were a dozen of us in the woods," Dudley mused, as he hurried along. "They can't bring it home to him, even if he did do it. I—I am certain it was Wally I saw, though."

But there was no good in going over that old ground again. The thing was, to do something practical to help the junior who had chummed in with him when no one else had thought of doing so.

Dudley went on grimly.

It was dreary work walking along the same paths where there had been so much excitement an hour before.

Presently a faint glimmer above told him the young moon had risen at last, and the trees were beginning to thin. He was nearing the field at last, then.

A few steps further, and he knew he must be almost upon the haystack, or what remained of it, and he began to slow down. The keepers might still be about. It was no good running absurd risks, anyway."

But he could see no one ahead, and there was no haystack. Just a black, charred patch, which showed up strangely in the faint light.

They had not succeeded in saving any of the hay.

But Dudley did not think much about that. He did not care a rap about Sir Caleb's loss.

He hesitated a moment or two longer, then stepped forward. There was not a sound to be heard.

The big Third-Former knew the exact spot where he thought he had seen Wally kneel, and made for it at once. The place was quite near a clump of bushes.

He dropped to his knees and commenced his search.

The moments slipped by, and Dudley's hopes began to rise. Perhaps he had made a mistake, after all.

Of course, Wally might have been there, and yet lost his cap in quite another part of the wood. But Dudley did not think of that. He was glad he could not find the cap.

Then suddenly he started.

There was something round and black lying ahead of him. It looked much as a cap might have looked on the blackened ground.

Dudley stepped towards it. It was a cap, right enough.

Wally had spoken falsely when he said he had not been near the haystack, then; and if Wally had spoken falsely, there must have been a very big inducement. Dudley did not have to search far for the motive.

In a moment of recklessness, the scamp of the Third had fired the hay.

Dudley stood for a moment or two looking at the cap. He was not thinking very clearly, for his discovery had come as a great shock to him.

The dry twigs behind him crackled, but he did not hear them; he heard nothing until a sudden cry rang out.

"Ah, it was you, was it?"

And a man dashed across the field.

He had been scarcely twenty yards from Dudley at the time, and it took the junior a second or two to grasp the situation. The keeper was less than a dozen feet away when Dudley realised his danger.

He began to run desperately.

But it was too late this time, and Dudley knew it the moment he had started. But he was made of the stuff that dislikes giving in, and he ran on until a hand fell on his shoulder.

The next instant Dudley was in the grasp of the keeper.

"Thought you'd come back an' see the damage you'd done—eh?" panted the keeper, in triumph. "Didn't know as one of us would most likely be keeping an eye on the hay,

to see it didn't smoulder up again. You're from St. Jim's, aren't you?"

Dudley did not answer.

He was thrusting Wally's cap deeper into his jacket pocket.

The keeper went on gleefully:

"You're coming with me, my lad. Sir Caleb'll have something to say to you, and he isn't in his best temper, either. He came out to see the flames, and he said then what he'd do to the fellow who'd done it."

"You needn't hold my arm."

"Oh, needn't I, my lad! This way, and it's no good trying to make a bolt for it. I've got you set this time, and no mistake."

Dudley did not answer. He let the keeper lead him towards Sir Caleb's mansion in silence.

What was he to say to Sir Caleb? Wally's name must be kept out of the matter, because Wally was the culprit.

That was about the only point Dudley felt sure of as the keeper hurried him along the garden path. A few minutes later he was being taken to Sir Caleb's study.

Sir Caleb was sitting by the window when Dudley was pushed into the room.

"What does this mean, Greaves?"

"Please, sir, I caught this lad by the burnt haystack."

"By the burnt haystack!" exclaimed Sir Caleb, springing to his feet. "I thought you suspected poachers?"

"We thought so, sir; but it seems it was the boys from St. Jim's instead, sir."

"Boys from St. Jim's! Are you from St. Jim's?"

"Yes," said Dudley.

"And you found him by the remains of the haystack, Greaves?"

"Yes, sir; looking for something. I'd just run out to have another glance to see that the fire was properly out—"

"Never mind that now. What is your name, boy?"

"Dudley, sir."

"Ah, Dudley!" said Sir Caleb quietly. "I am afraid this will prove a very serious matter for you. I scarcely think Dr. Holmes will view arson out of revenge as a boyish trick. I shall recognise you to-morrow if you have given me a false name."

"I haven't done that, sir; and I didn't fire the haystack, if that's what you are hinting at."

"Silence, boy!" said Sir Caleb sharply. "Greaves, show him out; then come back here."

And Dudley found himself in the grounds again.

He was a little astonished at first at Sir Caleb's quiet manner after his exhibition of temper by the river that afternoon.

Perhaps Sir Caleb was one of those people who only lose their tempers over trivial matters, and can keep perfectly calm when the affair is serious.

And this was serious enough in all conscience.

Dudley was very white as he made his way back to the college. He stopped once by a gas-lamp, and looked at the lining of the cap he had found.

Wally's name was printed there in large letters.

The cap went back into the big Third-Former's pocket, and he hurried into the college and into bed.

He did not wake Wally; but he did not go to sleep himself.

He tossed about in bed the whole night, listening to the college clock tolling off the dreary hours.

He longed for the morning, in spite of what it might mean to some of them.

CHAPTER 11.

Facing the Music.

"BAI JOVE, deah boys—"

"Oh, do ring off, Gussy!" exclaimed Jack Blake.

"We must get this worked out before brekker. That's my idea, Tom Merry."

"Not so rotten for a Fourth-Former kid, but very rotten—"

"Look here, ass—"

"Bai Jove, deah boys! Gweat Scott!"

"Gussy's looking for a thick ear!" said Figgins darkly.

"Weally, Figgy— My only toppah!"

"Ring off!" yelled Jack Blake. "It may be a rotten idea to turn our race into a bumping race, but it'll have to be done," he added thoughtfully. "It mayn't be so bad, after all, and we've never had a bump race at St. Jim's."

"What about the boats, as I remarked before, ass?"

"Oh, we shall have to get the proper cushions fastened, and all that, but—"

"Bai Jove, it is—I knew it was— Gweat Scott! How remarkably funny!"

The committee of three at the table turned and stared

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NEXT THURSDAY: "A RANK OUTSIDER."

towards the window. Arthur Augustus had been sitting on the ledge.

But he was on his feet now, unusually excited.

"What's the trouble this time, ass?"

"Seen a ghost?"

"Yaas, wathah! Pway don't be widic., Mewwy, deah boy! Bai Jove!"

"Ass!"

"Frabjous lunatic!"

"Look, deah boys—look! There goes Sir Caleb Ashton!"

"The Caleb bird! My only Aunt Jane! What's he doing here?"

"He's just come fwom the doctah's pwivate house, bai Jove!"

The other juniors raced to the window.

They could see Sir Caleb's tall, thin figure distinctly. Every one looked at every one else in surprise.

Then a startling sound rang out.

The college bell was ringing.

"My hat, it's half an hour before time, kids!"

"So it is, bai Jove! I shall wemonstwatw with Taggles!"

Tom Merry hurried to the door.

"This is more than one of Taggles's mistakes, chaps," he exclaimed. "There's something up here."

"Bai Jove! Yaas, wathah!"

"There go Cornstalk & Co.—"

"And my minah," put in Arthur Augustus. "I twust Wally has not been up to any more of his twicks on Mr. Selbay, bai Jove!"

The Third-Formers were walking in a body, about a dozen of them. They had their hands rather deep in their pockets, but the expressions of innocence on their faces were profound.

Tom Merry hurried from the room.

"Come on, chaps! There's some trouble ahead for someone!"

"Yaas, wathah! Come on, deah boys! Pway huwwy like anythin'."

They reached Hall without meeting any of the others, to find they were almost the last to enter. Dr. Holmes was at his place at the reading-desk.

There was a very stern light in his eyes as he faced the fellows.

"Silence, please!"

Instantly there was a dead silence.

"What boys were out of the college last night between the hours of ten and eleven?"

A pause followed, then Wally jumped to his feet. It was the signal.

Jameson, Curly Gibson, Dudley, and all the others rose at once.

Dr. Holmes glanced along their ranks.

"Twelve of you, then!" he exclaimed sternly. "Any more?"

"No, sir," answered Wally.

Even the scamp of the Third was quelled by the expression on the doctor's face.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus, in alarm.

"Ring off, ass!"

But Arthur Augustus was not the only anxious-looking junior along the Fourth Form and Shell Form benches. Jack Blake, for instance, looked almost as concerned as if it had been one of his own party who was in trouble.

Dr. Holmes was facing the fags.

"Boys, what do you know about this affair of the burnt haystack?"

There was no answer. Tom Merry & Co. glanced towards their great rivals from the New House. Figgins & Co. were looking very blank.

They had heard nothing about a burnt haystack.

"Who was near the haystack last night?"

The doctor's question came crisply. Dudley answered after a short pause.

"I was, sir."

"Ah! You were caught by one of the keepers near the haystack, but that was after the fire, I understand. Were you near the stack before that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Before it was fired?"

"Yes, sir," answered Dudley, his voice dropping a little.

Curly Gibson and Jameson were staring at him. They remembered again having seen Dudley running across the field.

The Head looked almost as worried as he looked stern.

"Then you returned a second time to the haystack, Dudley?"

"Yes, sir. I—I—"

The big Third-Former's voice faltered. He had gone very white now.

"It has been suggested by Sir Caleb that the haystack was fired out of revenge for the action taken in the matter

of the regatta course," he exclaimed. "Boys, was this so?" Again there was no answer. It was difficult for one fellow to answer a question like that on his own responsibility, although there was a flush of indignation on most of their faces.

"Did any of you set fire to the stack?"

That was a different sort of question. The answers came instantly.

"No, sir!"

"Rather not!"

"Then why did you go into the woods?" demanded the Head. "Answer me instantly. D'Arcy minor, why did you go into the woods?"

"To—to jape—I mean play a trick on Sir Caleb, sir."

"Ah! You give me your word, D'Arcy, that as far as you know, none of you set fire to the stack?"

"Yes, rather, sir; and I don't believe any of us would do a thing like that."

"Jameson?"

"No, sir; I don't know anything about it."

The Head asked all of them the same question, stopping for an instant when he came to Dudley.

"No, sir, I didn't do it," answered the big Third-Former.

"You admit being near the stack?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you admit returning to the spot afterwards? Why did you do that?"

Dudley was silent.

"Answer me, boy!"

Still Dudley was silent. The others were looking at him in amazement, but the doctor did not give them much time to wonder in.

"Dismiss!" he said briefly. "Dudley, you will go to my room, and wait for me there!"

And Dudley walked from Hall, the amazed glances of the Third still directed upon him.

CHAPTER 12.

D'Arcy Minor's Doubt.

"MY only Aunt Jane!"

Jameson's astonishment was complete.

"My only Aunt Jane!" he repeated. "Dudley never returned to the fire, chaps; he came back to the coll. with Curly and myself."

"Perhaps he went out again."

"But what would he want to do that for? I—I say, you don't think he did it, do you, Curly?"

Curly Gibson looked rather scared.

"He'll get sacked if he did. Where's Wally?"

"Yaas, wathah! Where's Wally, deah boys?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, hurrying up. "Where is my minah?"

Wally answered for himself excitedly:

"Here I am, but—"

"I must wequest you to wetiah with me to the studday, Wally, at once, as I wish to talk the mattah ovah—"

"Oh, rats!"

"Weally, Wally, I must wequest you not to say wats to me."

"Rabbits, then! Anyway, I'm not coming."

"Weally, Wally—"

"Oh, go and eat coke! I am going to wait for Dudley." Arthur Augustus stepped forward and laid an anxious hand on his minor's shoulder.

"I should wegwet havin' to administah a feahful thwashin', Wally, but—"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus! I tell you I am going to wait for old Dud. What do you want, Tom Merry?"

The three great rivals, Tom Merry, Figgins, and Jack Blake, were pushing their way through the white-faced group of fags. They were walking directly towards D'Arcy minor.

"Collar his arm, Gussy!"

"Wight-ho, deah boy!"

"Look here, Gus, I'm not going to be ordered about—"

"You are coming to the study to talk things over, kid," said Tom Merry quietly. "You've made a pretty fine hash of it. His other arm, Blakey."

"He's as slippery as a young eel."

"Rescue!" panted Wally, struggling desperately. "It's got nothing to do with you old fageys! Rescue, Third!"

But the Third did not obey its leader for once in a way. They were too upset.

Tom Merry & Co. yanked the scamp of the fag Form along.

"Don't be a young ass, Wally."

"It's like your beastly cheek, Tom Merry—"

"Weally, Wally, as your eldah bwotah, I must wequest you not to address my twiend Tom Mewwy in that weally wough and weaday mannah. Pway be weasonable."

Wally glanced round him. There was no chance of escape, so he resigned himself to his fate.

"I'll come, then," he grumbled. "Fat lot of good it will do, I don't think."

"We can talk mattahs ovah."

"But there aren't any matters to talk over, ass. You heard all there is to hear in Hall just now. We went out to rag the Caleb bird, and a haystack caught alight. I never saw it myself, but some of the others did. Jolly big fire, Curly says it was."

But Wally's remarks had no effect. He was taken to Study No. 6 in grim silence.

Jack Blake shut the door after them, and turned on the Third-Former bluntly.

"Did Dudley do it?"

D'Arcy minor lost his resentment at once, and a troubled expression flashed across his usually reckless young face.

"I don't know, Blake—honour bright, I don't. But I'm going to find out."

"Do you think he did it?"

Wally did not answer.

There was no proof that Dudley was the culprit, except that he had returned to the site of the fire. Curly Gibson and Jameson had met him running away from the haystack certainly, and he admitted having hidden behind it, but that was not much to go upon.

Wally refused to make up his mind until he had seen Dudley.

"It isn't like Dud, anyway," he said staunchly.

"He used to be a bit of a waster once, usen't he?" asked Tom Merry quietly.

"It doesn't matter what a fellow was once. Anyway, I'm not saying I think Dud did it until I've seen him. I'm clearing now."

"Wait a moment, Wally. As your eldah bwotah—"

"Oh, rats!"

"Weally, Wally! As your eldah bwotah, I must wemark that I considah you have behaved in the most weckless mannah poss. undah the circs.—"

"Go hon!"

"Weally— Stop—stop instantly, Wally! Bai Jové, the young wascal has gone!"

Tom Merry and Jack Blake were looking at one another thoughtfully. It was the Shell junior who spoke first.

"This means a sacking bizney for Dudley, Jack."

"You think he did it?"

"I shall be jolly surprised if it turns out that he didn't," replied Tom Merry quietly. "In his heart Wally thinks so, too."

"Yaas, wathah! I noticed that myself."

"Oh, we all noticed it," put in Figgins soberly. "Dudley is as good as sacked. Young rotter."

"Poor beggar!" added Tom Merry.

Figgins nodded.

"Yes, poor beggar as well," he said thoughtfully. "I expect he did it on the spur of the moment."

"Yaas, wathah! I twust he did, deah boys."

The others nodded, then silence reigned in Study No. 6.

None of them knew much about Dudley. He was not an attractive junior, like Wally or Gibson or Jameson, but he was a St. Jim's fellow.

And to be sacked might mean so much to a chap in after life.

Tom Merry & Co. looked out of the window gloomily.

CHAPTER 13.

To Leave St. Jim's.

"WHAT happened, Dudley?"

"How did you get on?"

"What did the Head say?"

The fags of the Third Form crowded round Dudley the moment he came from the doctor's room. Dudley was rather white.

"He thinks I did it," he said roughly. "Where's Wally?"

"In Study No. 6."

"My hat! Are you gated for the rest of the term, Dud?"

"No," answered the big Third-Former. "But I expect my pater will be asked to take me away at the end of the term. I must see Wally."

He hurried off, leaving the Third-Formers more scared than ever.

No one in the coll. was respected as much by the fags as Dr. Holmes. The fact that it might be possible for even the Head of St. Jim's to make a mistake did not present itself to the majority of the youngsters.

If Dr. Holmes were going to send Dudley away at the end of the term, Dudley must have done it. Poor old Dud!"

The Third-Formers stood where they were, in silence, until Wally's well-known voice hailed them.

"Has—has Dud come out, chaps?"

"Yes, rather!"

"He's gone to look for you."

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Another Splendid Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

"Then he must have taken the other corridor!" muttered Wally. "I expect he's gone to our room."
And the scamp of the Third flashed away again.
He ran most of the distance, sending the study door open with a thud. Dudley was there, all right, standing near the window.

Wally came in quietly now, and closed the door.

"What—what is the verdict, Dud?"

"I am to go at the end of the term, I think."

"Phew! The—the doctor thinks you did it, then?"

Wally asked his question, hesitatingly. It was to be expected that he would.

Speaking falsely was considered as bad form in the Third as it was in the Sixth at St. Jim's, and Dudley had already told Wally he had not fired the haystack. Wally had a little of the tact and judgment his brother so prided himself upon, only it was of a different brand.

He did not raise the point of whether Dudley were guilty or not for the moment.

"I—I am sorry, Dud."

The result of his words startled the leader of the Third.

"What do you mean by that?" flashed Dudley angrily.

"What do you mean by saying you're sorry?"

"I mean, I am sorry if you have to go."

"If?"

"You said you thought it would come to that, old chap," answered Wally, in surprise. "I—I am partly to blame, too."

Dudley looked up quickly, but he did not answer.

"You see, it was my idea we should break bounds," went on D'Arcy minor. "Would—would it do any good if I went and told the Head that?"

"If you went and told him that the breaking bounds was your idea?"

"Yes, but of course it wouldn't, old man. I—I am awfully sorry, Dud."

"I don't want your pity!" cried Dudley angrily. "You can keep it for yourself."

There was something in Dudley's voice which astounded Wally. An almost aggressive note was there, and the scamp of the Third would have resented it at any other time.

But Dudley had always been a strange fellow.

The door opened, and Curly Gibson and Jameson came into the room.

The two other juniors took no notice of them. Wally felt rather uncomfortable for a moment or two.

"I know pretty well how you're feeling, old chap!" he said, "and if there's anything on the face of the earth I can do to help—"

"Isn't there anything?"

"I—I don't know. Is there, Dud?"

"You cad!" shouted the big Third-Former. "You hypocrite!"

And he strode from the room, his hands clenched, and his lips trembling. Wally, Curly Gibson, and Jameson looked after him in silent amazement.

They did not speak for a moment or two, then it was Jameson who broke the pause.

"What did he call you a cad for, Wally?"

Wally shrugged his shoulders.

"Goodness knows, but he's upset, and I don't wonder. Perhaps there's something we can do for him, and he doesn't like to ask us to do it."

"Something pretty obvious, you mean?"

Wally nodded.

"Something we ought to have seen at once. No, I don't think that is it, somehow. He's on the rocks, that's what it is, and he didn't think what he was saying."

"Anyway, he can't blame you just because it was your idea to jape Sir Caleb."

"And he must have been a cad himself to set fire to a haystack."

Wally went and sat down on the window-ledge.

"No, Dud isn't a cad," he said thoughtfully. "He never was that."

And silence reigned in the Third Form room again.

Out in the passage, Dudley was walking at a great pace. He was making for the quadrangle. It would be quiet enough there, and for once in his school life the big Third-Former wished to be alone.

What would his father say, when he heard? What would his mother think?

She, at any rate, would not say much, but she would think a great deal. He could see her face now, with the worried expression all this would bring there, and it was that Dudley minded most.

He clenched his fists until the nails sank painfully into his palms.

Then gradually he became cooler, and began to think of Wally.

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NEXT THURSDAY: "A RANK OUTSIDER."

He wished now he had not called the scamp of the Third a cad. He was a cad. Any fellow who would consent to allow another to be punished for his fault was a cad; but the big Third-Former wished he had not used the word. Curly Gibson and Jameson had been present. He ought to have thought of that at the time.

It was no good doing things by halves.

He must either go through with it, or throw it up and tell Wally what he knew. But Wally had done so much for him.

Dudley thought of that, too.

Wally had chummed in with him when he had been in that most lonely state in the world, one by himself in a crowd. The act itself had not been much, but the result had been great.

It had meant more than anything else in the world could have meant at the time.

Dudley was not a good-looking youngster. There was not a great deal of intelligence in his face, for one thing, but his mouth and chin were very strong.

They looked stronger than ever now.

He must go through with it. And after all, it would not mean so much to him. He could tell his father the whole story in confidence—Captain Dudley was a man you could tell things to in confidence—and the worried expression on his mother's face would not be there so very long.

And he would have repayed Wally a hundredfold.

He clenched his hands again at that. Wally had acted caddishly. Why hadn't he owned up to the fellow who meant to stand the racket for him, a decent chap would have done that, at least. But to pretend to be sorry!

That was where Dudley's real resentment lay. He would have liked to have knocked Wally down.

And to leave St. Jim's!

It was not going to be so easy to carry it through, after all.

CHAPTER 14.

Dudley Hits Out.

"ROW up, chaps, for the finish!"

"Yaas, wathah! Pway show Cousin Ethel what we can do, deah boys!"

"Altogether!"

And the Study No. 6 juniors bent to their work.

In the stern of their dainty racing-boat, the pretty, girlish face of Cousin Ethel was to be seen. She was steering the boat, and brought her up to the landing-stage splendidly.

Jack Blake helped her out anxiously.

"Are we better than Tom Merry's crew, Cousin Ethel?"

"Yaas, wathah, deah gal. As one gentleman to anothah, I mean."

"Shall we beat them do you think?"

Cousin Ethel laughed.

She had steered the School House Fourth Form crew for a long pull, and half an hour before she had taken Tom Merry's boat over the same course. Her opinion would be worth a lot to the Study No. 6 juniors.

"You don't row so very badly," she admitted.

"Bai Jove—"

"And Tom Merry doesn't row so very badly, either."

"Weally—"

"Which is the better, Cousin Ethel?"

"Would you like to know very much, Herries?"

"Rather!"

"Bai Jove, deah gal!"

"Then I am afraid you will have to wait until Regatta Day," said Cousin Ethel pleasantly. "There is Figgins & Co. waiting for me to steer them now."

And she hurried away.

The Study No. 6 juniors grinned ruefully.

It was difficult work trying to find out what Cousin Ethel really thought about the rowing when she had made up her mind it shouldn't be found out. Jack Blake turned away with a laugh.

"Jolly decent of her to steer us all, anyway!" he exclaimed. "Can't she steer, too!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"She's going to take Figgy over the same course, by the look of it."

"Yaas, wathah. I pwopose we wun like anythin', and watch them pass down the mill!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Of course, Figgy & Co. aren't to be considahed in the same sweet as our cwew, bai Jove; but you nevah know, in wovin'."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get on with the washing, kids!"

And the Four flashed along the river bank.

Figgins & Co. and the Terrible Three had been watching their practice closely enough. It was only fair they

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should see if there was anything to be learned from the way Figgins's ship stood the cross wind at the mill.

They had reached the spot before the New House boat was under way. Jack Blake glanced round.

"May as well drop down amongst the bracken, kids," he grinned, wrapping his blazer closer round himself. "They'll think we're just taking a breather, then."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We don't want them to get swelled heads through thinking we are watching them."

"Rather not!"

They dropped down on the soft ferns. It was very peaceful and pleasant to be there after their hard pull.

Presently a rhythmic swish in the water below them told of the rival's approach. In spite of his previous decision to the contrary, Jack Blake jumped to his feet.

Cousin Ethel was steering a beautiful course.

And Figgins & Co. were rowing a beautiful stroke.

The long-limbed leader of the New House juniors had a wonderful reach, and it was fortunate for the welfare of the crew that Kerr, French, and Pratt were able to answer to it.

Fatty Wynn was not in the boat, and he probably would not be there on Regatta Day. His weight was against his chances, and he was not long enough in the reach to respond to Figgins's terrific stroke.

Fatty Wynn had taken himself out of the boat.

He was more anxious that the New House should win than that he should get his place.

They flashed past the mill, rowing at a great pace.

Jack Blake watched them anxiously.

"My hat! Haven't they come on, chaps!"

"Nothing like the same crew they were a week ago!"

"Good old Figgy!"

Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle deeper into his eye. "Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove! There's my minah, deah boys!"

"And young Dudley!" added Jack Blake, as the New House boat was lost to sight rounding the bend. "What are they up to?"

The Fourth-Formers watched curiously from the distance. There were three or four fags with D'Arcy minor, and apparently they had just come upon Dudley, leaning against the gate.

How it all exactly happened, Jack Blake could not see, but from where he stood, it looked as if Dudley suddenly landed out with his fist and struck Wally in the chest.

It was a heavy blow, and it sent D'Arcy minor staggering.

"Gweat Scott! Did you see that, deah boys?"

Jack Blake stepped forward, shrugging his shoulders.

"A split in the cabinet at last!" he exclaimed. "There'll be a fight over this! Hallo, Dudley is clearing off!"

"Perhaps Wally has threatened to administah a feafhl thwashin', deah boy!"

"Why didn't the kid go for him?"

"It's not like Wally to take a blow and not return it!"

"No, wathah not!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, I p'pose we inkuiah into the mattah!"

Jack Blake had already started towards the Third-Formers.

He faced Wally and Curly Gibson and Jameson, looking puzzled.

"What's the row, Wally?"

Wally looked more than puzzled, though a trifle grim.

"Blest if I know, Blake!" he exclaimed in amazement.

"We met Dudley here, and I asked him outright if he'd told me a fib when he said he hadn't fired the haystack!"

"Yes, that's right!"

"And he didn't answer at first."

"And then I asked him if he had done it on the spur of the moment," went on Wally excitedly. "He lost his temper then, and landed out!"

"Rather!"

"You should have seen the way he blazed up!" added Jameson quickly. "Then he asked if Wally would fight him. You would hardly have recognised his voice!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Are you going to fight him, Wally?" asked Blake.

"Blessed if I know," muttered the scamp of the Third. "Dud. used to be a sort of chum, and—and it's a bit rotten standing up to a chum!"

"He meant it, Wally!"

"If he means to fight, I sha'n't back out, of course, and I may be able to punch a bit of sense into his head," returned D'Arcy minor promptly. "I sha'n't say anything else about it, but you'll see me there if he's really keen. Blest if I can make it out, though!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus! The only thing he has against me is that it was my idea that we should break bounds. But—"

"Weally, Wally—"

"But, bother it all, anyone might have suggested a thing like that," went on D'Arcy minor. "He's suggested it himself many times!"

"Weally, Wally, I am twyin' to make a wemark!" said Arthur Augustus with dignity. "I have twied seweval times to make the same wemark, as a mattah of fact!"

Wally turned.

"Get it off your chest, then, Gus!"

"Weally! Howevah, I will ovahlook your slang, Wally, undah the cires. What I wish to wemark is that I ordah you to wefuse to fight Dudley!"

"Rats!"

"Bai Jove! Did you say wats to me, Wally?"

"Yes! Sorry, meant rabbits, of course!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"Why can't he fight Dudley, Gussy?" grinned Digby.

"Because I considah fighting infwah dig., deah boy!"

"My hat!"

"In fact, I considah it vewy infwah dig. indeed," added the swell of St. Jim's. "Of course, if Dudley has insulted my minah—"

"He dotted him a pretty hefty whack in the chest, anyway."

"Yaas, wathah, and a blow can be considahed an insult, bai Jove. As I was about to wemark, if Wally has been insulted, there is no othah wescource foah him but to administah a feafhl thwashin'."

"That's what he means to do, ass!"

"Weally, Jameson! Howevah, I undahstand that you are far too young to distinguish between a wough and weady fight and a feafhl thwashin'! My minah undahstands, though."

"Yes, I understand that if Dudley wants to fight me he can," said Wally grimly.

"A feafhl thwashin'!"

"Call it that, if you like."

"You considah it a mattah of dig. with you, deah boy?"

"I consider Dud. must be off his rocker, but that isn't my fault," observed Wally. "We'll let you chaps know when the scrap comes off!"

"The scwap! Weally, Wally—Wally—Waltah— Bai Jove, the young wascal has gone!"

The scamp of the Third had, and with him, Curly Gibson and Jameson.

CHAPTER 15.

Barlow, the Gamekeeper.

"PRETTY funny bizney, kids, and no mistake!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Digby and Herries nodded as they dropped into step with the others. Still, you never could tell with Third-Formers. There were usually wheels within wheels in the Fag Form of St. Jim's.

"And it isn't as if Dudley was going to be sacked," exclaimed Jack Blake. "He won't come back next term, that's all. Other chaps have had to put up with that for less than he has done!"

"And to set fire to a haystack is pretty rotten!" said Digby.

But it was a moment or two before the four recommenced their discussion about the forthcoming regatta. They could not get Dudley's impending fate out of their minds quite as easily as would have been comfortable.

Presently, however, they met Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, and at the same moment Arthur Augustus stopped dead.

"Pway excuse me, deah boys, but I feah I shall have to wun away!"

"Good!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Excellent!"

"Bai Jove, Mannahs! Howevah, I see you are only waggin', and I must huwwy, because—"

"Shall we see you later?"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"

"Hard cheese!" grinned the humourist of the Shell as Arthur Augustus walked off. "Blakey, you'll have about as much chance of winning Cousin Ethel's prize on Regatta Day as a one-armed crew would have in a small barge!"

Arthur Augustus heard the last remark and hesitated. Then he made up his mind.

He could remonstrate with Lowther later on, but there was no time now. He felt certain he had caught sight of Sir Caleb Ashton's keeper, Barlow, amongst the trees.

"Bai Jove, I was right, too! Barlow, pway stop a moment or two!"

The young keeper started, then hurried up to meet the swell of St. Jim's.

"I've been looking for you, sir!"

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"Have you weally, bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus in surprise. "I wegard that as funnay as I have also been lookin' foah you, deah boy, as I wish to say it was impos. foah me to see you aftah I had paid the visit to Sir Caleb—"

"No, sir; I saw you leaving."

Arthur Augustus coloured.

"Bai Jove, did you weally! I must wemark that I considah Sir Caleb tweated me with scanty respect!"

"He was in a bad temper, sir—I—I—What has happened to the young gentleman Greaves caught last night?"

"Dudley? Bai Jove, I am wathah afraid he may have to leave at the end of the term!"

"Leave at the end of the term? Not—not expelled?"

"Well, not quite that, perhaps," answered Arthur Augustus seriously. "Somethin' wathah wotten, though!"

"But there isn't any proof he did it—Sir Caleb himself said there wasn't!"

"Did he weally, bai Jove?"

"Yes, and he said he was going to point that out to Dr. Holmes!" went on Barlow quickly. "Surely they can't send him away without proof?"

"No, wathah not!"

"But—"

"Well, as a mattah of fact, I don't actually know that Dudley is to be sent down!" explained Arthur Augustus. "I undahstand Dudley himself said he was afraid he might have to leave, but I wathah fancay it isn't settled yet."

"It'll be a shame if he is sent away without proof!"

"Yaas, wathah; but we can twust the doctah not to do that!"

"I—I'd like to know how it goes on, sir?"

"Bai Jove, I wegard that as wippin' of you, Barlow!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove!"

"What's the matter, sir?"

"There is Dudley!" said Arthur Augustus, lowering his voice. "Goin' foah a stwoll by himself, I suppose?"

The young keeper looked across the field, but Dudley did not glance their way. He had seen them, but he did not want to stop.

He walked until he came to a lane which led from the high road. There was an ancient tree-trunk there, covered with the names of past St. Jim's fellows, and Dudley sat down on it.

It would not be so long before he was a past St. Jim's chap.

But he did not commence to carve his name; he had not come there to do that, as so many others had when the time was getting short. He looked dully at the names without reading, instead.

"Bother it! I'm always wishing I hadn't done something or other," he mused; "I wish I hadn't struck Wally!"

But this time he was not quite so sure of his wish.

Wally must know why the blow had been given. There was some relief in that thought, at least, and, when the fight came off, Wally would know again.

It would be a good fight.

And there was no crying off now. Wally would see to that. The fear of public opinion would make a compromise impossible.

Dudley shrugged his shoulders.

He did not care very much about the fight.

The minutes slipped by. Barlow, the young gamekeeper, passed along the road at the head of the lane, and Sir Caleb's huge motor-car raised a storm of dust not long afterwards.

Dudley hardly noticed it, then, suddenly, he became aware of the fact that he was not alone in the lane.

He turned hastily to see Cousin Ethel standing a few yards away.

"I have been waiting for you to notice me, Dudley," she smiled quietly.

"I am sorry," muttered the Third-Former. "I wasn't thinking—"

"Or rather—you were thinking about the trouble over the haystack," said Cousin Ethel, looking at the youngster's white face. "Oh, Dudley, how could you be so reckless?"

"I—I—"

Dudley jumped to his feet.

Cousin Ethel was right. He had been thinking, about as much as he could stand.

The girl looked at him curiously.

"Sir Caleb said you denied doing it," she said. "Did you?"

"Yes."

"But you did do it?"

"Dudley did not answer for a moment, then he coloured to the roots of his hair.

"No, I didn't do it, Miss Cleveland, but I don't suppose you will believe that."

"Why don't you suppose so?"

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"Because—because no one else does."

Cousin Ethel smiled again.

"That isn't a very good reason, Dudley," she said quietly.

"If you did not actually set fire to the hay, you must know who did—you must be shielding someone."

Dudley started violently.

Cousin Ethel was a year or two older than he was, and she was a girl. The fag's embarrassment told her a great deal.

"Dudley, you are shielding someone!"

The Third-Former tried to answer her, but there was no answer to give. The Head had raised the point himself, but Dudley had managed to gloss over that for a time. It was different with Cousin Ethel.

"I heard that you would have to leave at the end of the term," went on the girl calmly.

"I expect it will come to that."

"But why? Won't Dr. Holmes take your word that you did not do it?"

"I—I wouldn't give him my word," answered Dudley in a low voice. "I did say it wasn't me at first, but I wouldn't give any information. That's why I shall have to leave."

"I see!" answered Cousin Ethel softly.

"Yes; but you won't tell anyone, will you?"

"Someone ought to be told. It's a shame! The other boy must be a cad."

"No, he isn't that," exclaimed Dudley, using the same words Wally had used about himself—"not quite, anyway! Will you please promise not to tell, Miss Cleveland?"

"Oh, Dudley, you oughtn't to ask me to give a promise like that!"

"But I do ask, Miss Cleveland!" persisted the Third-Former excitedly. "You will?"

"I suppose so, if you ask me."

"Thanks awfully!" muttered Dudley. "And it doesn't make any difference in the end. I believe the doctor half thinks I am—am shielding someone as it is—the chap who did it with me. I—I had better be going."

"Good-bye!" said Cousin Ethel. "I am sorry, Dudley!"

And Dudley went without answering. He did not mind the girl chum being sorry.

He was glad Cousin Ethel knew nothing about the fight, though, or she might have guessed.

CHAPTER 16.

The Fight.

"SURE Dudley means to go through with it, Curly?"

"Rather!" He was getting ready when I passed his study."

Wally shrugged his shoulders.

"Sooner it's over the better, then," he said briskly. "Come on, chaps!"

There were quite a large number of Third-Formers moving across the quadrangle in the direction of a certain field.

Here and there was a sprinkling of Fourth-Form juniors, and presently the Terrible Three came up.

"What's the wheeze, Blakey?"

"Fight between Wally and Dudley—I'll tell you as we go along."

Tom Merry whistled.

"Thought they had chummed in a bit at times," he said. "I'll bet young Wally won't like standing up to a chap down on his luck, eh, Gussy?"

"No, wathah not! But I wathah fancay it is a mattah of dig. with my minah now."

Here come Figgins & Co."

"Yaas, wathah! They know all about it, deah boys. Bai Jove, what a crowd!"

The field was gained. It stood a long way back from the road, and a belt of trees prevented anyone from the college windows watching operations.

Wally was somewhat surprised to find Dudley already there, alone. The scamp of the Third waited to see whether Dudley meant to put a stop to the fight, then slipped off his coat.

It wasn't his place to speak first.

"Who is going to second you, Dudley?" asked Tom Merry.

"I don't want anyone to second me."

"Don't be a young ass! Here, Green, second Dudley."

Green was an inoffensive youngster at the bottom of the Third. He accepted the post of honour to Dudley nervously.

Jameson glanced round.

"Make a ring, chaps, and a decently large one. The usual two-minute rounds, I suppose, Green?"

"Y-yes. Is that right, Dudley?"

Dudley nodded; then he stepped into the ring.

Wally was not long behind him, and the juniors waited breathlessly.

A good many of them did not know what the trouble was, and did not mind. There was going to be a good, stand-up

fight between Dudley and Wally, the acknowledged leader of the Third.

Critical glances were directed towards the principals.

Dudley was nearly half a head taller, and must have weighed considerably more.

Both struck out together, but Wally's was rather a tame shot. He liked the affair still less now he was in the ring.

"Look here, Dud—"

"I don't want to hear anything you have to say—cad!" muttered Dudley in a low voice. "I'm going to square up accounts this way!"

And he struck out again.

It was a good left-handed blow, and it got home, staggering D'Arcy minor. But Wally was not long in recovering, and he countered with rather a late right. Then they went at it for all they were worth.

Dudley was bigger and stronger, and drove the younger lad back when he got home, but his boxing was not nearly so clean. He hit out well, but he was not quick enough in guarding. Wally invariably got home with the counter.

"Oh, well hit!"

"Buck up, Wally!"

"Now's your chance!"

It was easy to see which was the favourite, but it was difficult to say who would win in the long run.

Wally was showing the better form, but he was getting badly punished.

The round came to an end with Wally being sent down rather heavily.

Dudley's eyes were shining brilliantly. He had lost his temper.

Curly Gibson saw that, and nodded.

"You'll win, Wally."

"He'll get right down ratty in a minute," agreed Jameson. "All you've got to do is keep away from his left."

"It's a rotten fight, anyway!" muttered Wally.

"Time!"

The timekeeper's voice rang out crisply, and the principals were back in the ring again. The fight was recommenced in dead earnest.

Wally forgot that he was standing up to a chap he had once chummed up a little with, and Dudley only remembered a singed cap with Wally's name in it which lay at the bottom of his bag.

They hit out at one another with all the strength of their wiry young arms.

A blow from Wally's quick right staggered his bigger opponent, and brought forth a cheer from the spectators; then a rough-and-ready round-arm blow from Dudley balanced matters.

But Wally was boxing better than ever. Tom Merry noticed that before the round came to an end.

"It all depends on whether young Wally gets knocked out or not—"

"Of course it does, ass!"

"I mean, he'll win unless one of Dudley's chance blows sends him down, duffer!" exclaimed the hero of the Shell.

"There's no comparison in their styles."

"Not much!"

"Wally boxes rather good for a kid."

Arthur Augustus nodded approvingly.

"Yaas, wathah! Perhaps that is due to my havin' given him some winkles, deah boys."

"Given him some what?"

"Winkles, deah boys."

"Winkles!"

Tom Merry gasped.

"Ass! He means wrinkles!" chuckled Jack Blake. "A fat lot of wrinkles you ever gave Wally! Dry up; they are in the ring again."

"And not long about getting off the mark, either."

"And on it!" grinned Lowther. "That's about one to each, I should say— Oh, well hit!"

Wally was easily getting the better of the third round, and Dudley's heavy round-arm blows were conspicuous by their absence now.

Figgins & Co. stared at him in surprise.

"Can't be tiring, can he?"

"Not much! You should see him on the river."

"Yaas, wathah! He's awfully stwong foah a youngstah. Bai Jove!"

The fight had stopped suddenly, with the round not half over.

"Anything the matter?"

"What's up?"

Then, to the amazement of everyone, Dudley picked up his coat and slipped it on.

The Third-Formers crowded round him.

"Look here, Dudley, you can't sheer off like this."

"Not unless you cry best to Wally."

"Oh, I say, talk about pluck!"

Dudley did not vouchsafe any reply. His coat was on, and he was pushing his way through the small crowd.

"You aren't going to stand that sort of thing, Wally?"

"You'd have whacked him in another round."

Wally also did not answer. He was looking at his late opponent in blank astonishment.

Dudley had forced the fight upon him, and now he was crying off in the middle of it.

"My only Aunt Jane! I believe he's off his rocker, Curly!"

"Phew!"

"And he's been calling me a cad and all sorts of things," went on the scamp of the Third. "Bothered if I can make it out!"

Jameson glanced at his principal.

"It was rather rotten having to face Dud at all, I should think."

"Beastly! But what could I do? Oh, bother it all, what a rotten muddle; and perhaps he won't row in the regatta now!"

"No, he isn't going to!"

Wally wheeled round.

"What do you mean, young Green?"

"Dudley said he wasn't going to row, because I asked him," said the youthful second. "I'm cox., you know."

And the Third-Form crew looked blankly at one another.

Without Dudley they would have to begin all over again to get a balanced crew, and it was too late to do that now. Besides, it wasn't likely they'd make another "find" like Dud.

D'Arcy minor wished to goodness he had never thought about "japing" Sir Caleb Ashton now.

CHAPTER 17.

Arthur Augustus Meets Barlow Again.

"It is only a mattah of about twenty minutes, deah boys—"

"Rats!"

"We aren't going to wait twenty seconds, kid."

And Jack Blake moved towards the door of Study No. 6.

"Weally, Blake, it is uttably imposs. foah me to wow on the wivah with tar on my wovwin' vest. I will wush upstairs and change my attiah instantly."

"You can please yourself about that, kid," said Jack Blake firmly. "We're going down to the river at once. If you aren't there by the time we get the ship afloat you'll find us gone, with Reilly in your place."

"Hear, hear!" said Reilly heartily. "Shure, an' you couldn't do better, my bloy!"

"Wats, Weilly—uttah wats!"

Jack Blake flung open the door.

"Come on, chaps!"

And the four of them hurried from the room.

Arthur Augustus hesitated. He knew the fact that there was a smear of tar on his rowing vest would spoil his rowing, and he knew Jack Blake had meant what he said.

"I shall have to wun like anythin'," mused Arthur Augustus, racing upstairs. "Jack Blake has left me no othah weccourse but to considah his action unfwiendly in the extweme— Bai Jove! It would have been uttably imposs. foah me to wow like that."

He changed hastily enough, but then his hair had to be done again, and that was always a long task with the swell of St. Jim's. A good ten minutes had gone by the time he was ready to leave the college.

He started off at a brisk run, taking in deep breaths of the crisp, morning air.

"Bai Jove, this is weally wipping! I shall wov like anythin' this morning. Bai Jove!"

He ran on, rounding a bend in good style. Then he gave vent to a yell. He had brought up against something with a sounding bump.

He staggered back, his monocle fell from his eye, and his cap was jerked over his nose.

"Bai Jove! Gweat Scott!"

"Bless me 'at! I'm sorry, sir."

"Bai Jove, it's Barlow, isn't it? Gweat Scott, I twust I haven't hurt you, deah boy!"

The young gamekeeper grinned slightly. He went twelve stone in boxing attire, and Arthur Augustus was not a substantially built junior.

"No, you haven't hurt me, sir—"

"Bai Jove, that's all right then!" panted Arthur Augustus. "I am all in a fluttah. However, I must huwvy like anythin'."

"Yes, sir, nice morning, isn't it, sir?"

"Wathah—wippin' in the extweme, as a mattah of fact. Howevah, I shall have to wun."

"Are—are things pretty quiet at the school, sir?"

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"Yaas, wathah, as only a few fellows have wisen ffrom their beds yet."

Barlow looked uneasy. If Arthur Augustus had been in less of a hurry to get down to the river, he must have noticed it.

"I meant—has anything else happened about that—that haystack business, sir?" added Barlow. "About Master Dudley?"

"Bai Jove! I haven't heard of anything happenin'—but pway excuse me as I am in a we'tched huwwy."

The cheery hail from behind caused Arthur Augustus to turn.

"Cheer-ho, Gussy!"

"Bai Jove! Up already, Tom Mewwy, deah boy?"

"Do I look as if I'm still in bed, ass?"

"Bai Jove!"

The others came up at a run.

"Talk about early birds," grinned Manners, tucking his sweater closer round his neck. "We've been up for hours in the gym."

"Looking for worms," explained Lowther pleasantly.

"We've just found one—how are you, Gussy?"

"Bai Jove. Weally, deah boy—"

"Oh, don't apologise," chuckled Tom Merry. "I say though, have you heard about Dudley?"

"No, wathah not—"

"He's leaving at once—to-day," someone said.

"Gweat Scott!"

"Not—not expelled, Master Merry?"

Tom Merry glanced at the young gamekeeper before answering.

"Not far from it, anyway," he said soberly. "It seems the Head wrote to Dudley's pater, saying he had better leave at the end of the term, and Dudley's pater has wired that he is to leave at once. Best thing for the kid, I say."

"Yaas, wathah, undah the circs. I am wathah inclined to agree with you, deah boy. Howevah, I must say I wegard the mattah as wotten in the extweme."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Oh, it's all that, kid, only I don't see you can blame the Head."

"If chaps will go about doing rotten things like setting fire to haystacks, they must face the music."

"Yaas, wathah, Mannahs, deah boy. Bai Jove, but I must go. I shall have to wun."

"I'll walk along with you, if you don't mind, sir."

"I'm afraid it is quite imposs., Barlow, as I shall have to wun—"

"I don't mind running, sir."

"Bai Jove! Well, if we walk vewy quickly, I wathah fancy it will be all wight. Jack Blake will never be so uttahnly weckless as to attempt to take the boat out without me there to look aftah them. See you latah, Tom Mewwy, deah boy."

"Right-ho, dear ass."

"See us on Regatta Day."

"Rather, but you won't see us for long," called out Lowther cheerily. "Just catch a glimpse of us as we flash past."

"Wats—uttah wats. However, I have no time to pprove you are w'ong, Lowthah. We shall have to huwwy like anything, Barlow."

"Right-ho, sir."

Arthur Augustus glanced up at the gamekeeper. He was a little surprised that Barlow should be so anxious to walk down to the river with him. It was out of his way if he were going back to Sir Caleb's place.

"Pewhahs he is keen in wowin' though," thought the swell of St. Jim's. "I trust you will be able to take a day off for the regatta, Barlow."

"Y—yes!"

"There will be some wippin' waces."

"Yes, sir, I suppose so."

Silence fell between them again. Arthur Augustus could not make it out. He tried again.

"Have yau evah done any wowin' deah boy?"

"No, sir; I've never had a chance. I say, sir—"

"Yaas! Pway go one."

"Is—there any chance that Dr. Holmes may change his mind about Master Dudley?" asked the young gamekeeper. "It's a pretty bad thing for a boy to be sent away from a public school, isn't it, sir?"

"Yaas, wathah! Wotten! I am afraid the mattah is settled foah Dudley, though."

"You don't think—the doctor may change his mind?"

"Wathah not, I wegwet to say. You see, Barlow, we are all afraid Dudley did set fire to the hay."

"I see, sir," answered Barlow. "I—I think I'll turn down here."

And he walked off, taking a lane which led to Sir Caleb Ashton's estate.

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"A RANK OUTSIDER."

Arthur Augustus looked after him, considerably puzzled.

"Bai Jove! I considah him wathah a wippah, though. He appeahs weally twoubled about young Dudley—"

"Steady, there; we'll give the young ass three more seconds."

The words came to Arthur Augustus on the light morning breeze, and there was no mistaking Jack Blake's voice.

Arthur Augustus forgot about Barlow and his concern for Dudley. The honour of the Fourth Form of the School House had to be considered.

"Bai Jove! I believe the wottahs are starting—Blake, deah boy—Pway wait!"

And the swell of St. Jim's dashed across the field.

The boat was already afloat, but the crew were not in their places. Reilly had the rudder under his arm.

Jack Blake looked severely across the field.

"Just in time, ass," he said crisply. "We were just going out without a cox. All in!"

And the juniors took their places for one of Jack Blake's punishing pulls up the river.

CHAPTER 18.

The Mystery.

"HERE come the Fourth Form kids."

Tom Merry spun round and looked critically across the quadrangle.

Jack Blake & Co. certainly looked very fresh and fit after their long pull. They came towards the Shell juniors with cheery grins.

"Ripping on the river, young Merry."

"It's to be hoped Regatta Day turns out like this, young Blake," observed the hero of the Shell coolly. "Is Figgins on the water?"

"Come off soon after we did. Here he comes!"

"Good!" exclaimed Manners. "We can settle about the race once and for all."

Jack Blake nodded glumly.

As far as he could see the matter was settled for them. It would have to be carried out on bumping principles, a spin of the coin to decide which boat should lead.

It was rather a come down from the real thing, but that could not be helped.

"Have the fags been out as well?" asked Lowther, glancing towards a knot of Third-Formers talking in lowered voices. "A bit bowled over by the Dudley affair, aren't they?"

"Yaas, wathah; and the ewew is all to pieces without Dudley."

"Here come the young idiots!"

There were about eleven of the fags, the party, with one exception, which had visited Sir Caleb's woods. The one exception was leaving that morning.

"By the ten o'clock train," said Wally quietly. "Poor old Dud."

"Yaas wathah; are you going to see him off?"

"Rather—at least, the others are. He cuts me, you know."

"Bai Jove!"

"Have you got permission to go to the station?" asked Tom Merry. "Better get it from the Head than Selby."

Wally nodded.

"Not much chance of Selby giving it, you bet; he liked Dud about as much as he likes me."

Someone was crossing the quadrangle in flowing gown. Arthur Augustus peered through the sunlight, shading his eyes.

"Bai Jove! Here comes the doctor, deah boys."

"Good egg. You ask, Curly."

Curly Gibson nodded, and waited for the Head to approach. Dr. Holmes came up rather hurriedly.

"Good morning boys; training for the races?"

"Yaas, wathah, sir, we have just come ffrom the wivah."

"That is the way," answered the Head of St. Jim's kindly.

"D'Arcy minor, where is Dudley?"

"I—I don't know, sir."

"Well, will you tell him to come to my room before he leaves," answered Dr. Holmes, watching the approach of two figures. "Dear me, can you see who that is, Merry?"

Tom Merry looked.

"Sir Caleb Ashton, I think, sir."

"So it is. Humph!"

A frown settled on Dr. Holmes' face. He was becoming rather tired of Sir Caleb's perpetual visits during the last day or so. They were usually the forerunners of unpleasant events.

Sir Caleb came up hurriedly, and the man who was with him was the gamekeeper, Barlow.

Wally started and tried to look unconcerned. Had something else happened on that unfortunate night in the woods?

But the scamp of the Third was not long left in suspense.

Another Splendid Long, Complete
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"Can I speak to you for a moment or two, doctor?"

"Yes, Sir Caleb; will you come into the college?"

"I would rather say what I have to say here, sir, if you have no objection—before these boys," replied Sir Caleb, who was obviously upset. "Barlow, tell Dr. Holmes what you have just told me."

The gamekeeper stepped forward. He was rather pale, but seemed steady enough.

The doctor waited.

"It wasn't Master Dudley who set fire to the hay, sir."

"Not Dudley! Then he was shielding someone. Explain instantly, please."

"I don't know about his shielding anyone, sir, but I know it wasn't him as did it," said Barlow. "It was I, sir."

"My only Aunt Jane!"

If the penalty had been instant annihilation, D'Arcy minor could not have suppressed the exclamation. He was staring blankly at the gamekeeper.

But, then, so was everyone else staring at him.

The expression on Dr. Holmes's face was one of blank amazement.

"I—I do not understand, Barlow."

"It was simple enough, sir. I—I had a lantern in the woods. Perhaps some of the young gentlemen saw it?"

"Rather!" gasped Wally, in wild excitement.

"Well, sir, it was doing our side more harm than good," went on the gamekeeper. "I was pretty excited, or I would have turned it out, but somehow I never thought of that. I—I put it down near the haystack, sir, when I caught sight of one of the young gentlemen running across the field."

"That would be Dud!" gasped Jameson and Curly Gibson together.

"Most likely it was. I must have been mad to put the lantern near the hay, and it must have fallen over," said the gamekeeper, meeting the doctor's eyes pretty steadily considering the circumstances. "I ran after Master Dudley, and then I caught sight of the flames behind me."

"My hat!"

It was Wally again, but he pulled himself up this time.

"Of course I went back, sir, as hard as I could, but it was too late. Some of the oil had run out of the lantern, and the hay was well alight. I—I then did something I'm real ashamed of, sir."

"What was that, Barlow?" asked the doctor sternly.

"I—I hid the lantern, sir."

There was dead silence at that. Wally was trembling with excitement, but even he had nothing to say for the moment.

It was Sir Caleb who spoke first.

"And I am partly to blame, Dr. Holmes," he said quietly.

"It appears Barlow was afraid he might lose his place, and he has a widowed mother. It has come as a very severe and unpleasant surprise to me to learn that I am viewed with such fear by the men I employ."

Arthur Augustus looked up. He could not quite wonder at that view on the part of Sir Caleb's servants. The incident of his fall in the river was still fresh in the Fourth-Former's mind.

"Barlow, this is a very serious matter. You were willing to cover up a pure accident by allowing a boy to be suspected of what amounts to a crime."

"No, sir, not quite that."

"But—"

"I never thought anyone would be suspected. It was an accident, and I thought it would still be considered an accident, only it wouldn't be known who had done it. It was pretty low down, sir."

"But Dudley might have been expelled."

Barlow did not answer. He was not given the time, for Arthur Augustus answered for him.

"Bai Jove, I don't think that would evah have happened, doctah. I believe Barlow would have owned up, as he has been askin' me about the affair on ewevy occasion poss."

"And he has owned up now," put in Sir Caleb.

The doctor still looked very puzzled.

"It is an extraordinary affair, and I do not understand it at all," he exclaimed. "Dudley would give me no information. Surely he was not shielding you, Barlow?"

"No, sir; I don't think he knows me."

"D'Arcy minor, can you explain this?"

Wally shook his head.

"I can't understand Dudley at all these last two days, sir," he exclaimed doubtfully. "He's been acting awfully strangely."

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove!"

"What is the matter, D'Arcy?"

"Gweat Scott!"

The Head followed the junior's surprised glance across the quadrangle. A tall, rather shambling youngster was slinking along by the wall, carrying a bag.

It was Dudley.

Wally knew the fellow who was to have left that day

better than any of the others, and understood. The train Dudley was to leave by went at ten o'clock; it was eight o'clock now.

The big Third Former was slipping away so as to avoid good-byes. That was very like Dudley.

"Please, sir, Dudley won't have to leave now?" gasped Wally.

"No, of course not, but—"

"Hurrah!" yelled the scamp of the Third. "Come on, chaps!"

And the eleven fags pelted across the quadrangle in a flash.

CHAPTER 19.

Dudley is Trapped.

DUDLEY coloured as he caught sight of the Third-Formers approaching. He would have to say good-bye, after all.

Then he caught sight of Wally, and drew himself.

"Dudley!"

"Dud!"

Wally was well ahead. He dashed up excitedly.

"You frabjous ass, Dud!"

Dudley's eyes flashed.

"I haven't anything to say to you, D Arcy. I wonder you care to stop me."

"My only Aunt Jane! What are you raving about now?"

"Let me get past!" said Dudley angrily. "Look here —"

"Won't he stop, Wally?"

"Collar him if he wants to go."

And Curly Gibson and Jameson dashed up. Wally laughed in surprise.

"Blest if I know what's up with the young ass. Look out!"

Dudley was trying to slip away again. The approaching fags were just too quick for him.

He was surrounded in an instant.

"Take his bag from him!"

"The gym, chaps! Get on with the washing."

Dudley struggled desperately.

"Look here, D'Arcy—I'll punch your head, Jameson. All right, you rotters!"

His struggles had little effect on the Third-Formers. They rushed him along at a great pace, and were out of the quadrangle before Dr. Holmes had realised what was going to happen.

With a thud Wally sent the gymnasium door flying open. Then they gathered round Dudley in great excitement.

"My only Aunt Jane, lucky we spotted you!"

"Rather!"

"Of all the frabjous young asses! Dudley, you aren't to go after all."

Dudley had lost his temper. He stared at Curly Gibson without quite understanding.

"I haven't to go? Don't talk rot. I had a letter from the pater saying I was to come home at once."

"Rats! You aren't to leave at all, ass."

Dudley started. He was staring at Wally now. Perhaps Wally had owned up at the eleventh hour.

But Wally was chuckling in huge glee. He did not look like a fellow who had just owned up to something that meant expulsion.

Dudley stepped up to him.

"Have you owned up, Wally?"

"Owned up? What do you mean, duffer? I never knew—"

"Barlow owned up, Dud," shouted Jameson, who had not heard Dudley's whispers. "Came and owned up like a sportsman."

"Barlow? What do you mean? Who is Barlow, anyway?"

"One of Sir Caleb's gamekeepers, kid; and it was he who set fire to the hay—upset a lantern, or something of that sort."

"A gamekeeper upset a lantern?"

"Yes, ass; and why you have been goating about fighting Wally and generally playing the ass, goodness knows!" exclaimed Curly Gibson. "We all thought you must be off your rocker."

Dudley drew Wally aside, his chin set.

"Look here, D'Arcy, what's it all about?" he exclaimed quickly. "You know it was you who set fire to the haystack."

"My only Aunt Jane!"

"What's he raving over now, Wally?"

"He's just accused me now of burning the haystack," gasped Wally. "Hang it all, Dud!"

Dudley looked bewildered. The expression of amazement on D'Arcy minor's face would have convinced anyone.

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"W-wasn't it you, Wally?"
 "How could it be Wally when Barlow has just owned up, ass?" said Jameson indignantly. "Of all the shrieking duffers—"

"But—but you were near the haystack that night, Wally."
 "Rats! I never saw a beastly haystack."
 "You were crouching down doing something in the lose hay. I saw you, Wally."

The scamp of the Third looked bewildered. For a moment he really thought Dudley must be light-headed, or something.

"Don't talk such piffle."

"But—"

"An' don't keep butting, ass. I tell you I never saw a haystack."

Dudley did not reply at once. He unfastened his bag, and began rummaging amongst the few hastily-packed contents instead.

The others watched him with growing amazement, not untinged with alarm.

Suddenly Dudley brought to view a rather scorched cap. "Where did you lose that, then?" demanded the big Third-Former.

"My only Aunt Jane! Where did you find it? That's the point."

"By the burnt haystack."

Wally stared, and everyone else stared as well. Most of them remembered having heard Wally speak of his lost cap.

"I—I haven't the faintest notion where I lost it," exclaimed the scamp of the Third. "It blew off when I was running away from the keepers. My aunt! You say you saw me groping about on the ground?"

"In the loose hay."

"There wasn't any hay there; at least, I never saw any. Phew! You must have seen me looking for the blessed cap. About how long was I groping about?"

"Only a few seconds—less than a minute, I should say."

"That was it! I had to bunk like anything on account of Barlow coming up," exclaimed Wally breathlessly.

"Did you find the cap directly I dropped it?"

"No. I didn't find that until just before I was caught by Greaves."

"During your second visit there," said Wally, looking at the fellow he had chummed in with a little. "I suppose you went to look for the cap, Dud?"

"I went to try and prove whether you'd told a lie about not having seen the haystack."

Wally still looked puzzled.

"The haystack fairly knocks me, kids," he admitted. "I never saw anything like a haystack."

Jameson suddenly flung his cap in the air.

"My aunt, I have it! There is a clump of bushes there; you know we noticed them yesterday when we went to see what damage was done. Perhaps you were the other side of the bushes, Wally."

Dudley started.

It was quite likely some of the bushes may have been between Wally and the haystack, and the fact that he was on the ground looking for his cap would have prevented him seeing over them.

Dudley went pink.

It all seemed so very simple now.

Even if there had been no bushes, it was quite possible Wally might have failed to notice the haystack in the excitement of the moment. If there were some trees behind it, and Dudley remembered there were now—to form a dark background, it was probable he would have missed seeing it.

The big Third-Former turned from a pink to a deep crimson.

"I—I am sorry, Wally!"

"And I'm glad—jolly glad I gave you that black eye for thinking me such a cad!" exclaimed D'Arcy minor, with sparkling eyes. "My hat, though, it was straight goods your trying to shield me."

"Rot! I was an ass!"

"An awful ass!" admitted Wally. "A howling, shrieking ass!"

"No doubt about that."

"Raving dotter, in fact."

"Rather!" agreed Wally. "Three cheers for that shrieking, frabjous lunatic, Dud."

And in the middle of the wildly excited cheers, Dr. Holmes arrived on the scene. There was a smile on his kindly, splendid face.

"I want you to come to my room, Dudley," he said quietly. "I see you have heard most of the news. At once, please! Boys, I am pleased to be able to tell you that Sir Caleb Ashton has withdrawn his request that the races shall not take place on the river in front of his estate. On the contrary, he now hopes they will take place there."

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"A RANK OUTSIDER."

A few more cheers went, then Green, the youngest Third-Former, pushed his way past D'Arcy minor.

"And you will row for us, after all, Dud?" he exclaimed anxiously. "We aren't half the crew without you."

Dudley grinned rather sheepishly.

"Rather, kid—if there's still a place for me!"

And he hurried after the Head, to the accompaniment of further cheers.

CHAPTER 20.

Regatta Day.

"BAI Jove, this is wippin'—wippin' in the extreme!" Arthur Augustus spoke enthusiastically. He was standing in the doorway of the St. Jim's boathouse, a small crowd of other juniors with him.

There were more fellows at the water's edge, and still more in flannels, lying at the bottom of boats waiting for the regatta to begin.

For nearly a mile down the river, the banks were lined, the gaily-coloured sunshades of the ladies lending an added charm to the always beautiful Ryll.

The juniors were anxiously awaiting the sound of the gun.

The first race on the programme was the Third Form crew against the Glenside Third Form, and it was likely to prove a close thing.

"Bai Jove, isn't it great, deah boys?"

"Ripping, and no mistake."

"Couldn't have had a better day."

"No, wathah not!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I shall write this up foah the 'Weekly,' deah boys."

"I don't think!" grinned Editor Tom Merry. "They're off now."

A crisp pistol report had cut through the still air.

The juniors crowded nearer the water's edge, for the boathouse was the winning-post for Third Form races.

"Look out, Gussy!"

"Wats, deah boy!"

"Gussy, you ass!"

"Wabbits, Tom Mewwy! Heah they come!"

"Yes, and there you go!" grinned Tom Merry, pushing him on one side. "Fancy not letting Cousin Ethel come in front, ass!"

Arthur Augustus looked horror-stricken.

"Weally! Bai Jove, I am awfully sorry, Cousin Ethel," he began, turning a deep pink. "On my word of honah!"

"Who is leading? That is all that matters," laughed the girl chum. "I believe it's St. Jim's."

"No, Glenside," said Figgins. "Will you try these, Cousin Ethel; they aren't bad."

Cousin Ethel smiled excitedly, taking the field-glasses from Figgins's hand.

"Thank you, ever so; they are ripping. Glenside have a quarter of a length lead."

Figgins coloured a little. He usually did when Cousin Ethel thanked him for any slight favour, then he became absorbed in the race.

The fags were rowing splendidly. There was little to choose between the crews.

"But St. Jim's will win—of course, St. Jim's will win."

Cousin Ethel spoke decidedly, though she would probably have had some difficulty in backing up her opinion, except by the fact that she wanted St. Jim's to win.

But Wally certainly was rowing splendidly.

He had set a stroke which was a fraction slower than his rival's, and the crew behind him were longing for him to quicken. Through the glasses, Tom Merry could see that there was a desperate expression on Dudley's face.

No stroke that Wally could have set would have been too quick for him that day. Dudley felt as if he could have rowed behind Kildare even.

The Glenside crew were creeping ahead. There was half a length between them now, then Wally caught sight of something he had been looking for all along. It was a white gate in a field just off the river bank.

That was Wally's spurning point.

He quickened until Curly Gibson and Jameson were gasping.

But they stuck to their work magnificently. Dudley had the advantage in weight and age, and Wally in science, but there was not a great deal in it when it came to pluck.

Curly Gibson and Jameson would stop spurning when they found themselves at the bottom of the boat.

Still, it was not to come to that. The lead Glenside College had gradually decreased, cheers went up, then the loud crack of the pistol.

The race was over, and Wally's boat was home by less than a foot.

The cheering became terrific. The close thing was just the one thing needed to start the regatta well.

But nearly all the races that afternoon were to be close, for No. 2 on the programme was settled by less than half a length.

It was a single-sculling race, Kildare, the college captain, against Monteith, the head prefect of the New House.

Kildare was considered a School House man, so the affair had evolved itself in quite a House contest, as far as the juniors were concerned.

Tom Merry and Figgins shouted their respective favourites' names within a foot of one another. The row was deafening.

The race was worth it, though, the beautiful river skiffs cutting through the water in a manner that held the glance. Dead level they rowed for three-quarters of the long course, then Kildare drew ahead.

Monteith spurred at the finish, but he never quite recovered the lost water.

The pistol sounded for Kildare.

"What did I tell you, Figg?"

"School House—School House!"

"Rats!"

"Did you say wats to me, Figgay—"

"Rather, kid!" grinned Figgins. "You wait until our race comes off. You'll see who is cock house then. The seniors don't really count."

The argument subsided. Figgins was right in the main. Seniors scarcely counted in the perpetual warfare which waged between the two houses.

But there were to be two more races before item No. 5 on the programme was rowed.

The first was a senior pair-oared race, in which Monteith and another New House prefect turned the tables on the School House. Kildare and Darrell were cleverly beaten by less than a length.

Then came the senior eight race against Glenside College, and this St. Jim's won fairly easily. The result was expected, but the enthusiasm was there all the same.

Then the scoring-board showed item No. 5.

It was the rival Co.'s race at last. There was a wild stampede for the boathouse. The Study No. 6 juniors glanced round hastily.

Cousin Ethel was not to be seen on the landing-stage.

CHAPTER 21.

The Great Race.

"BAI JOVE, where is Cousin Ethel, deah boys?" Jack Blake pushed open the boathouse door. "Down by the winning-post, of course, kid. Hallo!"

A slip of paper had been pinned on the door. Jack Blake took it down.

There were only a few words written on it:

"Don't forget the prize.—(Signed) Cousin Ethel."

Jack Blake read the message, aloud, and gave vent to a cheer. Arthur Augustus removed his blazer hastily.

"Don't forget the prize—no, wathah not. I pwopose we woe like anythin', deah boys!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The four juniors, with Reilly as cox., were already very excited, but they were calm enough to take care of their boat as they lifted her down from the trestles.

"Steady, there. My hat, doesn't she shine?"

Jack Blake grinned. He had oiled and polished the boat himself the night before.

She was in perfect order.

"Get on with the washing, chaps; the others are on the water."

But there was plenty of time yet. A swimming race had just commenced, in which Kildare and Monteith were doing great things against the Glenside College pair.

"Steady, there! Bai Jove! Shall I cawwy the wuddah, Weilly, and you take this end of the boat?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Right-ho, kid!"

"Thanks, awfully, deah boy! I shall wequire a gweat deal of strength latah on, durin' the wace, and it is fatiguing work cawwyng the boat, bai Jove!"

"Tom Merry & Co. are afloat—"

"And Figgins."

"Yaas, wathah! Pway huwwy, deah boys!"

The racing four was lowered gently to its pillows on the landing-stage, the corks were driven home.

Jack Blake took one glance round. It would never do to take the water with an old stretcher strap, or an uncoiled rowlock.

"And try your slides, chaps."

"Wight-ho! Wippin', bai Jove!"

"Yes. Aren't they all right?"

An impatient voice hailed them from the water.

"Thinking of coming, Blakey?"

"Don't mind us, but—"

Jack Blake grinned. He was still very excited.

"Up with her, chaps! Steady there! Don't handle her like a barge or a welk punt, Gussy."

"Weally, deah boy—"

"It's easy enough to shove your thumb through the side of these boats, you know."

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove, pway be more careful, Digbay, deah boy, as you are wuffing my hair."

"Blow your hair! That right, Blake?"

"Yes, lower away!"

And the dainty racing boat was afloat at last. Reilly knelt down, and fixed his rudder. Oars were got into place. Then Jack Blake gave the word.

"All in!"

And the Study No. 6 juniors took their places gingerly. Their light boat rolled as if she could never carry them all.

But that was before they could make use of the sweeps. Once they were paddling out to mid-stream she was steady enough.

Tom Merry, Jack Blake, and Figgins had already tossed up for positions, Jack Blake having won the middle station. Figgins and Tom Merry were as excited as he was.

"Did you get a note from Cousin Ethel, chaps?"

"Bai Jove, yaas, wathah!"

"And ours was fastened to the boat!" grinned the hero of the Shell.

"She sent a junior fag with one for us," said Figgins.

There was no need to ask the contents of the notes. Cousin Ethel would have taken great care that each of them should be worded and written exactly alike.

"Are you ready? Back No. 1!"

"Sorry!" breathed Tom Merry; and he got his boat back. The three small flags in the bows were in a dead line now. The starter saw his chance.

Crack!

The pistol sounded loudly. Twelve blades took the water at the same instant, and the boats shot away. It was a magnificent start, whatever the race was going to be.

For the first few yards the rowing was nothing very great. A stroke or two was needed for them all to get rid of their excitement, and curiously they settled down to their work almost together.

Figgins had a slight lead at the other boathouse, but he lost it to Tom Merry the moment the church came in sight. Jack Blake was a short canvas behind.

But there was nothing in it, and they were all beginning to row splendidly.

"Oh, well pulled, sir."

"Blake, row up, Blake!"

"Tom Merry—good old Tom Merry!"

"New House—Figg—New House, chaps!"

The roars were deafening. Crowds of juniors were racing along the river bank to keep up with the boats, much to the discomfort of the less energetic spectators who preferred to watch a portion of the race only from deck-chairs.

To the rival strokes the shouts had no meaning. There was only one thought for Tom Merry, Jack Blake, and Figgins—to get past the other fellows' boat.

Figgins had his lead again, and the stroke he was rowing was tremendous—three inches longer than Tom Merry's best. The only thing was, would the men behind be able to stand it for the long course.

At that point Kerr & Co. appeared to be enjoying their work.

Tom Merry was behind now, and Jack Blake was creeping up, then the hero of the Shell quickened a little. He knew his crew to a man, and the answer came instantly.

The Shell boat leapt to the front.

"Tom Merry has it! Shell! Shell! Shell!"

But it was a rash prophet who would have cared to give an opinion at that stage. The rowing men amongst the spectators looked anxious, but they said nothing.

They were waiting until the bridge was gained.

It would be easier to see how things were going with half the course behind.

The bridge was approaching rapidly. Figgins and Jack Blake were pulling strongly.

Then all three boats shot under the bridge together.

Those who were looking down from above said afterwards there wasn't a foot between them. Barring accidents, a close finish was certain.

The excited juniors on the bridge seized bicycles, any one's bicycle so long as it would carry them to the winning flag, and dashed away.

The traffic on the river bank was becoming congested.

Fatty Wynn had already slipped into the river twice through trying to get his portly form through an anything but portly space.

But the Falstaff of St. Jim's did not trouble about that.

"Figgins! New House! New House!"

His stentorian voice could be heard above the uproar. The three boats were still together.

The three boats were still together.

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Another Splendid Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

CHAPTER 22.

The Finish.

"QUICKEN up, chaps!"

Reilly panted the words out as if he had been rowing with the rest, but Jack Blake took no notice.

It was not time to call on his crew again.

He was a short canvas behind the other pair, but that could not be helped. There had been a curious eddy under the bridge which somehow had effected the centre boat more than the others.

The Study No. 6 juniors had had to pull strongly to get through it. They were still feeling the effects.

Arthur Augustus at bow was rather white, but his hair was as neatly parted in the middle as ever. And he was rowing as well as ever, which mattered still more, except, perhaps, to the swell of St. Jim's.

Reilly's face was becoming horror-stricken.

The short canvas was lengthening into a long one.

"Oh, do row up, Blake!"

But Jack Blake was waiting his time. Like Wally, he was looking for a well-known landmark.

A glance ashore told him there was plenty of time yet, then he caught sight of a tall, thin figure.

Not only had Sir Caleb asked that the races should take place in front of his estate, but he had come down to watch them.

But Jack Blake had not time to think about Sir Caleb.

The leading boats were almost level again, scarcely a few inches lead giving Figgins the advantage over the Shell crew. All through the race so far, Figgins had kept well to the front.

Tom Merry could see Arthur Augustus's back now. Was the Study No. 6 crew beginning to splash?

Tom Merry longed to see them do that, and Figgins as well. But there seemed little chance of Figgins & Co. going to pieces.

Tom Merry thought it was a race between his crew and the New House.

And the prize to be won. A motor picnic down by the sea—the sea in this weather, and after a hard day like this was proving.

That was inducement enough to make a fellow row himself to his stretchers.

But there was almost as big an inducement for Tom Merry, to beat the New House.

The thoughts flashed through Tom Merry's mind.

And very similar thoughts, from a different point of view, were troubling Figgins with one addition. Cousin Ethel would be watching the finish. That made the leader of the New House juniors long to get his boat past the winning-post first more than anything else.

Tom Merry and Figgins quicken again together. They must be nearing the winning-post now.

Stroke for stroke the rival crews rowed, with Figgins's blade always a little longer in the water. But Tom Merry's quickness on the slide-up balanced matters.

Both boats were nearly half a length in front of Jack Blake now.

"Can't you quicken?" gasped Reilly. "Shure, an' they're running away from us, old man."

Then at last Jack Blake called upon his crew. He had seen his landmark, a battered old oak he had had in his mind's eye for a good many days now.

Tom Merry and Figgins saw him spurt, but they thought it was too late. And besides, they had enough to think of in each other to trouble about a boat nearly half a length behind.

Both were rowing with every ounce of strength they could muster.

The shouts along the river-bank were becoming confused. Tom Merry could not distinguish voices; even Fatty Wynn's stentorian yells sounded miles away to Figgins. Jack Blake's boat was becoming a blurred mass to both rival strokes.

The Shell cox was wildly excited.

"We're nearly there, Tommy! A dozen yards—well twenty! My hat!"

As if they were coupled together by some unseen force, the two outside boats swept along, as level as possible. Jack Blake was bringing his boat up in wild jerks. He was not rowing as he had rowed under the bridge.

The boat had gone to pieces as far as style went, even Arthur Augustus had lost his graceful grip of the water. But the Study No. 6 ship was coming along.

The half-length was less than a quarter, and the quarter was dropping into inches.

"Quicken, me boys!" yelled Reilly with a loud Irish yell. "We've got 'em!"

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NEXT THURSDAY:

"A RANK OUTSIDER."

It was the Irish junior's excitement that made him shout; the race was not over yet.

But it would be in a moment or two now. Jack Blake knew that. He had sighted another landmark.

"Now!" he panted in a sort of choking sob.

Almost a groan sounded from the chaps behind him. It seemed impossible that they could quicken again!

Jack Blake had set the stroke, though, and it must be answered. Digby was rowing with his eyes shut; Arthur Augustus thought it must be some horrible nightmare.

But the blades were taking and leaving the water at a quicker rate. They were backing up Jack Blake, even if they longed for the boat to turn turtle or something like that to happen.

"Again!"

Jack was gasping. He quickened, and in some way he got a fraction more speed into his work, and once again he was answered, then, in a solid body, the three boats swept past the winning flag.

"We've won, my boy!" shouted Reilly.

"Wait a minute!. My hat!"

Jack Blake gasped. A small strip of bunting had just been unfurled from the flag-mast. It was light blue in colour, and light blue was the flag in the bows of the Study No. 6 boat.

The School House Fourth Form had won the great race. "Gweat Scott!" gasped Arthur Augustus, and he let his oar slip from his hands.

"Buck up, Gussy; you're all right!"

Jack Blake looked towards Tom Merry and grinned.

"Hard cheese, kids!"

"You kids came along—for Fourth-Formers, and no mistake!"

"Yes, we did, didn't we?" chuckled Jack Blake. "What price the New House now?"

"About twopence!" said Digby. "You rowed quite decently at times, though, Figg!"

"Three cheers for Jack Blake!" sang out Figgins heartily enough. "Altogether!"

And the cheers were given by the crews of both boats with all their remaining breath.

Jack Blake & Co. promptly returned them.

"Three of the best!" exclaimed the chief of Study No. 5.

"My hat, wasn't it great, Tom Merry?"

"Ripping!"

"And nothing in it! If we rowed the course over again, it's just as likely either you chaps would win!"

"Rats!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"More rats!" grinned Tom Merry. "You've won, and that's all there's got to be said about it. Jolly good luck to you at to-morrow's picnic!"

"Bai Jove, yaas watah! I'll memembah you, deah boy, when we get down to the sea. Hallo, Cousin Ethel!"

"Hallo, Arthur!" laughed their girl chum. "I am sorry to have to tell you, you all rowed very badly indeed."

"Bai Jove! Howevah, I see you are only waggin'."

"I am doing nothing of the sort!"

But the laugh in her pretty eyes showed that Arthur Augustus had been a good deal nearer right than wrong.

"But I cannot possibly stay and talk to a lot of excited schoolboys," she exclaimed. "My brother is waiting for me. I shall see you all to-morrow at ten o'clock at the school gates."

"Yaas, watah! I wegard it as wippin' of you!"

"All of you, mind!" said Cousin Ethel, looking from Tom Merry to Figgins.

Tom Merry and Figgins stared.

"I suppose you can come, Tom Merry?"

"But—but Jack Blake & Co. won—"

"Oh, never mind who won!" exclaimed their girl chum loftily. "It was decided ages ago that you were all coming. You'll find the invitations at St. Jim's by now."

"My hat, but—"

"What about your prize?" gasped Tom Merry.

"I don't know anything about prizes," answered Cousin Ethel coolly. "People should be content to row without prizes. I am surprised at you, Tom Merry!"

And she hurried away before any of them had time to recover from the surprise.

When they did recover, there were sounding thumps on backs to be put up with, Arthur Augustus suffering chiefly.

"You uttah wottah, Tom Mewwy—Figgay—"

But his voice was drowned in the cheers.

This was another of Cousin Ethel's jokes.

And a jolly good joke, too, was the verdict of all.

THE END.

(Another long, complete story of Tom Merry & Co. next Thursday, entitled "A Rank Outsider," by Martin Clifford. Order your copy of the "Gem" Library in advance. Price One Penny.)

Another Splendid Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

The First Chapters of a Splendid Serial Story.



By Lieutenant Lefevre.

READ THIS FIRST.

Oswald Yorke, a youth of eighteen, joins the Navy under peculiar circumstances, becoming a midshipman aboard the frigate Catapult under the name of John Smith.

The frigate is wrecked while there is mutiny aboard, and but a handful of her crew are saved. The survivors, including Oswald, are accommodated at the house of a planter named Wilson on the island of San Andrade, where Lieutenant Hope, of the gunboat Rattler, which has been captured by the pirate Kester, is also staying.

By his friendship with Norah, the planter's niece, Oswald incurs the enmity of the Wilsons, father and son, and is quarrelling violently with them, when a King's ship arrives at the island, her captain coming ashore at once.

Captain Burgoyne at once explains to the new arrival what happened aboard the Catapult.

(Now go on with the story.)

Leaving San Andrade.

"It is also a bad business about the Rattler," said Captain Garvin, the new visitor to the island, turning to Dr. Telford and Lieutenant Fife; "in fact, we seem to have found a pretty budget of news waiting for us here altogether. I understand that Lieutenant Hope was in charge. Where is he?"

"He is on the island, sir. He has taken the loss very much to heart," said Mr. Fife.

"I should think so. It is a serious matter for him," replied Captain Garvin.

"Don't say too much to the poor fellow now," said Dr. Telford. "He is half beside himself with grief; in fact, I have feared for his sanity."

"So bad as that! Poor fellow!" said the captain commiseratingly.

"And you have seen no sign of the Rattler?" asked Mr. Fife eagerly.

"None—none whatever."

"What is your destination, Garvin?" asked Captain Burgoyne, who had rejoined his former acquaintance.

"Kingston. We are bound for Kingston, with the admiral on board."

"The admiral!"

"Yes, Admiral Sir Samson Eastlake."

Oswald had reached the group just in time to hear the last words.

"Sir Samson Eastlake?" he repeated eagerly.

"Yes, young sir," replied Captain Garvin grimly. "You seem surprised."

"I beg your pardon, sir. I forgot myself for a moment. Admiral Eastlake has been a very good friend to me. I hope, sir, that he is well?"

"He is quite well, youngster," said Captain Garvin goodtemperedly.

Captain Burgoyne walked up to the house in silence, with a scowl on his face. Of all the men in the world, Sir Samson was the last one he wished to see. He knew that Oswald and the admiral were on such terms as rarely existed between a midshipman and an Admiral of the Fleet, and he was afraid that Oswald might tell the admiral more of the truth than he, Burgoyne, ever wished to leak out.

Meanwhile, they reached the house and entered the large saloon, where Mr. Wilson was waiting to receive them. He had apparently got over his recent excitement and the effects of his potations, and welcomed Captain Garvin with cool self-possession and a show of friendliness. Lieutenant Hope was seated at a table, but rose as the two captains entered the room. He was ghastly pale, and there were dark rings round his eyes that told of sleepless nights.

"This is a very sorry business, sir," said Captain Garvin coldly. "Your first command, I believe?"

"My first, sir," replied Mr. Hope, in a low voice.

"Probably your last!" muttered Captain Garvin, under his breath.

"I presume that, as you have had so much time on your hands, you have made a full report of the loss of the Rattler, to present to the admiral?" asked Captain Garvin.

Lieutenant Hope pointed to the table before him, on which lay several sheets of closely-written paper.

"I had but finished it as you entered. It still needs my signature, sir," he said.

Then he stooped, and taking up the pen, wrote his name with a hand that did not tremble.

"It is finished," he said quietly.

He put his hand to his pocket as he spoke. For an instant the red light of the setting sun glistened on polished steel; then, before one of the men could stay his hand, there was a loud report, and Lieutenant Hope reeled forward, and fell on his face, with a bullet-hole in his forehead.

"One more death at that villain's door!" muttered Dr. Telford, rising from his knees from beside the dead body.

"Poor fellow! His sorrows are over; his troubles ended!" Captain Garvin turned away, and stood looking out across the sea.

"Have the body covered over," he said, "and taken down to the shore. We—we shall not make a long stay. We only want to replenish our water, and I hope, by dawn, to weigh anchor again," he said, turning to Captain Burgoyne. "You had better come on board to-night, I think—you and your party."

"As you please," said Captain Burgoyne, in a quiet voice. Hope's death had sobered him and terrified him, too, for was he not guilty also of the same crime? He had lost his ship, and his fault was ten thousand times greater than the poor lieutenant's.

And so it was decided that they should all go on board the frigate that same evening.

Glad though he was at the thought of seeing his benefactor again, it was with a heavy heart that Oswald turned away from the house and made his way towards the shore.

He had not seen Norah Wilson again since she had bidden him good-bye on the verandah. He had waited anxiously until the very last moment, in the hope of seeing her; but there had been no sign of the girl.

"I hate to leave her here with those villains!" he muttered to Maxwell, as they walked slowly down the hill.

"I wish I could have helped her. But what can I do?"

He stopped for a moment, and turned back to take a last glimpse of the house, which lay bathed in the red afterglow of the sunset. From one of the upper windows something white fluttered for an instant. He saw a white hand and arm waving a last good-bye; and then, with something like an ache at his heart, he turned away and walked in silence down to the shore.

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**NEXT
THURSDAY:**

"A RANK OUTSIDER."

**Another Splendid Long, Complete
School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.**

On Board the King's Ship.

The midshipmen's quarters on the Cynthia were neither commodious nor elaborate; but the three midshipmen who inhabited them were young gentlemen evidently gifted with a remarkably good opinion of themselves, and were inclined to look on Maxwell, Oswald, and Dick Davis with contemptuous superiority.

The eldest was a sallow-faced youth, Master Wilberforce Garvin, nephew of the captain of the Cynthia, and his messmates were named Muckridge and Williamson.

Not one of the three had been with the shore-boat, so they were considerably surprised when Oswald, Maxwell, and Davis made their appearance on board the Cynthia.

"Lost your ship?" asked Master Garvin patronisingly.

"Yes," said Oswald.

Master Garvin nodded his head seriously.

"That's bad. It's always against an officer to lose his ship."

Master Buckridge, a round, chubby-faced youth, looked very wise.

"Yes," he repeated, "it is always against an officer to lose his ship."

It was a habit of his to repeat every word that Garvin, whom he toadied to, uttered. He had a large and wholesome respect for Garvin, who was three inches his superior in height.

Maxwell looked from one to the other with a comical look on his face.

"I am very sorry. I wouldn't have done it if I thought you would have been offended about it," he said seriously.

Garvin took no notice of the remark. It was beneath his contempt.

"What is your name?" he said, with the same air of patronage, turning to Davis, who was the smallest of the newcomers.

"My name is Norval. On the Grampian Hills my father feeds his flocks," said Davis, spouting the well-known poem.

"Norval! H'm! Your father is a shepherd, then?" said Garvin disgustfully.

"A frugal swine," said Davis, "whose only thought to keep his son, myself, at home!"

"Extraordinary!" said Garvin. "As my uncle says, the Service is going to the dogs!"

"Oh, it is going to the dogs!" chimed in Buckridge.

"The puppies seem to be going to the Service," said Oswald.

Garvin shot a quick glance at the last speaker, and, seeing that he was rather too big for his liking, turned on his heel with a snort of disgust.

"What a shocking set of prigs!" muttered Oswald.

"Terrors, ain't they?" said Davis.

"Keep up your swine business. It'll make them feel glad that they know me."

The midshipmen's berth was divided off from the cockpit by a bulkhead. It was an evil-smelling place, furnished in the usual style—a hammock for each inhabitant, his sea-chest, and a deal table, with a reeking lamp suspended from the beam of the deck.

"Been long in the Service?" asked Garvin, addressing himself to Maxwell.

"Since I was a boy," replied Maxwell calmly.

"Ship's boy, I suppose?" said Garvin, with a sneer.

"Aha, ship's boy!" echoed Buckridge. "Very good!"

"Very good, is it?" young Moonface?" said Maxwell, rising wrathfully.

Buckridge's pink face turned pale green.

"He, he!" he giggled nervously. "It was only a joke! He, he!"

Maxwell sat down again.

"I don't like jokes," he said sourly. "Don't make jokes about me in my presence, please!"

"Really, Mr.—er—er," said Garvin. "Mr. Buckridge, I think, has the right to smile if he pleases!"

"Certainly, Mr.—er—er; and I have the right to do as I please, too."

Garvin muttered something under his breath, then, to change the conversation, turned to Davis.

"And what might the name of your ship have been, Mr.—er—er—Norval?"

Davis looked up seriously.

"It might have been the 'Crazy Jane,'" he said.

"Crazy Jane! Extraordinary! I never heard the name!"

"Nor did I," said Davis.

Garvin turned on him angrily.

"I don't understand!" he said.

"More do I," said Davis pleasantly. "You asked me what the ship's name might have been, and it might just as well have been the Crazy Jane as anything else; but it wasn't. It was called the Rattler."

"H'm! A schooner, I understand?"

"Oh, you do understand something, then!" said Maxwell cheerfully. "I am so glad!"

"How pleased mother will be when she hears how you are getting on!" said Davis.

This was too much for Garvin. He rose majestically.

"Do I understand—" he began.

"I don't know. You don't look as if you did," said Maxwell.

"What a lovely figure—so slim!" said Davis, in mock admiration.

"Sit down," he said, "and don't be a fool. Nobody wants to insult you."

"You all seem intent on doing so!" cried Garvin, in a rage. "I'm glad to say that all the officers on board the Cynthia are gentlemen, and behave to one another with courtesy. I should imagine that your last ship was—"

"Hardship," said Maxwell promptly. "Sit down, my lad, and don't get huffy. No harm meant."

But Garvin was not to be appeased.

"My uncle, the captain, has taken compassion on you, and given you hospitality, in return for which you—you come here, insulting us!"

"Quite right," said Davis.

Garvin suddenly lost control of himself, and launched out, catching Davis under the ear and depositing him on the floor.

"I object to resort to brute force," he said coolly, "but I am compelled to protect my own dignity."

"Look here, my young whippersnapper, sit down, and shut those fine airs of yours off!" said Maxwell wrathfully.

"You make me ill! The way you talk, I should think this was your first ship. When you have seen as much knocking about as I have, you'll forget that you ever had any dignity. I wouldn't give a go of cold rum for all the dignity of all the midshipmen in the Service put together. You ain't got any right to have dignity at all until you can wear an epaulette on your shoulder. If you spout any more rot about your dignity, I'll ram your nose into the bulkhead yonder! And as for you, you grinning-faced baboon—" This to Master Buckridge, who began to look alarmed at the fierce expression on Maxwell's face.

"Now, sit down and be comfortable!" said Maxwell, in conclusion.

It was quite evident that Maxwell meant to have no more nonsense, and as he looked quite capable of objecting in a more pronounced and striking fashion, Garvin sobered down, and soon the half-dozen were on fairly good terms.

Maxwell and Oswald told the story of the mutiny and the loss of the Catapult, though neither said very much regarding the captain's share in the matter.

Davis then told his new messmates how the Rattler had been stolen away by pirates, and how Lieutenant Hope had blown his brains out rather than face a court-martial.

(Another instalment of this thrilling serial will appear next Thursday.)

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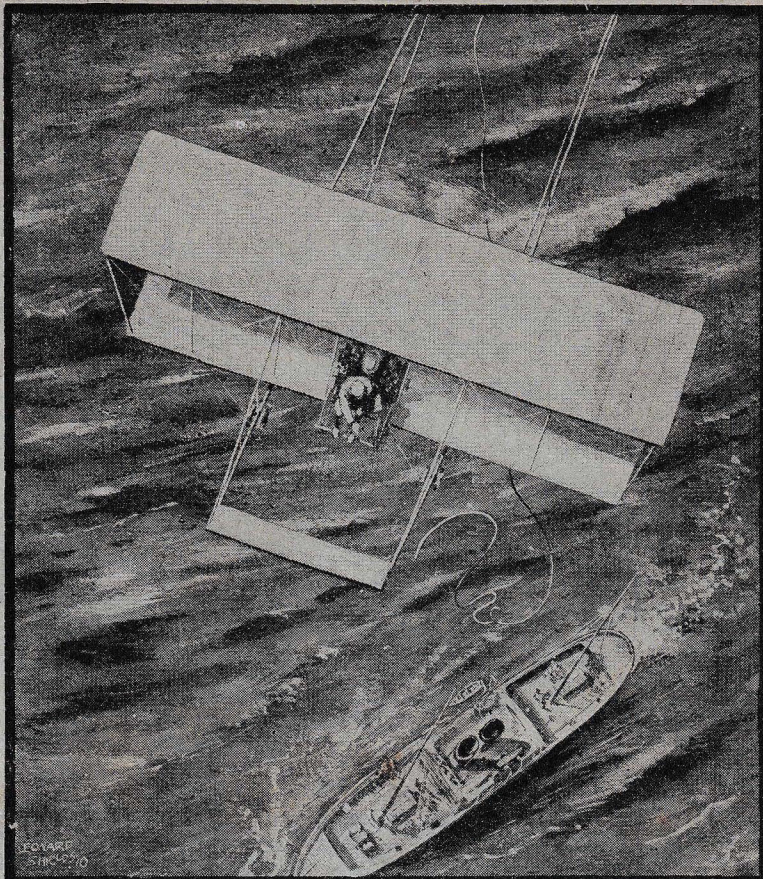
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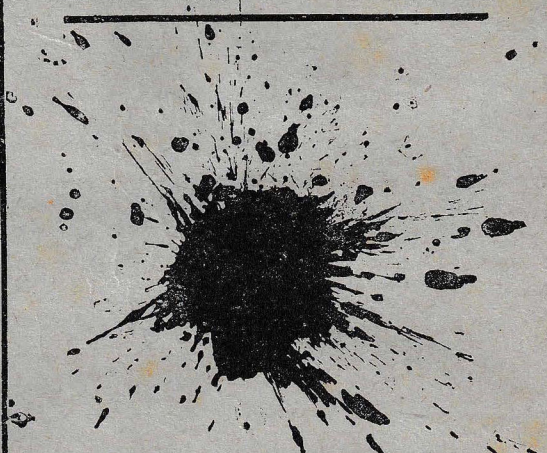
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