

OUT THIS  
WEEK! The Xmas Double Number of "Pluck."

NEWS-  
AGENTS &  
READERS.

Will you kindly  
note that next  
week's issue of  
the "GEM  
LIBRARY" will  
be a Grand  
Xmas Double  
Number; Please  
order well in  
advance.

# The GEM 1<sup>st</sup>

LIBRARY NO. 144. VOL. 5.

Grand Long  
Complete  
Tale

*A Tale of the Terrible Three.*

by  
MARTIN  
Clifford.

"D'ARCY'S DISAPPOINTMENT."



Arthur Augustus Discovers  
Levison's Little Joke!



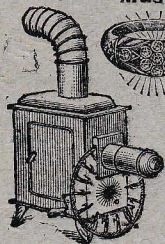


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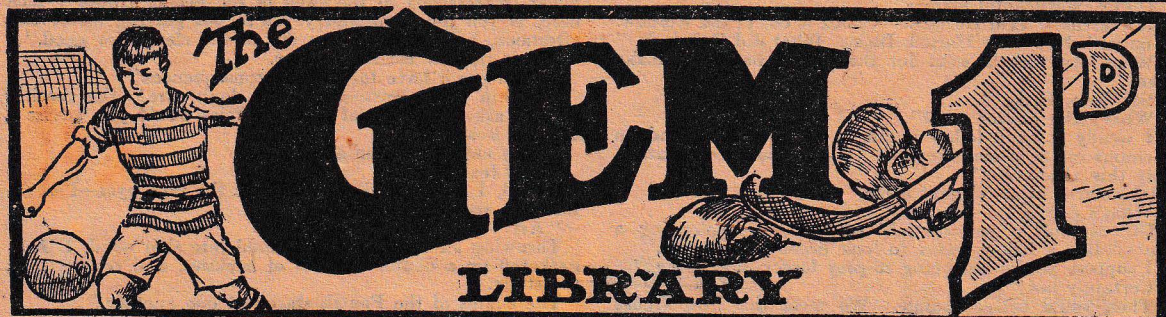
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Grand Christmas Double Number of "The Gem" Library next Thursday. Order your copy early.

# D'ARCY'S DISAPPOINTMENT.

A splendid long complete . . . school tale of . . . TOM MERRY & CO. . . at St. Jim's . . .

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

## CHAPTER 1.

### A Question of Neckties.

"WEALLY think that a chap ought to be able to depend upon his chums when he's in a difficult posish."

That opinion was delivered by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's.

D'Arcy had jammed his monocle into his eye, and was regarding Blake, Herries, and Digby with an expression of growing indignation.

Perhaps the swell of St. Jim's had cause to be exasperated.

For ten minutes or more he had been trying on neckties before the big glass in Study No. 6 in the School House.

Blake, Herries, and Dig were in the study, reading the latest football reports; or, rather, Blake was reading them, and Herries and Dig were listening to him.

D'Arcy had tried tie after tie, surveying the effect of each in the glass, not being quite satisfied with any of them.

Each time he had donned one he had glanced towards his chums, his manner hinting that he wanted an independent opinion on the subject; but the three juniors were so interested in League results that they had no eyes for him.

Besides, D'Arcy was always trying on a new necktie, or a new waistcoat, or a new silk hat, or something new. Indeed, Blake had declared that he was like a certain famous publication, and had something new every week, if not oftener. How were they to know that this was a special occasion?

Grand Christmas Double Number next week. See page 28.

Blake glanced up from the "Football Evening News" as D'Arcy spoke.

"Hallo!" he remarked. "What's the trouble?"

"I am twyin' on a new necktie—"

"Only one?"

Blake glanced at the table, which was covered with neckties of all shapes and sizes and colours.

Every hue of the rainbow was represented there, and a few shades which were beyond the scope even of a rainbow.

"Weally, Blake—"

"My only hat!" ejaculated Blake. "Where did you get that crop of ties?"

"I have had a few sent to me."

"A few! By Jove!"

"Not starting in business as a necktie merchant, are you, Gussy?" asked Digby innocently.

"Weally, Digby—"

"Go on about Newcastle United, Blake," said Herries

"Weally, deah boys, I think you might, for one moment, on a special occasion, dwop that wot—"

"Rot!" ejaculated the three juniors together.

"Yaas, watah!"

"You call League footer rot?" roared Blake.

"Weally, deah boys, there are more important mattahs. I want somebody's opinion on this necktie."

"Mine?"

"Yaas."

"Well, it's rotten!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Give him your opinion, Dig."

FOR NEXT WEEK'S LONG LIST OF SPECIAL STORIES SEE PAGE 28.

No. 144 (New Series.)

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"Certainly!" said Digby. "It's beastly!"

"Digby, you feahful ass—"

"It's terrific!" said Herries. "Chuck it out of the window. Get on with Newcastle United, Blake. What did Veitch do?"

"When the whistle went for the second half—" Blake began.

"Bai Jove, Blake!"

"What's the matter now?"

"I weally think a fellow ought to be able to depend on his chums on a special occasion. I want to dwess wathah nicely this aftahnoon."

Blake stared at his elegant chum.

"What's on?"

"Oh, nothin' in particulah!" said D'Arcy, colouring a little. "But a fellow wants to look decent, you know."

"I suppose you're not going to play footer in that rig?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then you'd better change. We meet the New House this afternoon. I suppose you haven't forgotten that?"

"Bai Jove!"

"What!" roared Blake. "Do you mean to say you'd forgotten there was a House match on?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake laid down the "Football News." He rose to his feet, and stared at the swell of St. Jim's. Herries and Digby followed his example. D'Arcy coloured, and seemed curiously uneasy under their combined gaze.

They stared at him in silence for a full minute, and D'Arcy, in unaccustomed self-consciousness, turned to the glass again. As a rule, the swell of St. Jim's had all the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere, but it seemed to have deserted him now.

"What's the matter?" demanded Blake at last. "I've noticed for a long time—two days, at least—that you've been moony."

"Weally, Blake—"

"You've been muttering to yourself in class—"

"Weally, deah boy—"

"You were sitting up in bed last night mumbling about something—"

"Weally—"

"And when Mr. Lathom asked you this morning what age George the Fourth was when he came to the throne, you said he was twenty-four."

"Oh!"

"And you told Mr. Lathom that the name of the first king of Rome was Clara!"

"You uttah ass!"

"Didn't he, you chaps?"

"He did!" said Herries and Dig together sternly.

"Bai Jove! It was a slip of the tongue, you know."

"What's the matter with you? You do all these things, which ought to be done in a lunatic asylum or not at all," said Blake severely. "Then you interrupt a chap who's reading about a Newcastle United match, with babble of neckties. Then you say you've forgotten a House match."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Explain yourself. Are you ill?"

"Certainly not."

"Are you insane?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Are you both?"

"I wefuse to continue this widiculous discush," said Arthur Augustus, in a tone of great dignity. "I wegard you as an ass, Blake!"

"What is the matter?"

"Nothin'."

"Then stop playing the giddy ox!" said Blake severely. "Chuck those neckties away, and get into your football things!"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort."

"Kick-off in half an hour," said Herries.

"I'm sowwy, deah boys, but I shall have to cut the match."

"What!"

"You can play Kangawoo instead. He's a wathah good forward, though, of course, not up to my form. I have no wresource but to cut the match."

"Why?"

"I have an engagement."

"You—you—you frabjous ass!"

"I wefuse to entah into any discush, on the topic, and I decline to be called oppwobwious names," said D'Arcy. "If you cannot tweat a fellow with pwopah wespert, I will wetire fwom the studay."

"Take the neckties with you, then," said Blake cruelly.

"You howwid boundah!"

"And get into your football things."

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 144.

"Now, look here, Gussy," said Blake, wagging his forefinger impressively at the swell of the School House—"look here, if you tell Tom Merry you're not playing footer this afternoon, he may leave you out of the eleven for good."

"It is imposs. for me to play."

"Then you'll have to take the consequences."

"Nothin' of the sort—I mean, I don't care! For the last time, I ask you which of these neckties would you advise a chap to wear?"

"Why not all of them at once?"

"You feahful ass!"

"Well, I recommend the one with the pink eyes—I mean, the pink spots."

"Ass!"

Throwing all the disdain he could into that word, D'Arcy gathered up a double handful of heekties, and retired from the study.

The chums of the Fourth stared at one another.

"What on earth's the matter with Gussy?" said Blake.

Digby shook his head.

"He's got something on his mind, I suppose."

"Or a bee in his bonnet," said Herries.

"My hat!"

"What's up with you?"

"Perhaps he's in love again!" said Blake.

Herries and Dig burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, he's been in love before," said Blake. "There was Cousin Ethel, and the Head's niece—Ethel Courtney, and a girl named Ethel in the village. I know he always falls in love when he meets a girl named Ethel."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The question is, whether he has met a girl named Ethel?"

The Fourth-Formers chuckled. D'Arcy, like all really nice lads, had a great respect for the gentle sex, and looked upon girls as a kind of superior beings to be deferred to and worshipped. Unfortunately, he sometimes carried his regard for them to the extent of falling in love; which was really, as Blake often remarked, a little too previous, considering that he was barely fifteen, and had footer and lessons and Amateur Dramatic Society and several other matters to occupy his mind.

Digby uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Clara!"

"What?"

"He's changed the name this time," exclaimed Digby excitedly. "Don't you remember? He told Lathom this morning that the first king of Rome was named Clara!"

"My hat!"

"The name was running in his mind, you see."

"By George!"

"Gussy's in love!"

Now, being in love is a serious matter, leading to still more serious matters, and the Fourth-Formers ought to have regarded it as something solemn, and drawn long faces and spoken in hushed voices. But they didn't. They burst into a wild roar, and roared again and again, till the sound of their merriment rang the length of the Fourth Form passage.

## CHAPTER 2.

### Wanted for Footer.

TOM MERRY, the captain of the Shell Form and football captain of the School House juniors, came down from the Shell dormitory, where he had been changing into his footer clothes. He had a long overcoat on, buttoned up to the chin, and the red jersey of the School House under it. His face was looking very fresh and handsome; he had the healthy colour and frank, jolly expression which a lad can hardly fail to have who keeps regular hours, has cleanly habits, and never neglects his footer and cricket. Tom Merry was looking very fit and well, and prepared to give the New House fellows socks.

Manners and Lowther were waiting for him in the lower passage. The two Shell fellows were also in football garb, in their coats, and looking very fit.

"Time we were on the ground, Tommy," said Lowther.

"I'm ready."

"Those Fourth Form chaps ready?"

"Here we are," said Jack Blake, coming downstairs with Dig and Herries. "Gussy won't be playing this afternoon."

"What's that?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Gussy says you'll have to scratch him."

Tom Merry looked concerned.

"Isn't he fit?" he asked. "I've noticed for a day or two that he seems to be a little off his feed."

Jack Blake chuckled.

"Oh, he's fit enough!" he said. "But he says he's got another engagement."

Tom Merry simply snorted.



"Got another engagement, has he, when there's a House match on? I'll give him another engagement! You chaps get down to the ground, and I'll bring Gussy."

"But, I say—"

"Where is he?"

"In the dorm., I think."

"I'll bring him. You go to the ground."

Tom Merry ran lightly upstairs. He reached the Fourth Form dormitory, and kicked the door open. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was there. He had half a dozen or more fancy waistcoats spread out over his bed, and was trying one on. He looked round at Tom Merry as he came in, and nodded cordially.

"You are just in time, Tom Mewwy."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"I'm twyin' on a waistcoat—"

"I can see you are. Off with it!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Get into your football things!"

"Wats!"

Tom Merry breathed hard through his nose. He felt the natural indignation of a captain who finds that a member of his team is not ready, and doesn't want to be ready. Fellows in the School House would have given their little fingers for a chance for the House junior eleven. D'Arcy had what so many coveted, and did not value it, apparently. It was enough to make the junior football captain wrathful.

"I wathah think the pale gween with the cwimmon bahs suits me best," D'Arcy remarked, in a reflective way.

"Would you mind waitin', Tom Mewwy, while I twy them all on in turn, and give me your opinion?"

"You champion ass!"

"I decline to be called a champion ass. Pewwaps, upon the whole, the dark blue with yellow spots—"

"Take that waistcoat off!"

"Wats!"

"Get into your footer things!"

"Wot!"

"The match will be starting."

"I am sowwy, I can't play to-day. Would you advise me to twy this one, with the silvah bahs?"

Tom Merry came towards the swell of St. Jim's. His intention was unmistakable, and D'Arcy put up his hands in defence.

"Take that waistcoat off!" roared the captain of the Shell.

"I decline to do so!"

"Change into your footer things!"

"I wefuse!"

"Then, I'll change 'em for you!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

The hero of the Shell grasped D'Arcy. Arthur Augustus hit out. He didn't want to hurt Tom Merry, but it was impossible to allow sacrilegious hands to be laid upon his fancy waistcoat.

Tom Merry staggered back, with a gasp.

"I'm sowwy to have to chastise you, Tom Mewwy."

"What!"

Tom Merry recovered from his momentary surprise, and rushed forward. In a moment D'Arcy was being whirled headlong round the dormitory, in the grasp of the sturdy Shell fellow.

"Ow!" he roared. "Welease me! Welease me, you howwid ruffian! You are wumplin' my waistcoat! You are cwumplin' my bags!"

"Hallo!" said Kangaroo, of the Shell, looking into the dormitory, with Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn of the same Form. "What's the row?"

"Welease me! Help!"

"Will you get into your things?"

"I distinctly wefuse!"

D'Arcy made a great effort, and wrenched himself away. The effort expended all his strength, and he staggered and sat down.

The two Shell fellows in the doorway looked on in amazement.

"What on earth's the matter?" asked Kangaroo.

Tom Merry panted.

"Gussy won't change. Says he's got another engagement, and doesn't want to play footer!"

"Oh, rats!"

"I wefuse to play footah! I—"

"Then we'd better change his clothes for him," said Bernard Glyn, with a chuckle.

"Good!"

"Ripping!" said Tom Merry, with dancing eyes. "Lend a hand here."

D'Arcy sprang to his feet.

"Keep off, you feafuhl wottahs!" he exclaimed. "Keep off! I shall stwike you violently if you touch me! Keep off! I wefuse to change my clothes! I—"

"Collar him!"

The four Shell fellows rushed at the swell of St. Jim's at once. There was no doubt that D'Arcy would not be able to offer much resistance when they had hold of him, and he fled.

He leaped a bed with great activity, and ran the length of the dormitory. After him went the Shell fellows at top speed.

"Head him off from the door!" yelled Tom Merry.

Kangaroo cut towards the door. D'Arcy was headed off, and he dodged round a bed as Clifton Dane made a reach for him.

He doubled at the end of the dormitory, tackled Glyn as if they were on the Rugger-field, and floored him, and came racing back.

Tom Merry leaped upon a bed as he scrambled over it, and they grasped one another, and rolled off the bed to the floor together.

"Ow!" gasped D'Arcy.

"Yah! Oh!"

"Got him!" roared Kangaroo. "Hold him!"

"I'm holding him," gasped Tom Merry.

And he held on fast. D'Arcy struggled desperately, but in vain. Kangaroo, Glyn, and Dane were upon him in a moment. The swell of St. Jim's was lifted bodily, and plumped down upon a bed, still struggling feebly in the grasp of the Shell fellows.

### CHAPTER 3.

#### Arthur Augustus Reveals the Secret.

TOM MERRY gasped for breath. The hot chase up and down the dormitory and the tussle at the end of it had almost winded him. He stood back for a minute, leaving the other three to hold D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's was allowed to sit up, still with the grasp of the Shell fellows upon him.

"Now, then," gasped Tom Merry, "are you going to change?"

"Ow! Certainly not! Yow!"

"Will you play footer?"

"No; certainly not! Yow!"

"Get his footer things, Kangy," said Tom Merry. "They're here in his box, I suppose. We'll put them on him."

"I uttahly wefuse—"

"That won't make any difference."

"I will give each of you wottahs a feafuhl thwashin'."

"I—"

"Rats!"

"You uttah wuffians!"

"Here's the jersey and the bags," said Kangaroo.

"Good! Now, strip him!"

"I uttahly wefuse to be stwipped!"

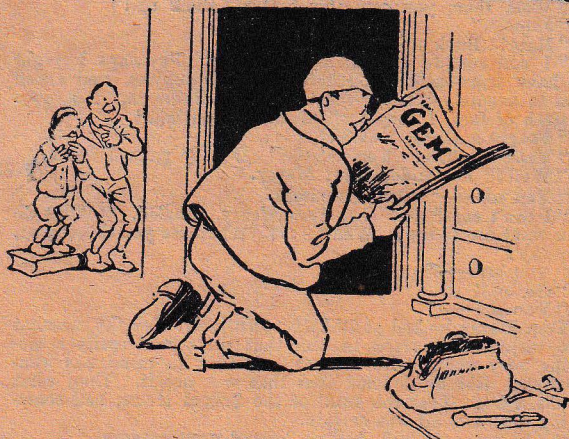
"Hold his arms on the side of the bed, Glyn, while we drag the things off."

"You feafuhl wottahs!"

"Here goes!"

D'Arcy's waistcoat was removed. It split up the back and nearly all the buttons came off in the process. But that could not be helped.

### THIS PROVES HOW GOOD IT WILL BE.



Billy the Burglar is easily caught while reading an advance copy of the Grand Christmas Double Number of "The Gem."

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of the "Gem" next Thursday. SEE PAGE 28.

GRAND CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER





Then his braces were jerked with such effect that all the buttons came off his nether garments, and Tom Merry and Kangaroo seized them by the ankles to pull them off.

"Ow!" roared D'Arcy. "Leggo!"

"Now then, hold him, Glyn."

"I've got him."

"A long pull, a strong pull, and a pull altogether."

"Help!"

"They're coming!"

"You howwid wascals!"

"Here they come."

The trousers flew off so suddenly that Tom Merry and Kangaroo sat down in the dormitory, holding the garments in their grasp.

"Oh!" gasped Kangaroo.

"M-m-my hat!"

"Help!" shrieked D'Arcy. "You feahful wuffians! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Welease me, you wottahs! I will change."

"Honour bright, Gussy?"

"Yaas, you wottah!"

The Shell fellows released the swell of the Fourth. Gussy's word of honour was inviolable, and they knew it. The swell of St. Jim's sat on the bed in his shirt and pants, and gasped for breath.

"I wegard you as a set of wottahs!" he said breathlessly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I considah you uttah wuffians."

"Go hon!"

"I wefuse to wegard you as fwields aftah this."

"Hurrah!"

Words failed the swell of St. Jim's. He simply gasped with rage. The Shell fellows stood round him grinning.

"You chaps can cut along and say I'm coming," said Tom Merry, laughing. "I'll keep with Gussy to hurry him up."

"Right you are!"

And Cornstalk & Co. walked out of the dormitory, laughing. D'Arcy still sat on the bed, pumping in breath. Tom Merry watched him and chuckled.

"Well, Gussy, you're wasting time," he remarked.

"You feahful wottah!"

"Buck up, old son, and leave that till afterwards."

"Look here, Tom Mewwy—" D'Arcy paused.

"Well, I'm looking."

"I have a most important engagement this afternoon."

"Rats!"

"It is feahfully important."

"Rubbish!"

"Weally, you know—"

"Get into your things. The fellows will be waiting for us."

D'Arcy made no move.

"I suppose I shall be forced to explain the mattah to you, Tom Mewwy," he said slowly. "I am in a most difficult posish."

Tom Merry looked at him quickly. His expression changed for a moment to one of concern.

"Look here, Gussy, there's nothing wrong, is there?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, no!" said D'Arcy hastily.

"You're not in any trouble?"

"Not at all."

"Well, then, you can play footer. Buck up!"

"Imposs."

"Rats! Buck up!"

"I will confide in you, Tom Mewwy. Pewwaps I ought to have appwoached you before on the subject, and asked you to excuse me fwom the team this aftahnoon. But, as a mattah of fact, I forgot all about the mattah."

"Forgot a House match!"

"Yaas, wathah! You see—" D'Arcy paused again.

"Well?" demanded Tom Merry.

"You see—" Another pause.

"I can't say I do," said Tom Merry, puzzled. "What do you want me to see? What is it? What are you driving at, anyway?"

"You see—"

"Go on."

"You see—"

Tom Merry looked at D'Arcy attentively. For the moment the suspicion occurred to him that there was really something very wrong with D'Arcy, and that his mind was wandering. But he decided that that was not it. Then what could it be? That the swell of the School House had something on his mind was certain.

"You see—" said Arthur Augustus once more.

"No, I don't. You'd better get into your things."

"You see—"

"You'd better change, D'Arcy."

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

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"Imposs, deah boy. I shall nevah, nevah change."

"What!"

"I—I mean, I shall nevah change in one wespect," said D'Arcy hastily, and colouring. "You see, Tom Mewwy—" Pause again.

"Are you off your rocker?" asked Tom Merry.

"Certainly not!"

"Then what's the matter with you?"

"Nothin'. Only, if you insist, I'll tell you why I can't play footah this aftahnoon, Tom Mewwy."

Arthur Augustus's face grew perfectly crimson as he spoke. Tom Merry gazed at him in unbounded astonishment.

"Well, why can't you?" he demanded.

"I—I—I've got an engagement."

"Rats!"

"It's an—an appointment."

"Stuff!"

"With a—a—a lady."

The secret was out at last. D'Arcy's face was now the colour of a well-cooked beetroot. Tom Merry gazed at him, petrified. For some moments he stood bereft of speech, and then he gasped.

"A lady!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Your Cousin Ethel?"

"No."

"Your mother?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then—then—then you're in love again!"

"Ya-a-a-as!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry roared. He could not help it. Arthur Augustus started to his feet, looking at him with great indignation. But the merriment of the Shell captain did not cease. He threw himself back on a bed, and kicked up his feet and roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

## CHAPTER 4.

### Major and Minor.

JACK BLAKE looked into the dormitory. At the sight of Tom Merry stretched upon the bed apparently in convulsions, and D'Arcy standing half-dressed and dishevelled, glaring at him with speechless indignation, Blake stared.

"What on earth's the matter?" he demanded.

Tom Merry roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The fellows are waiting," said Blake. "Figgins & Co. have been on the ground a long time. You fellows coming?"

Tom Merry staggered off the bed.

"I'm coming," he said weakly. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Gussy's not playing," gasped Tom Merry. "Under the circumstances, I excuse him. I don't think he'd be likely to give footer much attention in his present state of mind, so we'll have to play somebody else."

Blake grinned.

"All on account of Clara!" he exclaimed.

D'Arcy started.

"Bai Jove, Blake—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How did you know?"

"Well, I know you told Mr. Latham in class that the first king of Rome was named Clara," chuckled Blake. "I suppose you weren't thinking of the king of Rome."

D'Arcy coloured.

"I wefuse to have this mattah discussed with wibald mewwiment," he exclaimed. "I wegard you as a beast, Blake."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as anothah beast, Tom Mewwy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry staggered from the dormitory. He was exhausted with laughter. Blake stayed behind for a moment to speak to his elegant chum.

"Gussy, old man, stop playing the giddy ox, and come and play footer," he said. "Don't be an ass, you know!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass, Blake—"

"Well, you are an ass, you know. Look here, come and—"

"I wefuse to come. I twust you would not wecommend me to bwreak an appointment with a lady," said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Blake, and he tottered out of the dormitory after Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus was left alone.

He bestowed a glare of indignation upon the doorway



through which Tom Merry and Blake had departed, and then proceeded to dress himself.

He glanced at his watch, and hurried his dressing as much as was possible with the reposeful and dignified character of the swell of St. Jim's.

The result was certainly very effective.

When D'Arcy was finished, no one could have denied that he looked a perfect picture.

His waistcoat was perhaps a little rich, but it was toned down by the dark jacket of perfect cut and fit. The necktie was tied as only Arthur Augustus could tie neckties, and the collar was the highest and whitest in the School House. If anything could exceed the elegance of the beautifully-creased trousers, it was the gloss of the handsome little boots, or the delicate tint of the gloves. With his eyeglass jammed into his eye, and his gold-headed cane and silk hat in his hand, D'Arcy was a triumph of elegance. He had reason to be considerably satisfied with himself as he looked at his reflection in the glass.

He descended the stairs at last.

He burst like a vision of elegance upon the fellows he passed.

Wally, his younger brother, who never was elegant, met him on the stairs, and, pretending to be overcome by so much splendour, clung to the banisters while he passed.

Arthur Augustus passed on with his nose very high in the air.

Gore, of the Shell, met him in the hall. Gore was not on the football ground, and didn't intend to show up there. He was giving up footer, and taking to his old habits of hanging about the passages on a half-holiday with his hands in his pockets, or smoking cheap cigarettes secretly behind the woodshed. Gore stared at D'Arcy.

"My word!" he exclaimed. "Ripping! This is worth a penny admission."

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon Gore.

"Goah, I wegard you as a wottah!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Where are you going?"

"Mind your own business, Goah!"

And D'Arcy strode towards the door. Levison, the new boy at St. Jim's, was there, and he stared, too, at the resplendence of the swell of St. Jim's.

"Going out, D'Arcy?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Like me to come?"

"Thank you vewy much, deah boy, but I have an appointment."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Levison——"

"Oh, Clara!" sobbed Levison. "Oh, Clara, Clara! Who could be fairer?"

D'Arcy turned crimson.

"Levison, you wottah, you have been spyin'!"

Levison roared.

"You uttah cad! I wegarded you as a cad fwom our first meetin'," said D'Arcy. "I was willin' to ovahlook your wotten, caddish conduct on account of your makin' the discovahwy that Lumley-Lumley was not dead, and wesuscitatin' him, but it will be impos., to stand you, Levison. You are a wottah! Give me that papah!"

Levison had a paper in his hand, written upon in the handwriting of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

He put his hand behind him as D'Arcy reached towards it.

"Levison, you wottah——"

"Findings keepings," said Levison coolly. "I found this in the Form-room. You shouldn't leave your poems about if you don't want them seen."

"Ha, ha!" roared Gore. "Let's hear it."

"I wufesuo to allow——"

Levison backed away from the swell of St. Jim's, holding the paper in the air, and reading it as he did so.

"Oh, beauteous Clara!"

Who could be fairer?"

Oh, beauteous star,

I adore from afar,"

D'Arcy rushed forward and snatched the paper from Levison's hand.

"You uttah wottah!" he exclaimed, with crimson face.

"If I were not goin' to keep a most particulah appointment I would give you a feahful thwashin', Levison!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus thrust the paper into his pocket, and walked away, with his nose high in the air. Levison sat on the balustrade of the steps and roared. Gore held his sides and yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy, with a flushed face, walked quickly towards the gates. The House match had begun on the junior ground, and the shouts from the spectators reached his ears.

"Goal! Hurrah!"

The School House was getting ahead. On the senior ground Kildare and his men were playing a visiting team.

But Arthur Augustus had no eyes or ears for football that afternoon.

He had a more important matter to attend to—more important to him, at all events, in his present frame of mind. He strode down to the gates of the school, and then he hesitated.

Why he hesitated he hardly knew.

He had dressed as quickly as he could, taking only three times as long as any of the other juniors had taken, and he had walked quite quickly down to the gates. Now he was there he hesitated.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured. "I—I don't think I—I——"

There was a rattle of wheels in the road.

D'Arcy looked up.

A trap, with an old gentleman and a young lady in it, swept by.

The girl glanced at D'Arcy, and bowed and smiled, and the old gentleman gave him a nod.

D'Arcy coloured up to his ears, and swept off his topper in a low bow.

The trap dashed on towards Rylcombe, and disappeared.

D'Arcy stood in quite a flutter.

"My only Aunt Jane!"

D'Arcy swung round at the voice of his minor. Wally stood regarding him with a grin—the cheeky grin natural to a Third-Form fag.

"Weally, Wally——"

"So that's it, is it?" said Wally severely.

"You young wascal! What do you mean?"

Wally jerked an inky thumb after the trap.

"That was the vicar's trap, Gussy."

"Well?"

"And Miss Clara, the vicar's daughter, in it."

"Well?"

Wally chuckled.

"I rather think I know why we're dressed so splendidously this afternoon," he remarked. "We're going to the vicarage."

"You young boundah——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus fastened a tighter grasp upon his gold-headed cane, as if he thought of chastising his younger brother. Wally watched him warily, prepared to dodge.

"Look here, Gus, don't be an ass, old man!" he said, with the fatherly air he sometimes assumed towards his major. "I'm hard up this afternoon. Chuck up the vicarage bosh. Lend me five bob, and I'll take you up the river. Jameson and Gibson won't mind your coming if you behave yourself."

"You—you young wascal!"

"You've been mooning for days, and looking an awful ass all round," explained Wally. "Why don't you chuck it? I take an interest in you, you know."

"Look here, Wally——"

"Come along with Jameson and Gibson and me, and we'll have a good time. We'll get into a row with the Grammar School cads, and——"

"Wats! Look here, Wally," exclaimed Arthur Augustus abruptly—"look here! Will you come with me?"

Wally stared.

"Come with you?"

"Yaas."

"To the vicarage?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"To see Miss Clara?" shouted Wally.

Arthur Augustus frowned.

"No, of course not, you young ass! To back me up, that's all. You ought to back up your majah. I—I'm going to see her, you know, but—but I feel wathah in a fluttah. I feel that I ought to have somebody with me to back me up. I can't ask any of the fellows. They would only treat me with gwoss disrespect. Look here, Wally, you ought to stand by your majah."

Wally gave him a smack on the shoulder that made him gasp.

"And so I will, old cock!" he exclaimed heartily. "Come on!"

## CHAPTER 5.

### Arthur Augustus Goes Ahead.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY looked doubtfully at his minor. Wally was not the kind of companion he would have chosen upon such a delicate errand as he was now engaged upon. The fag could hardly be expected to understand a fellow being in love—he was too young for that, D'Arcy thought. D'Arcy at present was feeling about thirty-five or thirty-six. But Gussy felt that he must have somebody. He wanted to outpour the tender

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thoughts of his mind—he wanted somebody to back him up. His own chums were playing football, and, besides, they would only make a joke of it. D'Arcy felt that he could not stand that. Wally was the fellow, if only Wally had a little more tact. There was a lurking gleam in Wally's eye that disconcerted Arthur Augustus. But the plain truth was, that he dared not go alone.

"Vewy well, Wally," he said. "I shall be vewy glad of your company, deah boy. I twust you will be as sewious as the occasion demands."

"Solemn as a judge, old son."

"You see, it is a vewy delicate mattah."

"Bless you, I know all about it!" said Wally cheerfully. "Do you think I've never been in love?"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Let's get off," said Wally. "I don't know what the game is, but you can tell me as we go along. If you're going to carry off the charmer, I'll engage the trap and a couple of trusty bravos—"

"You young duffah!"

"Once aboard the lugger, and the girl is ours, you know," said Wally. "You can rely on me."

"If you won't be sewious, Wally—"

"I am being serious. If it's only a proposal you're after, I'll hold your jacket and time you."

"Wally—"

"Buck up, my son!" said Wally. "I know Miss Clara is always in the garden before tea, and you'll catch her nicely, with no heavy fathers about."

D'Arcy choked down the remarks he was inclined to make, and walked on in silence. Wally-suppressed a chuckle.

He knew Arthur Augustus of old.

D'Arcy had been like this before, and had always fortunately been rejected by the charming ladies upon whom he had bestowed his affections, and at whose feet he had laid his heart and his worldly possessions—consisting chiefly, if he had enumerated them, of a bicycle, a pony, a set of books, a very considerable wardrobe, and an allowance of from five to ten shillings a week pocket-money, with an occasional fiver from his governor thrown in.

Wally wondered what his major would do if he should be accepted one of these days.

At the thought Wally burst into an involuntary chuckle.

Arthur Augustus looked round.

"I twust you will let me share the joke, Wallay," he said frigidly.

Wally chuckled again.

"Gussy, old man, you are the joke," he explained.

D'Arcy halted.

"If you are goin' to accompany me in this fwivolous pipivt, Wally, I shall decline your company," he said.

"Pewpways you had bettah go back to the coll."

"Oh, stuff!" said Wally. "I'm going to back you up."

"Then pway be more sewious."

Wally drew a solemn face.

"Will that do, Gussy?"

D'Arcy disdained to reply. He walked on with his nose very high in the air. Wally followed, taking care not to chuckle aloud again. But he suppressed many an internal chuckle as he followed his major to the cross-roads in Rylcombe Lane, and took the green-shaded path that ran to the vicarage gates.

A glimpse of a red-tiled roof could be caught between the trees. Arthur Augustus paused, in the cover of the thicket, and mopped his brow with a cambric handkerchief, pushing back his silk topper for the purpose. The day was certainly not warm, but D'Arcy's brow was clotted with perspiration.

Wally looked at him with a solemn grin.

"Feeling bad, Gussy?"

"Certainly not."

"Would you rather go back?"

"Not at all, you young ass!"

"I'll stick to you, old son!" said Wally encouragingly.

"I won't desert you in the hour of danger."

"Pway don't be an ass!"

"If it turns out all right, I suppose you'll stand something decent at Mrs. Taggles's when we get back?"

"You are a mercenary young wuffian! How can you think of gwub at such a time?"

"Well, I'm not the chap that's going to propose," said Wally. "When a chap goes to propose, I know he's usually off his feed, but there's no sense in the rest of the world being off their feed, too, that I can see."

"You are a howwid little boundah!"

"If you'll take advice," said Wally, with a fatherly air, "I should recommend a ginger-pop before going it. It'll buck you up."

"Wally, you are a howwid little wuffian! Pway go."

"What?"

"Wetire! You howwid wemarks disturb me, and it is necessary for me to compose myself. Pway buzz off!"

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"Oh, all right!" said Wally. "I think you're jolly ungrateful, Gussy. It isn't every chap who'd stand by you in a thing like this. Suppose there should be some bungle, and I got accepted by mistake. I tell you, it's a jolly big risk for a chap to run."

"Wetire, you young wuffian!"

"Oh, all right! Teoral-loo!" said Wally, which was Third-Form English for good-bye.

D'Arcy remained a moment watching him as he walked off. Then he called out:

"Wally!"

The scamp of the Third turned his head.

"Hallo, Gus! What is it now?"

"Come back."

"Don't you want me to buzz off?"

"N-n-no! Don't desert me, old chap."

"I'll stick to you like Damon to Pythias, or grim death to a nigger!" said Wally, retracing his steps. "Rely on me. I suppose there'll be a feed at the school shop when we get back?"

"Ya-a-as, if you like."

"Tarts and ginger-pop, I suppose?"

"Yaas."

"Can Jameson and Gibson come?"

"Yaas."

"All serene, then," said Wally. "Let's get on with the washing. Look here, I can see a blue dress in the shrubbery there."

"Bai Jove!"

"Go ahead!"

Wally pushed D'Arcy in at the side gate of the garden. Certainly a graceful form in a blue dress could be seen among the shrubbery, and there was a glimpse of a broad garden-hat.

It was Miss Clara O'Neil, without a doubt.

D'Arcy hesitated.

"Look here, old man, go ahead," said Wally. "I'll wait here for you. Faint heart never won fair lady, you know. Go ahead! I'll wait here, and whistle when you're to propose, and then you get it out at once. See?"

"Shut up, you young ass!"

"Go ahead. Get in!" Wally pushed his major into the garden, and a crackle of the bushes made the girl turn her head.

D'Arcy was seen.

There was nothing for it now but to go on; and he went. Wally sat on the gate, under an overhanging tree, to wait, and filled up his leisure by sucking toffee. He glanced after his major, but the shrubbery now hid D'Arcy from sight. Once or twice Wally left off sucking toffee to murmur:

"What larks!"

## CHAPTER 6.

### The Charmer.

MISS CLARA O'NEIL gave Arthur Augustus D'Arcy a sweet smile, as he came up, raising his silk hat with the grace that belonged only to Arthur Augustus. In spite of his confusion of mind, D'Arcy was as graceful as ever.

Miss Clara looked glad to see him. She liked D'Arcy. Most people did, especially the gentle sex. The vicar's daughter was no exception. As she was ten years older than Arthur Augustus, she could like him without any danger of being misunderstood; and it never even crossed her mind that Arthur Augustus might want to improve upon a mere friendship. Not that there was anything alarming in D'Arcy's love-affairs. To think about the bright eyes of his charmer, and to think they were bright whether they were or not—to write yards and yards of bad poetry and then burn it—to sit in her presence as dumb as an owl—such were D'Arcy's methods of love-making. No lady was likely to be any the worse for them; or, indeed, to discover that he was in love at all.

But this time D'Arcy meant business.

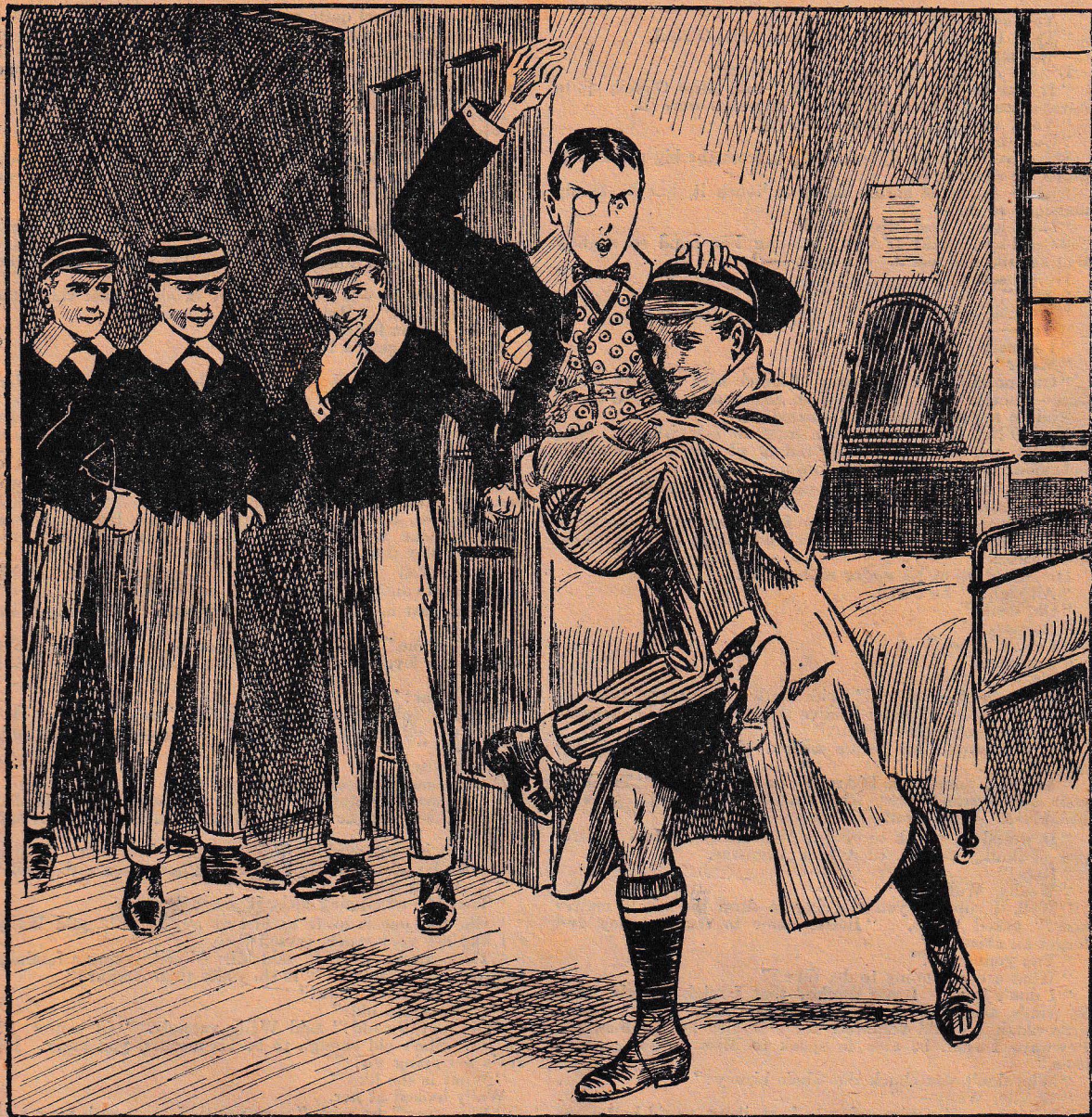
There was a certain naval officer who sometimes came to the vicarage, and it seemed to D'Arcy that he was inordinately attached to Miss Clara's company, and that Miss Clara regarded him with too much admiration.

It was evidently necessary to get something settled.

After all, a long engagement had really nothing to be said against it. In fact, Arthur Augustus thought it was a jolly good arrangement.

Miss O'Neil was fond of gardening. She was very busy now, and had on a pair of large and thick gardening gloves. She was a charming girl, with bright blue Irish eyes, and a smile that had had destructive effects upon more hearts than Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's. She had the delightfulest touch of brogue in her speech, too, and a way of saying "Faith"





"Ow!" roared D'Arcy. "Welsease me, Tom Mewwy! Welsease me, you howwid wuffian! you are wumplin' my waistcoat, and cwumplin' my bags!" (See page 3.)

that was simply ravishing. At least, D'Arcy thought so, and so did that obnoxious naval officer.

"Faith, and isn't it a beautiful day!" said Miss O'Neil, as D'Arcy did not speak. "Didn't I see you at the college gates as dad and I passed, Arthur?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I thought so. And you've come to tea? That is really kind of you," said Miss O'Neil, wondering in her own mind what D'Arcy had come for, and why he was standing so silent, turning alternately white and red.

"Tea!" said D'Arcy vaguely.

"Faith, and you find me gardening again," said Miss O'Neil. "Are you fond of gardening, Arthur?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And you haven't asked me about the garden at all." D'Arcy blushed.

"I'm sowwy! I'm wathah an ass, you know. I—I hope the pwimwoses are comin' out all wight."

Miss O'Neil looked surprised.

"I hope they will, next spring," she assented. "As a rule, we don't expect them at the end of autumn."

"N-n-no, of course not," said D'Arcy, colouring again. "Perhaps you would like to come in and see papa," Miss O'Neil remarked.

"Oh, no!"

"No? Then you shall watch me gardening."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Miss O'Neil went on with her occupations. Arthur Augustus watched her, and could not speak. He tried several times, but instead of "Miss Clawah, I adore you," he only succeeded in saying, "It's a fine afternoon, you know."

He was not making much progress.

Suddenly, from behind the trees in the direction of the gate, came a shrill whistle.

D'Arcy started. It was a signal from Wally. The fag of the Third had finished his toffee, and he was getting impatient.

"Dear me!" said Miss O'Neil. "Did not that sound like a signal?"

"Yaas, wathah!" stammered D'Arcy.

"Perhaps you have a friend waiting for you?"

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"Ya-a-as, wathah!"

"Then I mustn't detain you," said Miss O'Neil.

"Wathah not."

D'Arcy hardly knew what he was saying.

"It was so kind of you to call," said Miss O'Neil, quite puzzled, and wondering if Arthur Augustus were ill.

"Yaas, wathah," murmured D'Arcy.

"Good-bye!"

She gave him a hand, extracting it from the big gardening-glove for the purpose.

Arthur Augustus hardly dared to touch it, but he finally managed to do so.

"Good-bye!" said Miss O'Neil.

"Good-bye," said D'Arcy, pressing her hand so slightly that she did not feel it. "I hope——"

He paused.

"Yes?"

"I twust——"

"Yes——"

"I sincerely wish——"

"Well?"

"Oh, nothin'," said D'Arcy, flooded with shyness all at once—"nothin' at all! It's of no consequence. Good-bye!" And he raised his hat and scuttled off.

Miss O'Neil looked after him in great astonishment. She had not the faintest understanding of the unaccountable behaviour of the swell of St. Jim's.

D'Arcy reached the gates, gasping for breath, and his colour coming and going.

Wally was rubbing his sticky fingers on a handkerchief, which, judging by its colour, was not likely to make them much cleaner.

He looked up at his major with a grin.

"All right?" he asked.

"Oh, deah!"

"Rejected?"

"Certainly not."

"Accepted?"

"No."

"My only Aunt Jane!" said Wally. "But you must be one or the other. I don't believe there's any middle course."

"I—I haven't said anythin'."

Wally surveyed his major with a glance of unmitigated disgust.

"You call yourself a D'Arcy!" he exclaimed. "Think of your giddy grandfather, who charged the Russian guns at Balaklava. What would he have said?"

"It would be easiah to charge Wussian guns than to pwo-pose, I think," murmured Arthur Augustus.

"Rats!"

"Weally, Wally——"

"Well, I suppose you're going to drop the whole matter now?" asked Wally. "Better come to the tuckshop and forget all about it."

"You young ass!"

"What are you going to do, then?"

"I don't know. I was thinkin' that I might—might leave St. Jim's, and—and go abwoad," said D'Arcy. "If I were a little oldah I would volunteer for a forlorn hope somewhah. Pewwaps I shall be able to speak to Miss O'Neil anothah time."

"Why don't you chuck the whole bizney?"

"Weally, Wally——"

"Look here, if you're going to keep it up, you'd better get down to business now," said Wally. "If you haven't the cheek to speak to Clara, I'll do it for you."

"Wally!"

"It's all right; you wait here."

Wally slipped off the gate, and was gone before his major could make a movement to stop him.

"Wally!" shrieked D'Arcy. "Wally!"

The fag did not even reply. D'Arcy took a couple of steps after him, and then stopped. He leaned against the gate, gasping, and waited.

## CHAPTER 7.

### Wally Knows Best.

WALLY chuckled to himself as he plunged through the high shrubbery. A blue dress glimmered before him, and then he saw a charming, surprised face. Miss O'Neil knew the scamp of the Third very well, and in spite of his ways she liked him. It was hardly possible to help liking Wally, cheeky young rascal as he certainly was. Wally dragged off his school cap, and ducked his head to Miss O'Neil, most of his hair standing up like the quills of a porcupine until he replaced the cap.

"Your brother has just gone," said Miss O'Neil.

"Yes, I've seen him," said Wally, with a grin.

"I thought he was going to stay to tea, but——"

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"He doesn't feel quite up to tea, I think."

"I hope he is not ill?"

"Oh, not at all?"

"Are you going to stay to tea, Wally? There is straw-berry-jam, and new tarts, and cake."

Wally considered.

"Plum or seed cake?" he asked.

"Plum-cake," said Clara, laughing.

"Thanks, I'll stay," said Wally. "We get lots of seedy-cake in the School House at St. Jim's. I believe it's cheaper. But look here, I came to speak about Gussy!"

"Yes?"

"I suppose you've noticed that there's something wrong with him?"

Miss O'Neil laid down her shears and regarded Wally attentively.

"I thought he was a little strange in his manner this afternoon," she said. "But you say he is not ill."

"No; he's in love."

Miss O'Neil gave a little shriek.

"Wally!"

"Fact!" said Wally stoutly. "Gussy's often taken like that. You notice that some fellows take up hockey for a time, and then get sick of it and drop it—or they'll go in for tennis a lot, and chuck it again. Well, Gussy falls in love in the same way. He was dead spoons on my Cousin Ethel, you know, and she laughed him out of it. He wanted to be engaged to a young lady in Rycombe once—a ripping girl, too. I must say for Gussy that he has good taste. She's married now, I believe. Then there was the Head's niece at St. Jim's—he was a regular Romeo that time, only she wouldn't play the game and act Juliet."

Miss O'Neil laughed, and at the same time shook her finger reprovingly at the scamp of the Third.

"You must not speak of serious matters in this way," she said.

"All serene," said Wally; "I'm coming to the point. Gussy is in love again, and he's got it badder than ever this time."

"Oh, dear!"

"Romeo isn't in it with him this time," said Wally. "He's talking of volunteering for a giddy forlorn hope, or something of the sort."

"Nonsense!"

Wally shook his head seriously.

"I tell you he's got it," he said. "I've talked to him like a father, but it's no good. Gussy's an awfully obstinate chap!"

"But it is nonsense!" said Miss O'Neil, laughing. "Faith, you must be joking, Wally! Whom is he in love with, then?"

"A ripping girl!"

"They are all ripping girls, it seems."

"Oh, this one is quite as nice as any other!" said Wally. "I like her very much, myself!"

"Then you know her?" said Miss O'Neil, taking a feminine interest in the matter. "Is she older than Arthur?"

"Oh, years and years!"

"Is she quite old?"

"Oh, awfully old!" said Wally vaguely. "Of course, it's all rot. She's old enough to be his mother, you know. But she's a ripping girl!"

"What is she like?"

Wally looked at her. "Blue eyes," he said, "very pretty face, mouth very nice, but perhaps a little too wide. Really, a jolly girl!"

"Does she live near here?"

"Very near."

"What is her name?"

"Clara O'Neil."

Miss O'Neil gave quite a jump.

"Wally!"

"Well?"

"The same name as myself!" said Miss O'Neil, in astonishment.

Wally chuckled.

"You're the party," he said.

"What!"

"You're the party."

"Wally!"

"Fact!" said Wally.

Miss O'Neil looked at him long and hard. Suddenly she leaned forward and boxed his ears. Wally started back with a yell of indignant astonishment.

"My only Aunt Jane! What the—the——?"

# ANSWERS



"There, I'm sorry," said Miss O'Neil, with a charming smile. "But faith, you should not joke so."

"I wasn't joking!" roared Wally. "It was all true!"

"How could it be true, when D'Arcy is fifteen?" exclaimed Miss O'Neil, her blue eyes sparkling with indignation.

"That doesn't make any difference. He was fourteen the first time," said Wally, rubbing his ear ruefully.

"I—I mean— You said I—she—the young lady was old enough to be his mother," said Miss O'Neil.

"Well, so she is! She's jolly well over twenty, I know that!" howled Wally, still rubbing his ear. "Look here, don't you go for a chap like that!"

Miss O'Neil laughed.

"Never mind, Wally—never mind! There, I'll give you a kiss—"

"That you jolly well won't!" said Wally, backing away. "Look here, it's all right—I don't mind a thump—only you're not going to start kissing me! It's all right—I don't mind a bit! About Gussy, now—"

"You must not talk any more nonsense about Arthur."

"You've got to get him out of this," said Wally. "He's mooning about like a silly ass. He got three hundred lines yesterday for neglecting his lessons, and he'll have them doubled to-day for not doing them."

Miss O'Neil looked concerned.

"How absurd!"

"Then he's cut a footer-match this afternoon to come over here," said Wally impressively. "You'd hardly believe it, but he has."

Miss O'Neil's expression hinted that she did not realise the tremendous importance of a footer-match.

"He's got to stop it," said Wally. "It's no good my talking to him—I've tried. You're the party to do it!"

"I! How?"

"He's going to propose to you—"

"Wally!"

"That's what he came for just now, only he hadn't the nerve. Blessed if I can see any reason to be afraid of you, either," said Wally, surveying Miss O'Neil. "I know I could knock you out with the gloves on, if it came to that. You took me unawares just now. I say, you've never boxed Gussy's ears, have you?"

"Certainly not! Arthur is not a rude little ruffian!"

Wally grinned.

"Oh, draw it mild, you know!" he said. "I can't help it if you're old enough to—well, it's all right; I won't say it. But look here, Gussy will start this rot again soon, and then you ought to stomp him."

"Stomp him?" said Miss O'Neil, not comprehending.

"Yes. He's got to be cured. I shall get chipped in the Third Form about it if something isn't done," said Wally seriously. "I can't have that, you know. Now, when Gussy comes and pops the question—"

"Don't be so vulgar, Wally!"

"Then you're not to reject him."

"Not!" exclaimed Miss O'Neil, in astonishment.

"No," said Wally, with a wink. "You see, if he's rejected he'll go on imagining that he's in love the same as ever. He'll keep on writing rotten poetry about Clara and fairer, and the fellows will get hold of it, you know, and I shall get chipped. And he'll get hundreds of lines every day."

"Poor Arthur!"

"But if you accept him—"

"Don't be silly!"

"I'm not being silly!" said Wally wrathfully. "I'm proposing a jolly good scheme, like a man of the world!"

Miss O'Neil laughed.

"Well, go on," she said.

"Suppose you accept him," said Wally sagely. "Then he'll begin to realise that he's rather young to be engaged, and he'll wake up to the facts, I think. It stands to reason that an engagement would knock it on the head. It must be pretty awful to be engaged. Don't you think so?"

"No."

"Oh!" said Wally, disconcerted. "If you don't think so—"

"But I will see," said Miss O'Neil. "I am very sorry Arthur has been so foolish, Wally, as to fancy himself in love—"

"Yes, he's an awful ass, you know!"

"But it shows that he is a very nice boy, and worth a thousand of his younger brother," explained Miss O'Neil.

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Wally, in astonishment.

"If Arthur should speak to me on such an absurd subject, I shall use my own judgment," said Miss O'Neil.

"Better accept him—"

"Nonsense!"

"Otherwise he'll be mooning, and getting lines, and missing footer-matches, and going to the dogs generally."

The girl laughed again.

"I will think about it," she said.

"Oh, all right!"

And Wally departed.

## CHAPTER 8.

### D'Arcy's Luck.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS was leaning on the gate, his brow damp with perspiration. He was buried so deeply in a reverie that he did not hear footsteps behind him, and did not move till he felt a slap on the shoulder. Then he jumped.

"Ow! Weally, Wally—"

Wally grinned at him.

"It's all right, Gussy!"

"What do you mean, Wally?"

"Just you go and pop the question, that's all!" said Wally mysteriously. "I've made it all right for you."

"You—you haven't said—"

"Yes, I have!"

"You young wascal!"

"My dear chap, I've made it all plain sailing for you!" said Wally. "Go ahead! Go in and win!"

"Weally—"

"Go ahead, you ass, and I'll wait for you!"

D'Arcy gave his minor a doubtful glance, and then plunged into the shrubbery. Wally sat on the gate, and searched through his pockets for toffee. Not finding any, he contented himself with whistling shrilly, and very much out of tune, while he waited for the return of his major.

He had to wait quite a little time, whistling and kicking his heels on the gate. At last Arthur Augustus reappeared.

The swell of St. Jim's seemed to be walking on air. His face was beaming; his eyeglass fluttered unheeded at the end of its cord.

Wally grinned.

"Hallo, Gus!"

Arthur Augustus grasped his hand, and shook it silently. He could not speak. His feelings were too deep for words.

Wally slid off the gate.

"Going?" he asked.

D'Arcy nodded.

"Why don't you stay to tea?"

D'Arcy shook his head.

"Better," said Wally. "They're having strawberry-jam and plum-cake."

D'Arcy smiled in a far-away manner. What was strawberry-jam and plum-cake to him now?"

He walked down the path to the lane as if he were treading air. Wally followed him unwillingly. As a matter of fact, Wally was feeling a little remorseful, but he comforted himself with the reflection that he had acted for the best. It was necessary for D'Arcy to be cured; and what so certain cure for a love-attachment as an engagement? thought Wally in his wisdom. But had Clara accepted his major?—that was the question.

Wally plucked at his major's sleeve.

"Gussy, wake up!"

"Eh?"

"How has it gone?"

"Who could be fairer?" murmured D'Arcy. "Whose beauty and grace could be richer and rarer?"

"My only Aunt Jane! If he isn't composing poetry!" exclaimed Wally, in disgust. "Look here, Gussy—"

"In the bloom of sweet youth, in the blossom of beauty, to love and adore her is pleasure and duty."

"Great Scott!"

"Eh?"

"You frabjous ass!" roared Wally, shaking his major by the shoulder. "Come back to earth!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Did you pop?"

"What?"

"Don't you understand plain English? Did you pop?"

"Weally—"

"Did you pop, you ass?"

"If you mean, did I propose to Miss O'Neil—" began D'Arcy, with stately dignity.

"Well, did you?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Has she accepted you?"

"Yaas."

"Good! Wally chuckled. "Did you kiss her?"

"Pway don't be a coarse beast, Wally!"

"Oh, all right! I am only asking a civil question," said Wally, in an injured tone. "I thought people always kissed one another when they were engaged. If they do, I know I jolly well won't ever get engaged, that's all. It's a thing I

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can't stand myself. But look here, I suppose you're going back about that feed now—"

"Eh?"

"The feed you're going to stand to Jameson and Gibby and me, you know."

"What?"

"Blessed if he hasn't forgotten all about it!" exclaimed Wally, in disgust. "Look here, I'll have that feed to-morrow, Gussy. I'm going to have tea at the vicarage. They've got strawberry-jam and plum-cake—Clara said so."

"Eh?"

"Ain't you coming?"

"Coming?"

"Yes—to tea!" roared Wally.

"Tea!"

"My only Aunt Jane! If he hasn't turned into a blessed parrot! What's the matter with you, Gus?"

"Like a symphony sweet is the name of my Clara—"

"What?"

"What loveliness ever was richer and rarer?"

"My hat!"

"In all the wide world there is no other fairer."

"Great Scott!"

"Have you a pencil, Wally?"

"A pencil?" ejaculated Wally, in immeasurable scorn. "You don't mean to say you'd have the cheek to write that rot down?"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Look here, I'll have that feed to-morrow. I'll have to cut back to the vicarage now, or all the plum-cake will be gone. Clara's young brother's there, and I know that young beggar. Tooral-loo!"

And Wally cut off.

Arthur Augustus hardly noticed him go.

He walked—or, rather, sailed—on down the lane, with his eyes turned skyward, and his feet seeming scarcely to touch the ground. He had been accepted. He was engaged. He seemed to touch the stars with his sublime head.

## CHAPTER 9.

### The Terrible Three are Surprised.

TOM MERRY gave a whistle of astonishment.

The football match was over, ending in a draw and a prolonged argument. Both the match and the argument being finished, the Terrible Three were indulging in a quiet stroll before tea. Their conversation had turned upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, when, near the school gates, they caught sight of that individual, and Tom Merry gave utterance to that whistle.

D'Arcy did not look as usual. He did not see the chums of the Shell. His eyes alternately sought the sky and the earth. As Tom Merry's eyes fell upon him, the swell of St. Jim's walked right into a tree growing beside the road.

He recoiled with a sudden exclamation, raised his silk hat and bowed, and said gracefully:

"Bai Jove, I'm awfully sorry! I beg your pardon!"

Then he walked on, without having even seen that it was a tree he had collided with.

The Terrible Three looked at one another.

"My only hat!" said Monty Lowther.

"Mad!" said Manners, with a shake of the head. "Mad as a hatter! I always foretold this for Gussy."

The swell of St. Jim's came straight on towards them, but unseeing. The Terrible Three exchanged a grin, and lined up in his path, so that he either had to stop or to run into them.

He did not stop.

He did not see them until he had walked right upon Monty Lowther, and then he staggered back.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped.

Lowther threw his arms round D'Arcy, as if to save himself from falling. The elegant junior gasped as the breath was squeezed out of his body.

"Ow! Ow! Welease me!"

"Where are you going?" demanded Monty Lowther. "What do you mean by charging a peaceful citizen on the King's highway?"

"Bai Jove!"

"If you wanted to charge anybody, why couldn't you play footer when we wanted you to?" queried Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"I wish you'd wait like that a few minutes, while I get my camera," said Manners eagerly.

D'Arcy jerked himself away from Monty Lowther's grasp. "I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort," he said. "I wegard you as three silly asses, and I wathah suspect that you wan into me on purpose. I would give you all a feaful thwashin' but—"

His face cleared, but he beamed smilingly. "Congwatulate me, deah boys!"

"Congratulate you?"

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"Yaas, wathah!"

"What for? Been asked to play for the first eleven?"

"No, duffah!"

"Asked to play for the county?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Has your governor sent you a tenner?"

"Certainly not!"

"Have you found a bullseye?"

"Weally—"

"Well, then, what are we to congratulate you for?"

"I have been accepted, deah boy!"

Tom Merry staggered.

"What?"

"I've been accepted!"

"Accepted?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"B-b-b-b-by whom?" yelled the Terrible Three together.

"By Miss O'Neil. Congwatulate me!"

Tom Merry looked helplessly at Manners and Lowther. Then they all three stared with equal helplessness at D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's was beaming.

"Isn't it wippin'?" he asked.

"What?"

"I'm engaged, you know!"

"Engaged?" said Tom Merry faintly.

"Yaas," said D'Arcy, with a nod. "Isn't it wippin'? It's a secwet at pwesent, as Clawah will have to wait for me a little, you know. Of course, you fellows won't mention it."

"Of course not!" gasped Manners.

"I am only tellin' my personal fwends," said D'Arcy. "I don't want it to be known all ovah the school. The fellows might chip me."

"They—they might!" stuttered Lowther. "Come to think of it, very likely they would. So few fellows in the Fourth Form are engaged, you know."

"Besides, it would be diswepsectful to the young lady to let the fellows make jokes on the subject, you know. And they might."

"My hat! They might!"

"I am going to get a wing," said D'Arcy, with much satisfaction.

"Eh?"

"I shall get a wing immediately."

"Well, I knew you were a downy bird," said Lowther; "but I didn't know you could sprout wings."

"Pway don't be an ass, Lowther! I mean an engagement-wing."

"Oh, a ring! Ha, ha, ha! My hat!"

"Isn't it wippin', deah boys?"

"Oh, ghastly ripping!" said Tom Merry. "I say, you'll send me some of the wedding-cake, won't you?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, hang it!" said Lowther. "As it's likely to be a long engagement, I think there ought to be an engagement-cake instead of a wedding-cake. What do you think of the idea, Gussy?"

"I think you are an ass, Lowthah, and I wefuse to discuss such a widiculous wemark."

"Now, look here," said Tom Merry seriously, taking D'Arcy by the shoulder, "do you mean to say seriously, that you've had the awful nerve to propose to Miss O'Neil?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And she's accepted you?"

"Yaas."

"You're sure she knew what you were driving at? She didn't misunderstand, and think you were proposing a game of hockey, or a tea-party, or anything of that sort?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"She has really accepted you?"

"Yaas."

"And you are engaged?"

"Yaas, wathah! Isn't it wippin'?"

Tom Merry could only stare. He knew that the swell of the School House was incapable of falsehood, and he could hardly have imagined a thing like this. What did it mean? Why had Clara O'Neil accepted him?

It dawned upon Tom Merry suddenly.

He knew Miss O'Neil, having often visited the vicarage, and he knew her merry Irish face, and her merry laugh, and her love of a joke.

It was certain that she had accepted D'Arcy only in fun.

But the swell of St. Jim's was taking it seriously enough.

"Well, aren't you fellows goin' to congwatulate me?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, yes!" gasped Tom Merry. "May you live a thousand years—I mean, may you have a thousand wives—no, that's not it—"

"May your shadow never grow whiskers!" said Monty



Lowther solemnly. "Of course, you'll always keep a place at your fireside for Uncle Monty."

"Weally, you ass——"

"I can do you a photograph of the happy pair, at a very reasonable rate," said Manners. "Cabinet size, standing hand-in-hand, smile on bride's face, bridegroom looking as if life wasn't worth living, as usual—highly finished and well-mounted, suited to hang up in any gent's drawing-room, price——"

But D'Arcy was gone.

The chums of the Shell looked after him, and watched the elegant figure disappear in the old stone gateway of St. Jim's.

Then their eyes met.

They smiled—they grinned—they laughed—and the laugh became a wild and irresistible roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

They could not help it. The whole business seemed so utterly ridiculous. The seriousness with which D'Arcy took his engagement made it all the funnier. They roared, and Tom Merry staggered gasping against a tree, and Manners clung to a fence and shrieked, while Monty Lowther lay down in the grass beside the road and kicked up his heels in ecstasy. It was thus that Blake, Herries, and Dig found them a few minutes later, almost in hysterics.

"What on earth's the matter?" demanded Blake.

Monty Lowther sat up weeping.

"Ha, ha, ha! Go and ask Gussy!"

"But what is it?"

"Ask Gussy!" sobbed Manners.

"What is it, Tom Merry, you ass?"

Tom Merry shrieked.

"Ask Gussy!"

And Blake and his chums thoroughly mystified, went in to ask Gussy.

## CHAPTER 10.

### The Scoffers are Chastised.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY sat in Study No. 6 in the School House. He was glad that it was a half-holiday, and a fine afternoon; because it led to the house being deserted. The old building was very quiet, and D'Arcy had the study to himself. He sat at the table, pen in hand. Sometimes the pen travelled quickly over the paper. Sometimes D'Arcy sat gnawing the handle of it. Sometimes he tore up a sheet and started a fresh one. But he was not writing out impots. He was not doing exercises.

Three faces peered in at the open door. They belonged to his chums, but D'Arcy did not see them.

He had just finished some scribbling, and he took up the paper and recited aloud what he had written.

"When stars are in the moonlit skies,

Then oft I think of Clara's eyes;

When music soft mine ear doth greet,

I think of Clara's accents sweet!"

"Bai Jove, that's not so bad!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a sudden roar of laughter from the door, and D'Arcy turned round in surprise and indignation. He hastily thrust the scribbled paper into his pocket.

Blake, and Herries, and Digby came in. Herries collapsed into the armchair, gasping. Digby sat on the window-seat and yelled. Blake held his sides.

D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and surveyed them indignantly.

"Weally, you fellows——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What is the meanin' of this intwusion?"

"My hat!" ejaculated Blake. "I should think fellows could come into their own study if they liked! Besides, we like poetry, don't we, Dig?"

"Oh, my hat! Yes! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't you like it, Herries?"

"Don't ask me!" sobbed Herries. "Oh! Oh! Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah asses——"

"I think I could repeat it from memory, it's so ripping," said Blake dreamily. "When cats are howling on the tiles, then most I think of Clara's smiles——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah chump!"

"Isn't that right? Whene'er I see a red, red rose, I often think of Clara's nose," said Blake. "Is that right?"

Digby and Herries yelled. D'Arcy cast a glance towards the poker.

"And when I see the carpet beat, I seem to hear my Clara's feet——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blake, I wefuse to allow these wibald wemarks upon a sacwed subject," said Arthur Augustus.

"Rats! Can't I write poetry as well as you, Gussy? Don't be selfish. I haven't finished yet. When loud the crow and rooks rejoice, it brings to me my Clara's voice——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus rushed at the scoffer. Blake dodged round the table, with the swell of St. Jim's at top speed after him.

"Stop, you wottah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy stopped himself, breathless, and Blake stopped, on the other side of the table. The swell of St. Jim's glared through his monocle.

"I weward you as an uttably wank outsidah," he exclaimed. "Undahstand me, you fellows. I wefuse to allow any jokes to be made in this studay about the young lady I am engaged to."

Jack Blake almost fell upon the floor.

"The—the—the what?" he stuttered.

"The young lady I am engaged to," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "I have the honah to inform you that Miss Clawah O'Neil has kindly and gwaciously honahed me by acceptin' me."

Blake stared blankly.

"My hat!" ejaculated Digby. "What larks!"

"Weally, Digby——"

"You don't mean to say——" gasped Blake, at last.

"Pway don't wepeat all Tom Mewwy's wemarks," said D'Arcy, with a lofty wave of the hand. "Miss O'Neil has accepted me."

"Then that's what was the matter with those Shell bouncers?" roared Herries. "I thought it was hysterics at first."

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"You ass, Gussy!" roared Blake. "You know Miss O'Neil! She's making fun of you!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"It's all a joke, of course."

D'Arcy's face was very frigid.

"I decline to have my engagement considahed in the light of a joke," he said. "I twust you will not force me to bwreak our old fwendship, Blake."

"My hat!"

"If any more wibald wemarks are made on this subject, I shall wetire frowm this studay, and shall dwop your acquaintance."

"Gussy——"

D'Arcy waved his hand.

"Pway don't pwolong the discush, Blake. Unless you can speak of the mattah in a tone of pwopah and becomin' wespict, I beg that you will allow it to dwop."

And Arthur Augustus walked out of the room.

Blake sank helplessly into a chair.

"I always said that Gussy would be the death of me," he murmured. "I know he will! Oh, my Uncle James! Ha, ha, ha!"

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

Tom Merry, and Manners, and Lowther looked into the study, grinning.

"Have you got it?" asked Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes. Gussy's engaged."

"Isn't it ripping?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"When stars are in the sunny skies,

I think of Clara's stunning eyes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"When all the world is in repose

I think of Clara's mouth and nose."

The juniors shrieked.

There was a quick step in the passage, and D'Arcy pushed into the study again, through the Shell fellows in the doorway. He had come back for his hat. He jammed his monocle into his eye and glared round at the juniors.

"I weward you as a set of wottahs!" he exclaimed.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"When stars are in the sunny skies——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"When shines the moon at midday bright,

I think that Clara's perfect quite!"

"You uttah ass——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus quivered with wrath. There was a cricket stump in a corner of the study, and D'Arcy, putting his hat down again, caught up the stump. Without wasting time in words he started on Blake.

"There, you uttah wottah! Take that——"

"Ow!" roared Blake. "Yow! Leave off! Yaroo!"

"And that—and that——"

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"Hurrah!" roared Digby. "Give it him! Hallo! Leave off! Don't touch me with that stump, you ass!" "Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Herries. "Ha, ha—Yow!" The chums of the Fourth simply hopped as D'Arcy laid about recklessly with the stump. They made a rush to escape, knocking the Terrible Three out into the passage and falling over them.

But D'Arcy was not yet appeased. He dashed out into the passage after them, flourishing the stump, and Monty Lowther gave a wild yell as it descended with a heavy thwack across his shoulders.

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Run for it!"

"Bai Jove! You boundahs!"

"Run!" yelled Blake.

"Take that—and that—bai Jove! You wottahs! Take that!"

The juniors fled at top speed—or as near as they could get to top speed, for laughing. Arthur Augustus pursued them half-way down the passage, with the cricket-stump waving aloft.

Then he returned to the study, satisfied that he had adequately chastised the irreverent youths who refused to treat his engagement with the seriousness so important a matter demanded.

Tom Merry & Co. gathered on the lower landing, too breathless with laughter to run any further. They had several separate aches each, for D'Arcy had been very reckless with the cricket-stump. But they hardly felt them. They sat on the stairs and roared; and the sound of a slamming door above announced that their laughter had reached the ears of Miss O'Neil's fiancee.

## CHAPTER 11.

### All Gussy's Fault.

TOM MERRY & CO. laughed and laughed till they hadn't another laugh left in them. They were quite exhausted when they staggered out into the quadrangle at last. The absurdity of a lad of fifteen proposing to a lady of twenty-five, and of taking his engagement seriously, appealed very much to their sense of humour, though D'Arcy could not see it in the same light.

"But Gussy means business," said Blake, with tears of exhaustion in his eyes. "I don't know why Miss O'Neil has pretended to accept him, but so long as he believes it's all right, he'll take it seriously."

"Wally!"

Tom Merry called out the name as he saw the scamp of the Third come in at the gates. Wally nodded coolly, and surreptitiously licked a jammy finger.

"Hallo, kid!" he said.

"You went out with Gussy this afternoon?" said Tom Merry. "Do you know where he went—and what he was up to?"

"Oh, he's told you, has he?" said Wally, with a grin.

"Only us," said Blake. "It's a secret from the rest, and mind you don't make it the talk of the Third Form-room."

Wally chuckled.

"Not likely. I'll keep it dark. We don't want Gussy to be gayed too much, and we don't want jokes made about Miss Clara. She's a ripping girl. They had strawberry jam and plum cake at the vicarage for tea. Clara made the plum cake. That's something like a girl—one who can make jolly good cakes!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Never mind the cake. Is it true that Miss O'Neil has—"

"Accepted Gussy?"

"Yes."

"Quite true," grinned Wally. "Keep it dark from Gus, you know—but she did it on my advice—to cure him."

"Cure him?"

"Of course," said Wally. "He'll soon get sick of being engaged, you see, and it may be a lesson to him for years to come," said Wally.

The juniors roared.

"And that's Miss Clara's idea?"

"That's it."

"Gussy's taking it quite seriously."

"Of course he is," said Wally. "Gussy takes everything seriously, doesn't he? There's nothing funny about Gussy except his tenor solos."

And Wally went on cheerily, with his ear-splitting whistle. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy issued from the School House. He did not take any notice of Tom Merry & Co. He crossed directly to the letter-box in the school wall, and posted two letters. Then he walked away again, with his aristocratic nose held very high in the air.

Blake chuckled.

"Letter to Clara, of course," he remarked. "The other's to a jeweller, I expect, on the subject of the ring."

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"The ring! Ha, ha, ha!"

And there was a fresh explosion of merriment. Arthur Augustus presenting a young lady with an engagement-ring was comical to think of. But, as a matter of fact, Blake was wrong about the second letter. It was addressed to a milliner in Rylcombe, on the subject of a new hat. D'Arcy had heard Miss O'Neil praise that hat in the milliner's window—it was a Paris hat which the milliner had had sent down for the purpose of astounding the natives, and she never expected to sell it. The price was five guineas—prohibitive in Rylcombe. But what was the money when a fellow was in love, and newly engaged to the finest girl on earth? D'Arcy thought that that hat would make a very pleasant surprise present for Clara—and he was certainly right about the surprise.

And so Arthur Augustus had ordered the hat.

D'Arcy was never better pleased by anything than by a new topper, and so he could think of no better present for Miss O'Neil.

Whether she would be delighted or not remained to be seen.

That evening, and the next morning, Arthur Augustus was somewhat cold to his chums in the Fourth, and hardly spoke to the Terrible Three.

He seemed to suspect them of a desire to laugh at him, and indeed they had very great difficulty in containing their merriment at the thought of Arthur Augustus being engaged.

Whenever the idea crossed their minds, they chuckled, and during the morning the Fourth Form-master and the master of the Shell were both considerably surprised by mysterious cackinations proceeding from their classes.

Mr. Linton, the Shell-master, glanced up and down the class several times suspiciously, and at last detected Tom Merry in the act of chuckling.

He frowned at once. Mr. Linton was a somewhat severe Form-master, and much given to maintaining strict discipline.

"Merry!" he rapped out.

"Adsum!" said Tom Merry absently. "I—I mean, yes, sir!"

"Stand up!"

"Yes, sir!"

"You laughed just now, Merry?"

"Did I, sir?"

"Are you not aware that you did?"

"Ye-es, sir!"

"Will you kindly acquaint me with the cause of your merriment, Merry?" asked Mr. Linton, glowering.

"If you please, sir—"

Tom Merry paused in dismay. He could not tell Mr. Linton that the swell of the School House was engaged to the vicar's daughter, but that was the cause of his merriment.

He stood silent, and Mr. Linton frowned.

"The class-room is not a place for unseemly mirth, Merry!" he exclaimed.

"N-n-no, sir!"

"You will take fifty lines."

"Yes, sir."

"You may sit down."

Tom Merry sat down. He was glad that he had not been further questioned, and he did not mind the fifty lines so much. He tried hard not to think of D'Arcy and his engagement. Manners and Lowther were feeling the same. But in a lull of the lessons Lowther's active imagination pictured Arthur Augustus purchasing a ring and slipping it on the finger of Miss O'Neil, and the picture was irresistible. Lowther burst into a chuckle that echoed through the class-room. The next moment he recollected himself, and sat reddening; but Mr. Linton's eyes were upon him, his sharp voice rapping out:

"Lowther!"

"Ye-es, sir!"

"Take a hundred lines for laughing in class."

"Thank you, sir!"

Mr. Linton breathed hard through his nose. The Terrible Three exchanged sympathetic glances.

All went well till near the end of the morning lessons, and then Manners, being momentarily unoccupied, could think of nothing better than D'Arcy walking out of a church to the tune of the "Wedding March," and Manners shrieked.

Mr. Linton was upon him like a flash.

"Manners!" he shouted.

"Oh!" said Manners.

"This is a conspiracy, I suppose," said Mr. Linton angrily. "It is a concocted scheme for bringing my authority into contempt."

"Oh, sir!"

"Take two hundred lines, Manners!"

"Certainly, sir!"

"The next boy who laughs in class will be caned."



There was no "next boy." Fortunately, morning lessons ended, or one or another of the Terrible Three would have offended again.

The chums of the Shell looked grim as the class filed out after lessons. The Fourth Form were already out, and Blake & Co. could be seen standing glumly in the passage. The Terrible Three bore down upon them.

"Where's the champion ass?" asked Tom Merry. "Where's the unspeakable Gus? We owe him three hundred and fifty lines!"

Blake grinned.

"Oh, have you had it, too?" he said. "I was lined to the tune of a hundred for just giving a little giggle in class, and Herries got fifty for whispering to Dig."

Tom Merry laughed.

"We're all in the same boat," he remarked. "It's all Gussy's fault! Oh, here he is! Gussy, are you going to do our lines?"

"Wats!"

"I think we ought to bump him!" said Manners.

"Hear, hear!"

Arthur Augustus walked quickly away. When the juniors gathered in the dining-room for dinner, D'Arcy was not there. He did not turn up for dinner at all, and Mr. Lathom asked Blake if he knew where D'Arcy was—a question Blake had to answer in the negative. D'Arcy came in as the juniors trooped out after dinner, and his hand showed a disposition to linger at his waistcoat pocket—from which the chums guessed that he had made a purchase which was deposited there.

And Blake gave a sort of choking giggle.

"It's the ring!" he said.

"The ring!" murmured Tom Merry

And he yelled.

## CHAPTER 12.

### Troubles of an Engaged Young Man.

"B AI JOVE! I weally think that will suit Clawah!"

Arthur Augustus stood in Study No. 6, holding a ring up to the light. It was a really handsome ring, with three good-sized diamonds in it, all of the purest water. D'Arcy might be, as his chums averred, a duffer in some things, but he was not to be imposed upon in a matter of this sort.

The ring sparkled and flashed in the light.

"Bai Jove! I think Clawah will like it!"

Three grinning faces looked in at the door.

D'Arcy turned round quickly.

"Weally, you Shell boundahs—"

He thrust the ring hastily into his waistcoat pocket. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther came into the study.

"Let's see it!" said Monty Lowther. "I'm rather a judge of rings. I always make it rubies when I'm engaged."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"I prefer pearls," said Manners. "They're very delicate and nice, and suitable for a really nice girl—and cheap."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Are you really going to take that ring to Miss O'Neil, Gussy?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"My hat!"

"As you have seen it," said D'Arcy, "you may as well give me your opinion on it, deah boys."

He held the ring up.

"Splendid!" said Tom Merry.

"I was just a little doubtful whethah Clawah was quite old enough to wear diamonds," said D'Arcy. "She is a little oldah than I, of course, but—"

"A little!" roared Lowther. "Why, I know she was twenty-five last birthday."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"That's young enough for a naval officer," said Manners solemnly, "but a little too old for you."

D'Arcy flushed scarlet. In his innocence he did not know that his uneasiness with regard to that obnoxious sea gentleman was known to anyone else.

"You uttah ass, Mannahs—"

"Well, it's a ripping ring, and Clara can wear diamonds," said Tom Merry. "Of course, it's a little old for a girl of twenty-five—pearls would be better. But, then, you always were gorgeous."

"The jewellah assured me that it was quite the thing," said D'Arcy. "There was one of pearls at half the pwice, but he thought that wouldn't be so suitable."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you can't have paid for that ring," Manners remarked. "It can't have been less than fifteen quid."

"What a vulgah expression, Mannahs."

"Oh, Gussy wouldn't get engaged on tick," said Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I had a fivah from my governah this morning," explained D'Arcy. "I told him I wanted tin for a very special purpose, you know."

"I'll bet you didn't tell him what purpose!" shrieked Tom Merry.

"Well, no. I thought I had better put that off a bit. I shall go down to Eastwood and see him personally, to ask his consent to the engagement."

"Won't that be rather late in the day?" grinned Lowther.

"Pewwaps it will. However, I have no doubt it will be all wight. My governah is a vewy sensible old boy, you know."

"But you didn't get a ring like that for five pounds, surely?" said Tom Merry.

"Scarcely, deah boy. I had three pound ten besides, and I gave the jewellah that and the fivah. Then that leaves me owin' ten pounds. He knows me," said Arthur Augustus, with a touch of dignity. "He knows the money is all wight."

"He oughtn't to have—"

"Wats!"

"By the way, we came up to give you a message," said Tom Merry. "There's a messenger waiting for you downstairs."

D'Arcy started.

"A messenger—for me?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, it's nobody from the vicarage," said Tom Merry, guessing D'Arcy's thoughts from his fluctuating colour. "It's a chap in uniform—a commissioner—from the village. I think he's from the milliner's."

D'Arcy started.

"Has he a bandbox with him?"

"Yes."

"Bai Jove! It's the hat!"

"The hat?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He's not from the hatter's," said Tom Merry. "It's not the hatter's man—I know him—you have seen him here often enough. This is a milliner's man, and Binks thought there must be some mistake, and that he really wanted to see Mrs. Holmes."

D'Arcy coloured.

"No, it's all wight; Binks ought to have sent him up. Pway tell the chap to come up here, deah boys."

"You don't mean to say that you've given up toppers and taken to wearing 'Merry Widow' hats?" exclaimed Lowther, in surprise.

"Pway don't be an ass, Lowthah!"

"But I say—"

"Ask the chap to bring the hat up here, will you?"

The Terrible Three quitted the study.

"It must be a present for Clara!" grinned Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus heard the Shell fellows laugh as they went downstairs. His aristocratic brows came together in a frown.

"Bai Jove! Those chaps are howwibly wuff in their ways," he murmured. "They have nevah been in love with the sweetest gal on earth! Pewwaps they will look at the mattah in a difewent light when they are a little oldah."

And D'Arcy wagged his head, as if he himself were forty-five at least.

He put the ring away in a little case, and put that in his pocket, and waited for the man from Rylcombe to come in. He thought of his next meeting with Miss Clara, and of slipping the ring upon a fairy finger, and had no time to reflect that he had spent almost his last coin at the jeweller's, and had no money to pay for the hat. At the delicious picture conjured up in his mind D'Arcy strode to and fro in his study, his eyes beaming.

He glanced round the room. He felt that he had grown older and older, years and years older, in the last week or two—had suddenly developed into manhood, it not into middle-age.

He looked at the golf-sticks leaning on his desk, and smiled softly. What was golf to him now? He stopped for a moment before the big glass, and glanced at his reflection, and smiled. As he did so there was a tap at the door, and he swung quickly away from the glass.

"Come in, deah boy!"

The man from the milliner's entered, with his bandbox in his hand. He touched his cap to D'Arcy.

"Master D'Arcy?" he said.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The hat, sir, from Madame Boni."

"Thank you vewy much, deah boy!"

The man handed the bandbox to the swell of St. Jim's, at the same time presenting him with a sealed envelope,

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which evidently contained a bill. D'Arcy started. He had forgotten that little matter.

He laid the bandbox down, and opened the envelope, and looked at the bill.

Five guineas.

He was not sure, but he believed he had a shilling. He certainly had no more. And on top of the bill was printed in large and terrifying letters:

"Terms strictly cash."

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy.

The man waited. He had evidently been instructed to wait.

Arthur Augustus glanced at him.

"Were you instructed to wait for an answer?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Vewy good!"

D'Arcy crossed to the desk under the window, and laid the bill there. Then he came back towards the messenger, and placed a shilling in his palm. It was his last shilling.

"Pway accept that, my man," he said. "And kindly inform Madame Boni that I will send her a remittance."

"Very good, sir," said the man.

D'Arcy felt relieved. He had feared that the man had been told not to leave the hat without the money.

"Thank you vewy much," he said. "I will send the remittance shortly."

"Thank you, sir!"

And the man, with a perfectly grave face, as if he had never suspected anybody of being short of money in his life, stepped out of the study.

Arthur Augustus turned to the hatbox, as it stood on the carpet, neatly tied.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured.

He thrust his hands into his trousers pockets, as if in hope that a solitary coin might be lingering there, and drew out the lining—only lining—merely that, and nothing more, as the poet remarks.

"Bai Jove! Stony!"

The messenger gave a backward glance as he quitted the room, and his solemnity was gone from his face now. He was grinning, but he disappeared before Arthur Augustus turned round.

The swell of St. Jim's stood with the lining of his empty pockets extended, looking in dismay at the bandbox.

The door closed.

What was to be done?

## CHAPTER 13.

### A Lecture for Levison.

"PWAY excuse me, sir!"

Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, paused on his way to the Fourth Form-room that afternoon. Arthur Augustus was standing in his path, bowing, and raising his silk hat in the most graceful manner.

"Yes, yes!" said Mr. Lathom, blinking at D'Arcy over his spectacles. "Yes, what is it?"

"Will you be so kind as to excuse me from classes this afternoon, sir?"

"What?"

"I have a most important mattah to attend to, sir."

"Really, D'Arcy—"

"I twust you will be kind enough to excuse me, sir," said Arthur Augustus earnestly. "It is weally a vewy important mattah."

"Very well," said Mr. Lathom, who was in a hurry. D'Arcy had never asked so big a favour before. "Very well, D'Arcy. You may absent yourself."

"Thank you vewy much, sir!"

The little Form-master walked on. Arthur Augustus was beaming with satisfaction. He intended to pay a visit to the vicarage that afternoon, and present the object of his mission with the ring. That was a most important function, and certainly deserved to have an afternoon devoted to it. What were lessons in comparison? What was the Gallic War to D'Arcy now? What were decimals or vulgar fractions?

Less than nothing!

A chuckle made D'Arcy turn his head, and he saw the hopeful countenance of his minor, with a blot of ink upon one cheek and a blacklead smear on the eyebrow. Arthur Augustus frowned.

"Wally, you young wascal—"

"Hallo, Gussy! So you're cutting lessons this afternoon?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I wish you could beg me off from old Selby," said Wally, with a sigh.

"I am afraid that would be imposs., deah boy."

"Going to the vicarage?"

"Yes."

"Look here, if you stay to tea you might smuggle away some of the cake," said Wally. "Could you manage to hide some in your silk hat?"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Got the ring?" asked Wally.

"Weally—"

"You might let a chap see it," said Wally, in an injured tone. "You're only accepted because I put it so nicely for you to Clara. As a matter of fact, I did the whole bizney for you. I ought really to be engaged to Clara instead of you."

"If you speak of the mattah in that gwoosly diswospectful way, Wally, I shall have no wesoource but to give you a thwashin'! However, you may see the wing. Come into the quad."

And in an angle of the School House building D'Arcy halted, and produced the little morocco box from his pocket, and showed the ring. Wally uttered an exclamation of delight.

"Ripping!" he exclaimed. "How much?"

"Eighteen pounds ten."

Wally staggered.

"Eighteen pounds ten!" he exclaimed.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, you silly ass!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Miss O'Neil won't take it."

"Wats!"

"Hallo, what have you got there?" asked the voice of Ernest Levison, the new boy at St. Jim's, as he came strolling round the corner.

D'Arcy hastily restored the ring to his waistcoat pocket. He did not like Levison, and had no desire whatever to be confidential with him.

"Nothin' to intwest you," he replied coldly.

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, keep your giddy secret!" he said.

"It is not exactly a secwet, deah boy, but I don't see why I should show you the thing. I wegard you as an inquisitive pwowlah."

Levison laughed.

"You are pickin' up a lot of Mellish's wotten ways, or else you bwought them to St. Jim's with you," said Arthur Augustus warmly. "I warn you that they will not go down in this school. You are always turnin' up in unexpected places, and happenin' to be within hearin' when people are discussin' pwivate affairs, and that sort of thing. I wegard it as wotten bad form."

"Go hon!" said Levison.

"Yaas. I have heard it remarked that you are a spyin' beast," said D'Arcy, with growing heat. "As a mattah of fact, I stwongly suspect that that desceiption is quite cowwect, and that you are a spyin' beast."

"Hear, hear!" said Wally.

Levison grinned. Hard words break no bones, seemed to be his maxim.

"What could be fairer," he grinned, "than the beauty of Clara? What giddy delights could be richer and rarer?"

D'Arcy turned scarlet.

"You wottah!" he exclaimed. "I don't believe you found that papah at all, as you told me. I believe you got it out of the jacket pocket in my studay."

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Levison, flushing.

"That's the sort of wottah I think you are," said D'Arcy. "Bai Jove, if you gwin at me in that pwovokin' way I will give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"Rats!"

"I wegard you with the pwofoundest contempt," went on D'Arcy, warming to his subject, and heedless of the fact that fellows were gathering round to listen to him. "Only ten minutes ago I found you in my studay meddlin' with the stwing on the bandbox there. You would have opened it and looked inside if I hadn't come in."

"Rats!"

"You are an inquisitive beast, and I considah you wathah dishonowable, and I warn you that it won't do at St. Jim's."

"Go it, Gussy!" said Figgins, of the New House, encouragingly. "Let him have it in the neck!"

"Pile it on!" said Blake. "He deserves it."

Levison chuckled.

"I don't mind," he said. "It's as good as a gramophone. I never see D'Arcy without thinking of a tailor's dummy with a gramophone attachment inside."

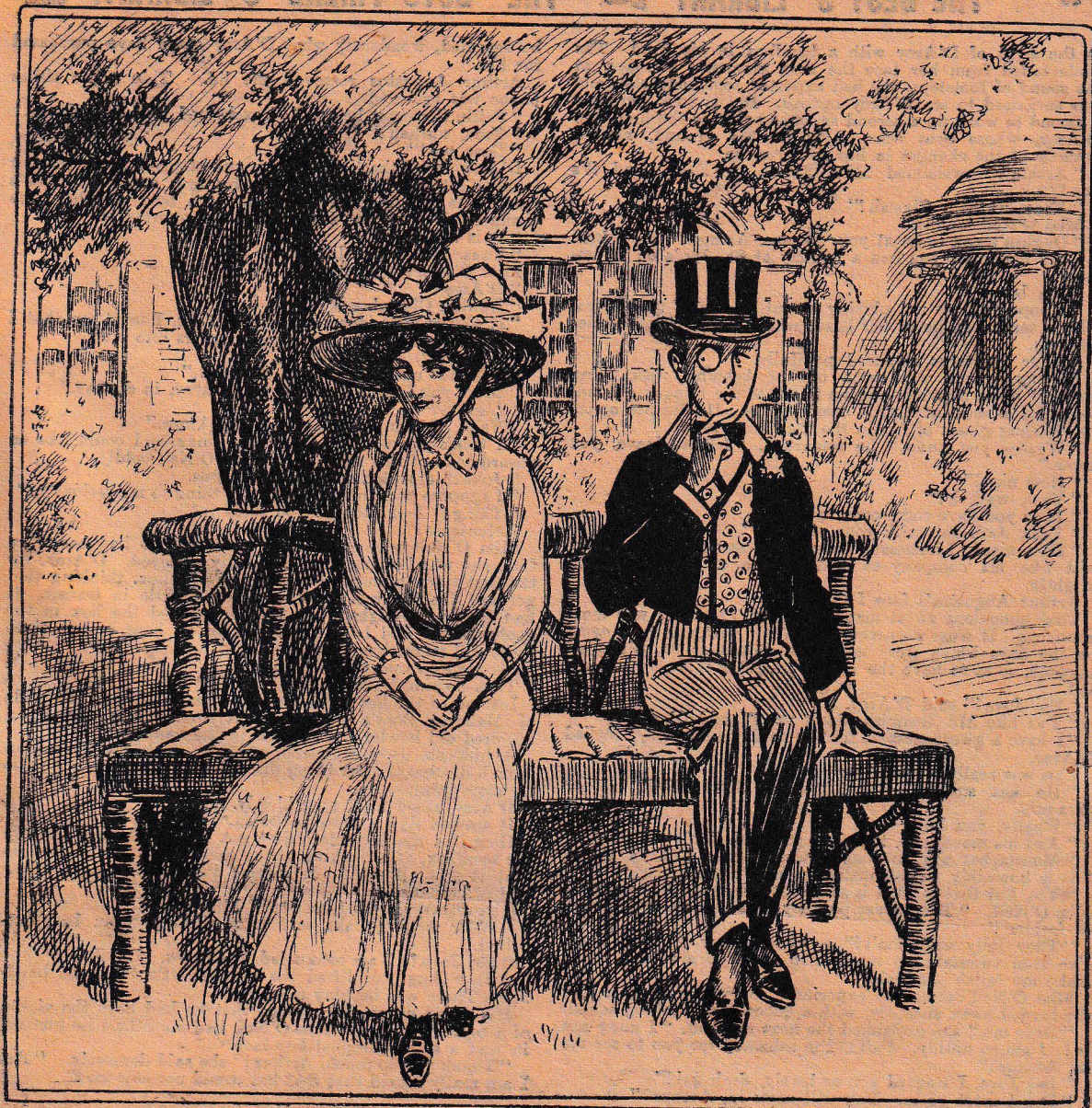
"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy simply bristled with wrath. This was too much. He rushed straight at the new junior, and grasped him.

"Bai Jove," he panted, "I'll wipe up the quad with you!"

There was a shout of encouragement. No one liked Levison. That he was a clever fellow could not be denied.





"Then you could not marry me while you are at St. Jim's?" asked Miss Clara, innocently.  
(See page 18.)

But even in the few days he had been at St. Jim's, his keen and sarcastic tongue had inflicted many wounds. Added to his other unpopular qualities, that was enough to make him disliked.

"Go it, Gussy!"

"Squash him, old son!"

"Give him a licking!"

Levison stiffened up and closed with D'Arcy. Slim and somewhat undersized as Levison was, he seemed to be very hard and wiry.

Arthur Augustus did not find it so easy to wipe up the quadrangle with him. The elegant junior's silk topper flew off, and Wally picked it up and held it. There was a sudden clang of a school bell.

"Hallo, there's the bell!" exclaimed Blake. "Chuck it, you chaps!"

The juniors rushed off towards the School House.

"Let go!" muttered Levison.

As D'Arcy had an exeat for the afternoon, he need not have been in a hurry; and had the positions been reversed, Levison would probably have held on to his opponent and made him late for classes.

But that was not like D'Arcy. He was always generous. He released Levison as the bell clanged over the quadrangle.

Levison dashed off. He did not seem to mind the rough handling he had received. He grinned as he ran into the School House.

"Good-bye, Gussy!" said Wally. "I shall have to buck up, or old Selby will jump on me. Good luck, and don't forget the cake."

"Weally, Wally——"

But Wally was gone.

Arthur Augustus entered the School House, to put some finishing touches to his attire before sallying forth. And while the rest of the Fourth Form were grinding Latin irregular verbs under Mr. Lathom's spectacles, the swell of St. Jim's walked down to the vicarage.

#### CHAPTER 14.

##### A Present for Clara.

MISS O'NEIL was in the garden. She had been gardening for some time, and autumn garden work was not light work, apparently. At all several tresses of her hair had come loose, and were over her face, and her hands were encased in gloves, and she was wearing boots that could not be light or graceful. She looked round and



at the sight of D'Arcy with a bandbox in his hand. The smile faded from her face the next moment. Perhaps, at the sound of footsteps, she had expected somebody else, and was surprised to see D'Arcy instead. But it took her only a second to work up a second smile as sweet as the first, and D'Arcy, whose eyes were shyly on the ground, noticed nothing of the changes in her countenance.

"Arthur!" exclaimed Miss O'Neil. "Faith, and it's you!"

"Yaas, wathah, Clawah!"

Miss O'Neil laughed.

"Oughtn't you to be at your lessons, Arthur?" she asked. "I did not know you had a holiday at St. Jim's on Thursday."

"No, but—"

"I hope you are not playing truant, Arthur," said Clara, with a serious shake of her head, which set the loose tresses dancing.

Arthur Augustus coloured painfully.

Playing truant was quite out of keeping with being engaged to be married, and he felt that the remark was not so tactful as most of Clara's observations. He did not notice the dancing gleam of fun in the blue Irish eyes.

"Weally, you know," he remarked, "I have leave, you know."

"How nice!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then you have come over to tea?"

"Yaas, deah gal, with your permish."

"How nice! Lieutenant Beamish is here to tea, and you will like his company so much, I am sure," said Clara brightly.

Arthur Augustus's face fell.

That obnoxious naval man was there, then. It was most annoying. It even occurred to D'Arcy that the rian came on the days which were not half-holidays at St. Jim's on purpose, so as to have the vicar's daughter specially to himself.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy.

"You like Mr. Beamish, don't you?" said Clara.

"I have a gweat wespsect for the naval pwofession," replied D'Arcy.

This was really a tactful answer.

"He has such nice eyes," said Miss O'Neil, rather dreamily.

"Weally, you know—"

"And his moustache, too—it is graceful, don't you think?"

"Moustaches are no longah worn," said D'Arcy stiffly.

"It is howbily unfashionable to have a moustache."

"Yes, but that is what is so delightful about sailors," said Miss O'Neil. "They never pay any regard to the absurdities of fashion."

"They jolly well don't!" agreed D'Arcy. "Bai Jove. I've seen twousahs on naval men at a view that would make my tailah shuddah."

Miss O'Neil seemed to experience some internal pain, for she turned away abruptly, with a queer little choking sound.

"Dear me," she exclaimed the next moment, "I must run in! I am so untidy. Faith, I'm ashamed for you to see me so, Arthur!"

"Bai Jove, I wegard you as lovely, deah gal!"

"But I must go in. You will come in, Arthur?"

"Yaas, wathah! I—I have a little pwesent for you, deah gal."

"Oh!"

"I think you will wathah like it."

Miss O'Neil glanced at the bandbox. She had noticed it before, and it puzzled her.

"Whatever have you there, Arthur?" she exclaimed.

"A little pwesent."

"In a bandbox?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Really, Arthur—"

"You will not be so cwuel as to wefuse it, Clawah."

Miss O'Neil laughed.

"Well, I don't know what it is yet," she exclaimed.

"I will jollay soon open it."

The girl stood watching him as he untied the string, a somewhat slow and difficult process. But it was done at last, and Arthur Augustus loosened the lid of the cardboard box.

Miss O'Neil's expression was very grave.

Her love of fun, added to the reasons Wally had given her for pretending to accept Arthur Augustus, had caused her to enter into the affair, but she had not foreseen that Arthur would expend money upon presents for her.

That sort of thing would not do; but how to stop him from wounding his feelings was a difficult question.

"I think you will like this," said Arthur Augustus, holding out the bandbox.

She did not speak. She waited to see what would be revealed, wondering what D'Arcy could have purchased for her.

Arthur Augustus removed the lid. Thin white tissue paper was revealed.

"Faith, it cannot be a hat!" exclaimed Miss O'Neil.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Dear me!"

D'Arcy lifted the tissue paper, and stepped back, without looking into the bandbox again, his eyes on Miss O'Neil's face. The girl glanced down into the box, and her face changed. D'Arcy was surprised at her expression.

"It is a hat!"

"Yaas. Don't you like it?"

Miss O'Neil's eyes flashed.

"D'Arcy!"

"Weally, Clawah—"

"If this is your idea of a joke, Arthur, I must say that I quite fail to see where the humour enters into it!"

"Clawah!"

"I do not understand it in the least."

"Don't you like it?" exclaimed D'Arcy, in dismay.

"Like it?"

"Yaas. I thought you would, you know."

"I think you must be foolish, to imagine I could like an absurd joke of this sort!" said Miss O'Neil coldly.

"Joke!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"I suppose you did not bring this thing to me seriously?"

"Thing! I—I thought you liked it?"

"Nonsense!"

Miss O'Neil was not half so sweet as she had been. In fact, she was looking most decidedly annoyed. D'Arcy, for the first time, glanced down into the hatbox, thinking that perhaps the hat had been squashed a little in transit. It had looked all right when he first opened the box in the study, but it had been left there for an hour or two since then, and might have been damaged.

He glanced into the bandbox.

Then he simply staggered.

Instead of the beautiful Paris hat that had been the pride of Madame Boni's window in Rylcombe High Street, a battered old bowler hat reposed in the bandbox.

A hideous, dirty, battered, old tile, evidently picked up from a dustheap, after being discarded as no longer wearable by some tramp.

D'Arcy gazed at it speechlessly.

It seemed like a hideous dream.

How had the horrible object got there. He had tied up the bandbox, after looking at the milliner's hat to make sure that it was all right. It seemed like black magic. How had it happened?

The dismay in his face struck Miss O'Neil.

"Well, Arthur," she said more kindly, "you look surprised."

"Bai Jove! I am astounded, you know. Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus lifted the battered tile from the bandbox. There was nothing else in it.

His dazed expression showed that he had been the victim of a practical joke, if Miss O'Neil had not otherwise guessed it, and a smile dimpled her face.

"Thank you so much, Arthur!" she said demurely. "But I am really afraid that that hat would not suit me!"

## CHAPTER 15.

### The Other Fellow.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS replaced the lid upon the bandbox. His fate was a study. Miss O'Neil's bright eyes were dancing with mirth.

"I—I'm vewy sowwy, Miss Clawah!" stammered the swell of St. Jim's. "I—I have been the victim of a wotten pwactical joke, you know! I—I had a wippin' hat fwm the millinah's there—a weally wippin' hat—the one you admired the othah day, you know."

Miss O'Neil looked very grave.

"You must send it back, Arthur," she said.

"What!"

"I could not possibly accept a present from you."

"Weally, Clawah—"

"My dear Arthur, you will hurt me if you mention such a matter again. You must return the hat to Madame Boni."

D'Arcy looked very distressed.

"But I thought gals were fond of new hats?" he remarked feebly.

"So they are," she said. "But—but—but, really, Arthur, you must not make me any presents! It is impossible!"

"Vewy well, deah gal. Of course, your wishes are law to me, although I am vewy much disappointed," said D'Arcy gracefully. "I twust I shall nevah be found diswegardin' a gal's wishes. You can let your gardenah thwow that wotten thing away, and I will return the original to Madame Boni."



Howevah, there is one pwesent you must weally allow me to make you."

"No, no!"

"Weally, deah gal, I must insist in this case!"

Miss O'Neil had taken off her gardening gloves. Arthur Augustus took one of her hands—in his confusion of mind he hardly knew which—and felt in his pocket for the little leather box containing the engagement-ring.

Clara realised at once what he wished, and she drew her hand away quickly.

"Arthur! No, no!"

"I insist, deah gal!"

Arthur Augustus fumbled in his waistcoat-pocket. The little leather box did not seem to be there. He did not remember having changed it to another pocket, but he began to fumble in the others, to make sure.

Miss O'Neil's face was very pink.

She had not expected D'Arcy to carry the engagement to this length, and she wondered what she could do to stop him, without speaking too plainly.

"Arthur! You must not—"

"My deah gal, you must have the wing, or we sha'n't be weally engaged!"

"But—"

"I think you will like the wing, deah gal."

"No, no! I—"

"I am not sure you are old enough to weah diamonds, that is all," said the swell of St. Jim's, starting investigations in a new pocket.

"Diamonds! Arthur, you foolish boy!"

"Bai Jove! Where is that wing?"

"Have you lost it?"

"Imposs., but—but it seems to be gone!"

D'Arcy went through pocket after pocket.

The distressed look faded from Miss O'Neil's face, and she looked strongly inclined to laugh.

D'Arcy's aspect was certainly not conducive to gravity.

He was turning out pocket after pocket in search of the elusive ring, but that ring was not to be discovered.

The elegant junior realised at last that he must have lost it.

He turned a crimsoned face upon Clara.

"Bai Jove, you know, it's gone!"

Miss O'Neil smiled.

"You have lost it, Arthur?"

"It—it seems so, deah gal!"

"Perhaps you will be able to find it at the school?"

"Yaas, wathah! Now I think of it, I must have dropped it when I was havin' that tussle with that wottah Levison! Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy, as a new thought struck him. "Of course, it's another of his wotten conjuniv' twicks! That's why he got up that wow with me, to pick my pocket!"

"Pick your pocket!" exclaimed Clara.

"Yaas, wathah; only a joke, you know! That's that wottah's idea of a joke! Bai Jove! It is all wight; I shall get the wing!"

"You must take it back to the jeweller, Arthur!"

"What?"

"I cannot accept it."

"Nonsense, deah gal!" said D'Arcy, in a fatherly manner—a manner the swell of St. Jim's not infrequently assumed towards persons older than himself. "Stuff, you know! How can you be engaged to me without a wing?"

"But—"

"And we are engaged, you know. I want to speak to your govannah, this aftahnoon, Clawah!"

Miss O'Neil turned pink again.

"But, really—"

"I cannot allow anythin' suwweptitious to exist about our engagement," said D'Arcy firmly. "It must be open and aboveboard, you know."

Miss O'Neil looked quite affectionately at Arthur Augustus for a moment. He was a foolish lad, perhaps, but there was something so kind and honourable about him that a girl must have been hard-hearted indeed not to like him.

"You are a dear boy, Arthur!" said Clara.

"If you like me, that is all wight!" said D'Arcy.

And he raised Miss O'Neil's hand to his lips in a very gallant way.

There was an exclamation in the shrubbery.

"By George!"

D'Arcy swung his head round, and Miss O'Neil coloured very much. She would have drawn her hand away, but D'Arcy held it firmly.

It was the naval gentleman who was looking at them, in great astonishment.

Lieutenant Beamish was a big, handsome man, with the sunburn of tropical skies in his cheeks, and the large, easy way a sailor has with him. His face was very pleasant and good-natured, his eyes bright and merry. But to D'Arcy at that moment he seemed about as prepossessing as an ogre.

"By George!" he repeated.

D'Arcy still held Miss O'Neil's hand in his own. With the other hand he carefully adjusted his eyeglass in his eye.

"Bai Jove!" he remarked.

"I came to take you in to tea, Clara," said Mr. Beamish.

D'Arcy flushed angrily. He didn't like this big, naval man addressing his fiancée by her Christian name.

"Thank you, Harry!"

That was another surprise for D'Arcy. What the dickens did his fiancée mean by calling the man Harry?

D'Arcy eyed Lieutenant Beamish with great dignity.

"Miss O'Neil will come in to tea with me!" he said loftily.

The naval man stared at him.

"By George!" he said.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But I came to fetch Miss O'Neil," said the big sailor-man good-humouredly. "Is this one of your young brothers, Clara?"

D'Arcy almost snorted. The man must be as blind as a bat, he thought, not to see that his interest in Clara was far from brotherly.

"Weally, my deah person—" he began.

"This is Arthur D'Arcy, of St. Jim's," said Clara hastily.

"You have met him before, Harry."

"Have I?" said Harry vaguely.

"Pwobably I have met this person, too," said D'Arcy, in a lofty tone. If Beamish didn't remember him, he certainly didn't intend to remember Beamish. "But I shall be obliged if he will now wetire!"

Mr. Beamish stared at him.

"By George!" he ejaculated once more.

That ejaculation seemed to be the only safety-valve Mr. Beamish possessed, but perhaps when he was at sea he remembered some stronger expressions for use.

Clara looked half-alarmed and half-amused. Arthur Augustus was riding the high horse now, and at such times it was difficult to get him to dismount.

"You may not be aware of the fact, sir," said D'Arcy, with chilling dignity, "that this young lady is my affianced!"

"Hey?"

"This young lady is engaged to me, sir!"

Mr. Beamish staggered back.

"By George!" he murmured.

"Arthur!" murmured Clara.

D'Arcy pressed her hand.

"Pway leave this person to me!" he murmured. "I'll put him in his place, deah gal!"

Miss Clara suppressed a choking sound in her throat. Lieutenant Beamish stared at the two in amazement.

"That is not exactly a nice joke to make, youngster," he said.

D'Arcy flushed.

"I was not jokin', my deah fellow."

"But—"

"I wepeat, sir, that this young lady is engaged to me, and I shall be much obliged if you will wetire," said D'Arcy sharply.

Lieutenant Beamish gave a sort of gasping sound. He seemed to be choking for a moment, and D'Arcy, thinking he was overcome by disappointment and emotion and the pangs of unrequited love, felt quite sorry for him. But that was not what was the matter with Lieutenant Beamish. He was trying not to laugh.

But it was no use trying. He burst into a sudden roar that rang through the vicarage garden, and then fairly doubled up with merriment. Miss O'Neil looked strongly inclined to join in it.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lieutenant Beamish.

"Weally—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah wuffian!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The naval man staggered away, still laughing, and for a considerable distance his laugh could be heard after he had gone.

## CHAPTER 16.

### Broken Bonds.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY turned to Miss O'Neil. The girl composed her face as well as she could.

"I am twily sorry that this scene should have occurred, Clawah," said D'Arcy. "It is vewy howdid. But these sailahmen are so wude."

"Let us sit down for a few minutes," said Miss O'Neil.

"Bai Jove, yaas, wathah!"

They sat upon a garden-seat under the drooping branches. Miss O'Neil pondered for a moment. She realised that the engagement had gone far enough, and that since Arthur Augustus took it so seriously, it would not do. But how to

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undecieve him without wounding his feelings; how to make him wish himself that the engagement would come to an end—die a natural death, as it were?

That was a puzzle. But it had to be done. Clara would not have wounded the kind, honourable lad for anything. She would rather have suffered herself. But the absurd engagement must come to an end. How to make D'Arcy wish it so?

"Arthur!"  
"Yaas, deah gal."  
"You are quite sure that you wish to be engaged to me?"  
D'Arcy's look was reproachful.

"Of course, deah gal. Haven't I asked you? Of course, it will have to be wathah a long engagement. I am sowwy for that."

"How long?" asked Miss O'Neil demurely.  
Arthur Augustus reflected.  
"It will be a few years before I go up to Oxford," he said reluctantly.

"And you could not marry at St. Jim's?" asked Miss O'Neil innocently.

D'Arcy coughed. He was sure that Miss Clara was a sweet and unsuspecting girl, but he wondered that even she did not know that there could not possibly be a married chap in the Forms at St. Jim's.

"Hardly, deah gal," he said.  
"Then you would want the wedding to take place before you went up to Oxford?"

D'Arcy coloured.  
"Yaas, wathah!" he said. "But—but I—"  
"I suppose a young man would be much more comfortable at Oxford, in one of those dreadfully draughty old colleges, with a wife to look after him?" said Miss O'Neil, in a very thoughtful way.

"Bai Jove!"  
"Are there very many married undergraduates?" asked Miss O'Neil innocently.

"You—you see—"

"Of course, your father would consent?"  
Arthur Augustus pictured himself for a moment telling Lord Eastwood that he meant to marry before going up to Oxford, and he turned cold at the thought. Miss O'Neil was the sweetest girl in the world, but surely she was also the most inexperienced and the most unreasonable.

"Have you written to Lord Eastwood?" asked Miss O'Neil.

"I—I thought I had better leave it for a personal interview," stammered D'Arcy. "That—that is weally much more satisfactory."

"Yes, perhaps. And does Lady Eastwood know?"

"Not yet."

"And your Cousin Ethel?"

"N-n-not yet."  
It was dawning upon D'Arcy what those various persons would say when they knew. He began to feel an inward tremor. He did not know it, but that was exactly Miss O'Neil's object.

But he was engaged now, and if he had to face a world in arms, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy would never have broken his word.

To ask a young lady to bestow her promise upon him, and then to calmly tell her that he did not want it after all—that might suit a cad and a bounder, but it would not do for a D'Arcy.

He looked bravely at Clara.  
"It's awwanged now, Clawah," he said simply. "I shall nevah change, deah gal."

Miss O'Neil smiled. She knew how many, many changes D'Arcy would probably experience before he reached her age, youthful enough as that was.

"Arthur, I know you would never break your word, if everything and everybody were against you—"

"Wathah not, deah gal!" said D'Arcy stoutly.

"I know that when you are grown-up, Arthur, and are seriously in love—no, listen to me—the girl you are fond of will be a very fortunate girl indeed. But that time is not come yet, Arthur. This fancy of yours—for it is only a fancy—will pass, though I hope your friendship will never pass from me."

D'Arcy looked at her blankly.  
"But this engagement," said Miss O'Neil, touching his hand, "it is nonsense! And, faith, I think you must realise that yourself!"

Arthur Augustus's features worked a little.  
"Will you forgive me, Arthur dear, if I tell you that I—I was not serious? I thought that an engagement would make you realise that you were acting thoughtlessly; that is all. I thought it would cure you of a folly, my dear boy. And—I know you will tell me the truth—I think it has."

The lad was silent again.

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Clara pressed his hand.

"So it must be over, Arthur; and, on reflection, you will be glad of it. But you will always be my dear friend."

D'Arcy stood up.

"I suppose I am an ass," he remarked slowly, "and—and you have made me feel it myself. But—but—"

Miss O'Neil smiled.

"You are not sorry it is not serious, Arthur?"

"Yaas—and no. But you are wight, Clawah. I am sowwy I have evah bothahed you in this way."

Clara rose, too.

"Nonsense, Arthur!" She took his hand. "It is all over now, and we are good friends. Will you come in to tea?"

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"No, deah gal, thank you! I think I will go."

She did not say him nay.

Arthur Augustus pressed her hand, raised his silk hat, and was gone. Miss O'Neil walked slowly towards the house. Lieutenant Beamish joined her in a shrubby path. He was looking perplexed.

"What did that young duffer mean, Clara?" he asked.

Clara smiled a little sadly.

She explained in a low tone.

"By George!" said Mr. Beamish. "By George!"

He was silent for a few moments.

"He is a nice lad," he said at last—"a very nice lad. But I'm afraid I can't give you up to the nicest lad on earth, Clara! And you can't very well be engaged to two fellows at once, so it's just as well Master D'Arcy has retired."

And the lieutenant slipped his fingers into his waistcoat pocket, and—more successful than D'Arcy—produced a ring therefrom, which he slipped upon Miss O'Neil's finger.

Arthur Augustus walked in at the gates of St. Jim's, with a thoughtful expression upon his face. He was disappointed. He could not help being so. But he realised that, mingled with his disappointment, was a sense of relief. The engagement had been a farce; but if it had been serious, he would have been in about the worst scrape of his life.

That had dawned upon him now, and he was glad that the girl had been so kind and nice as Clara, and had, in plain language, shown him what a duffer he had been.

He had lost his fiancée, but he did not feel gloomy. As a matter of fact, he was half-ashamed to realise that he was relieved.

There was a crowd of juniors near the School House door. Classes were lately over, and the boys had just swarmed out. The Terrible Three greeted D'Arcy as he came in. He gave them a nod, and passed on, and went up to his study.

There he threw himself into a chair—to think.

Two objects on the table caught his eye. One was a lady's hat, the other a little morocco box. He opened the latter, and the diamond ring flashed before him.

D'Arcy knew that Levison had done the changing, and that he had replaced the articles in the study for D'Arcy to see when he returned. The swell of St. Jim's reflected for some minutes, and then wrapped the articles up, and called in Binks, the page, and sent them back to the shops they had come from, with explanatory notes offering to pay either the full value of the articles, or to make any composition agreeable to the owners, as he no longer wanted the articles.

Binks departed on his errand, and D'Arcy strolled downstairs. The swell of St. Jim's felt that he ought to be feeling very depressed and sad; but, as a matter of fact, he did not feel so, and unconsciously he tried to. It dawned upon him all of a sudden that he was trying to humbug himself, and he broke into a sudden smile.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake, looking at him. "Wherefore this jolly grin? Are you thinking of the wedding-day?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"St. George's, Hanover Square, I suppose? Parish churches wouldn't do for you, of course?" Tom Merry remarked. "I hope you'll have me for a bridesmaid."

"Pway don't wot, deah boys! That affair is all off! I was thinkin' that you chaps might like to come and have a feed in the tuckshop," said D'Arcy.

"Hurrah!"

And they did. And Arthur Augustus drowned the last of his disappointment in ginger-beer.

THE END.

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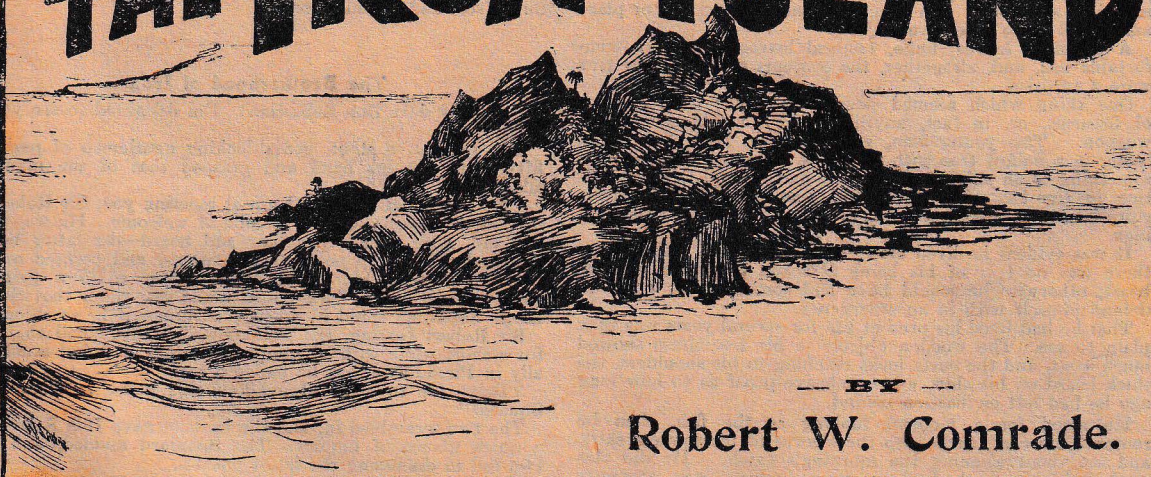
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## The Castaway.

"BY Jove, what a ripper!"

The man had involuntarily uttered the words as he hauled into the boat a magnificent fish, weighing all of 10lbs. He laid it beside several smaller catches, then stowed his line away, preparatory to setting sail for shore.

From the above, it could easily be imagined that the boat was an ordinary one, the man an ordinary one, and the surroundings equally ordinary. Such, however, was very far from the case—all were surprisingly extraordinary.

In the first place, the boat was unlike any other boat in existence—at a glance it could be seen that no boat-builder had ever had a hand in the making of it. It was small, unwieldy and rough. Instead of being nailed together, some peculiar sort of twine had been used, and the tiny mast had a turn in it which plainly showed it to be in its natural state.

The sail itself was made up of odds and ends of all descriptions, and would instantly blow to shreds if a moderate wind arose. At present, however, a warm and gentle breeze slightly stirred the deep blue water—water which was so clear and crystal that the ocean bed could be plainly seen twenty feet below.

The man stood up and gazed about him—first at the distant horizon, with the pure sparkling blue of the Pacific intervening, then at the shore, half a mile distant. No sound, save the gentle lapping of the water against the side of the boat could be heard, and it seemed as if the whole world were at rest, with only this one man awake and active.

And to look at him one would be set a-wondering who he was, what he was, and what he was doing here. His appearance as he stood motionless in the boat was certainly enough to excite the attention of anybody, had anybody been there to see.

Tall and erect, attired in neatly-cut flannels and panama hat, he seemed utterly out of place and grotesque in that primitive boat. The only things that were in keeping with it were his hair and beard. These had evidently been allowed to grow wild for years, for the hair—dark-brown hair—fell upon his shoulders in curly confusion, while the beard reached almost to the bottom of his waistcoat.

It could be seen, however, that he was a young man. There was no trace of grey whatever, and the face was free from wrinkles. The shape of the mouth and chin were, of course, hidden, but the forehead was a massive one, while the eyes, though giving the impression of laziness, were dark and piercing at times.

The figure, too, could easily be seen through the thin flannels, and the physique was evidently a powerful one. Though slim, his whole being had the appearance of power.

Then he sat down, and the lazy look grew more pronounced in his eyes. He hummed slightly to himself, and seemed completely contented.

But who was he? What extraordinary circumstances caused him to be there, in a home-made boat, steering for a sandy

shore in the Pacific Ocean? And why did he wear his hair long—why was he attired in expensive flannels and white boots, as if he had stepped off the deck of a racing-yacht at Cowes, during Regatta Week.

A fine view of the shore was visible from the boat, and it was a singular fact that not a soul could be seen—nothing but sand, pebbles, and, in the background, trees. The beach itself was insignificant—no more than fifty yards in breadth—at the extremity of a little bay.

The man in the boat was about half-way across the lagoon now. Behind him a jagged reef of rock stretched across the mouth of the bay, making it impossible for any vessel to enter.

The ends of the reef were met by frowning cliffs, which rose perpendicularly from the water. Menacing-looking cliffs they were, composed of dull ironstone, jagged and dangerous. They rose from the sea right to the end of the bay, so that it was impossible to land at any other point except the strip of sand immediately in front.

A steep slope led up to the trees, and presently the primitive boat grounded. Although its weight was considerable, the man pulled it up the slope with seemingly no effort.

Having secured it to a stake, he hauled out the fish and proceeded upwards.

His gait was a lazy one, but although the ground was of the worst possible kind to walk on, he never faltered or slipped. A mountain goat could not have covered the ground with more ease than did this peculiar individual.

He glanced at the sun, high in the zenith, and though the glare was terrific, he never so much as blinked. The heat, even, seemed to have no effect on him, for there was no sweat on his forehead—a forehead brown with exposure to this tropical sun.

Right ahead lay a large clump of trees—or what at first sight appeared to be a clump of trees. As a matter of fact, it was a species of the Indian banyan-tree—huge, impenetrable, and delightfully cool. The parent trunk was of stupendous thickness, while on all sides grew the smaller trunks, which had formerly been thrown out from the branches as thin, tender fibres, to rapidly grow and finally take root in the ground beneath.

The man strolled to this colossal tree, and removed his hat as he drew under the lovely green leaves and impenetrable shade. To all appearances he was in a grove which stretched for dozens of yards on either hand.

He walked straight to the main trunk, and a portion of it opened out like a door—it was hollow, and the interior served as a first-class living-room. The grotesque, long-haired individual stepped inside, and hung the fish upon a peg.

Here, again, everything seemed utterly out of keeping with the clothing the man wore—except for his hair, he would have been presentable at any English sea-side town, but his habitation was rather that of a savage than a civilised being.

A table stood in the centre of the peculiar apartment—an

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apartment as cool as any in England—but its surface was rough and coarse; its legs were knotted and twisted. It was the same with the chair. Both, however, served their purpose well enough for their owner. The apartment was practically bare—there were no books, no maps, no cooking or culinary requisites—although on a kind of shelf rested several flat pieces of wood hollowed out in the middle into the shape of plates. In addition to these a couple of gourds evidently did duty as cups, while pronged and flat pieces of wood served as knives and forks. An iron tin-opener seemed out of place among all these primitive objects.

A couch of leaves—huge, tropical leaves—formed a comfortable bed, and, altogether, the contents of the hollow tree were a surprise.

One thing which seemed peculiar was the total absence of firearms, or, in fact, anything which would serve as a weapon. This young man, wearing West End clothes and living in a hollow tree with an air of savagery about it, was something of an enigma. When he had uttered the exclamation in the boat, his words had been spoken in a quiet, cultured drawl, completely out of keeping with his surroundings.

It was evident he lived alone—and it was also evident that there was no fear of his being attacked by either man or beast, otherwise he would have had something or other to defend himself with in an emergency.

That he had lived his present life for several years was very plain to see. The wooden objects in his tree-house showed much wear, and the curly locks reaching to his shoulders, the thick beard on his chin, was conclusive proof as to how long ago he had left civilisation behind.

He stood for a moment looking at the fish, then he removed his coat, turned up the sleeves of his spotless shirt, and set about cleaning the morning's catch. He did this work with a methodical exactness which was amazing. Certainly he appeared to be happy enough, for while he worked he whistled softly to himself—and the music he produced by those slight movements of his lips and tongue were a revelation.

But nobody was there to listen—nobody, that is, except the few birds that flitted about and the thousands of insects. Soon the fish were ready, and the man selected one and laid it aside. The others he wrapped up in a huge leaf and, going to the back of his strange dwelling, lifted up a thick block of wood.

A black cavity yawned beneath, and he placed the fish at the bottom, in the cool earth, where the insects were kept at bay.

The next thing was to light a fire. Matches were seemingly unknown here, but the man produced a powerful lens, and, walking out beyond the deep shade of the mighty, many-trunked tree, he set it in position on two sticks. Soon a bundle of dried grass was blazing merrily, and it was only a matter of half an hour before the long-haired inhabitant of the remarkable place was sitting down to a really appetising meal of fish, potatoes, and clean spring water.

When the repast was over, he lay down on the couch, and, closing his languid-looking eyes, was very soon fast asleep.

It was getting late afternoon when he awoke. It is usual for a person who has just slept to yawn and stretch—this man, on the contrary, rose to his feet without so much as a trace that he had closed his eyes. They still looked lazy and languid, but of sleep there was no sign. He did not even glance at the sun to see what time it was, for he had decided beforehand to awaken at this time, and had done so.

He donned his hat, and walked under the branches of the banyan in the opposite direction to the beach. A path led through a cluster of tropical bushes, while another sloped steadily upwards; it was this latter the man chose. Presently the ground grew harder and harder, until he was walking on jagged, dingy ironstone.

The path was almost lost here, for there was nothing to define it. The man knew his way, however, and walked over the rough rock with a singularly easy gait. Many people would have stumbled and floundered hopelessly, but to him it seemed as flat as an asphalt road.

Away to his right, the ironstone stretched for perhaps a mile, then the dullness gave way to bright blue—the sparkling ocean. The rock ended abruptly, clearly showing that there were cliffs.

To the left, he looked downhill upon a valley, well-wooded and grassy. The other side of the valley a steep hill arose, and again the vegetation gave place to ironstone. The hill the man was on sloped steadily, and as he walked upwards he looked ahead, to the north. Behind him stretched the lagoon, while immediately below the vast foliage of the banyan-tree stretched out.

On he went, ever rising, until at last he could go no further—a precipice, all of 1,000 feet deep, yawned at his feet. Looking straight down, he could see the clear blue sea splashing against

the rock. There was no landing-place here, at the extreme north.

The man turned, and although he was within a foot of the awful precipice and instant death, he never gave the matter a thought. Before him he could see everything—the lagoon, the jagged reef, and the tiny stretch of beach. As far as the eye could see beyond that there was nothing but the illimitable ocean. It was the same to the left, the same to the right, and the same in his rear. He was on an island, barely three miles from end to end—alone!

### The Brotherhood of Iron.

"Ah, my dear Don Sebastian! I'm delighted to see you—delighted!"

The speaker, a stout, genial-looking gentleman of perhaps fifty, held out his hand and grasped that of the man he addressed.

"No less delighted than I am at meeting you, Sir Robert," replied the Spaniard, with a smile of welcome. He was slim and tall, with dark-brown hair and beard—the latter being trimmed to a sharp point. Two waxed and pointed moustaches added to his foreign appearance, while a pair of piercing eyes and a dark frown made one think that Señor Diego Sebastian could be an ugly customer if he so chose.

Sir Robert Gissing, the well-known banker, stood chatting for a short while with his companion—they had met accidentally in Piccadilly—then he hailed a taxi.

"Drive me to Lord Mount-Fannell's house in Grosvenor Square!"

The two scrambled in, and the baronet gave Don Sebastian a quick glance of inquiry. The Spaniard nodded, and the two fell to discussing the latest politics.

The taxi drew up with a jerk, and the occupants were soon mounting the wide steps that led to the front door of the imposing mansion. Several loiterers at the gate looked at them inquiringly.

"'Oo's them?" inquired an old man curiously.

"Don't know the fat jossier," replied an urchin, "but the other cove is Don Semastian, the blessed millionaire—a furriner."

"There seem to be a lot o' folk a-goin' in this 'ere 'ouse," went on the old man. "I wonder what they're all goin' for?"

"Don't you know, old sport? Why, Lord Mount-Fannell's got a blessed card-party on to-night! There'll be a lot more come yet. 'Ere y'are, 'ere's one!"

This time it was a private motor-car, and the tall, erect-looking man who stepped out on to the pavement caused the little urchin to whisper excitedly to the curious old man.

"That's Detective-inspector Caine, of Scotland Yard!" he muttered. "One of the biggest men in the Force, you know!"

Inside the great mansion Lord Mount-Fannell, a breezy little man of thirty-five—a bachelor, who had lately acquired his title—was chatting and laughing with his visitors. The place was a blaze of electric light, and in the huge banquetting-hall the visitors—every one of them rich, influential men—were smoking and loitering about preparatory to the business of the evening.

Obsequious flunkies flitted about among the chairs and lounges, and, altogether, the gathering seemed an exceptionally grand one.

Huge fires roared and crackled in the magnificent grates, for, unlike the Pacific Ocean and the tropical heat of the Iron Island, the month of November was cold and wet in London. The men gathered round the cheerful hearths—it was singular that there were no ladies present—and joked together lightly.

Soon after Detective-inspector Caine's arrival the host entered the gorgeous banquetting-hall, and stood for a moment counting the occupants. With a quick nod of satisfaction he stepped forward.

"Gentlemen!" he exclaimed.

The others—twenty-four in all—turned immediately and looked at their host in expectation. There were all sorts there—Jews, Spaniards, Germans, but mostly Englishmen—some of them titled. Bankers, money-lenders, ships' commanders, an Army officer, a naval officer, and many others of vastly different stations, but all occupying high positions in the world.

"If you are quite ready, gentlemen," said Lord Mount-Fannell quietly, "we will attend to the business of the evening without delay. Mr. Milverton, if you will keep by my side I will see you through."

The person addressed, a well-known barrister, nodded, and the others began moving out in pairs. Where to? The card-tables? It hardly seemed like it. The host led the way, and the peculiar procession proceeded down a well-lighted staircase.



Don Sebastian, in close conversation with a short individual, plainly a sea-captain, followed in his lordship's immediate rear. Down they went, until the staircase ended in a cellar. Here the lights were less in number.

The host walked swiftly across the stone floor of the cellar to a massive iron door, evidently the entrance to a strong-room. For a moment he hesitated, then inserted a key. There was a click, and the door swung open.

"Now, Mr. Milverton, kindly step inside," said Lord Mount-Fannell. "All this is to you, of course, quite new. As a new member you have yet to learn a good deal."

The barrister looked about him curiously. Seemingly he was in an ordinary strong-room. The rest of the card-party crowded in, still chatting on various topics; to them it was no new experience. A couple of incandescents shed a moderate light upon the strange gathering, almost as bizarre, in its way, as the solitary inhabitant of the tiny island thousands of miles away in mid-Pacific.

Everyone being in—no servants were to be seen here—the peer carefully closed the door, and secured it.

"You see," he explained to Mr. Milverton, "the servants, who are all common members, are never allowed past this door, although they know of its existence. In the event of one turning traitor and informing the police, I am afraid that excellent institution would not see much to gain evidence from here."

The others laughed, particularly Detective-inspector Caine, of Scotland Yard.

"As members of the Inner Council," went on Lord Mount-Fannell, "everyone now present can be absolutely trusted. The others not knowing what is beyond this door are harmless."

"Quite so," said Mr. Milverton, with a quiet smile; "but personally I must admit that I cannot see much to give the game away—"

"One moment! I will now show you how absolutely secure we are."

His lordship crossed the room, opened a safe with a key, and pulled forward a drawer. Having done so, he relocked the safe and stepped back.

"That was the signal," he said.

"The signal?" repeated the barrister.

"Exactly. Look!"

Mr. Milverton turned, and then uttered an exclamation of amazement. In some miraculous fashion the whole wall at the back of the strong-room was swinging away as if on hinges. Beyond could be seen a well-decorated passage, artistically lit with electric lights.

"You see," said Lord Mount-Fannell, "it is impossible to open the secret door from this side, so that even if the room were examined for years the entrance now open before you could never be discovered."

"But the drawer—" began the barrister.

"The drawer in the small safe is merely a signal to the doorkeeper on the other side to release the bolts. You see, the action of pulling out the drawer rings an electric bell. He is to be trusted as much as any of us, and is the only man outside the Inner Council who knows of the existence of the chamber. Now, gentlemen, please, one at a time."

The host passed on into the passage with the new member of the council. Just round a bend there was a little gate, and beside it sat a man—a man wizened and wrinkled until his face appeared to be nothing but creases. Lord Mount-Fannell passed through without a word, but the gate was closed on the new-comer. The doorkeeper looked at him with a quick flash.

"Number?" he asked in a whisper.

"Twenty-five!"

"Password?"

"Island!"

"Do you swear allegiance to the Brotherhood of Iron, whose council chamber you are now about to enter for the first time?"

"I swear!" replied Mr. Milverton earnestly.

"Then kiss the book and sign. The punishment of traitors is death!"

The barrister did as directed, first pressing his lips to a huge leather-bound volume, and afterwards signing his name in it. The gate opened, and he passed through. And after him, one by one, came the other members, all going through the same performance, with the exception of kissing the book and signing, which, of course, they had all done on being initiated.

Just past the little gate the passage ended in a door, and this, on being opened, led into a good-sized room, also illuminated with electricity. The furniture was plain, merely consisting of solid mahogany table and chairs, a carpet on the floor, and walls covered in dark-red paper.

One wall was nothing else but drawers from floor to ceiling, and in those drawers there was enough evidence to convict over two thousand men—convict them of almost any and every crime, including murder. The Brotherhood

seldom struck down, but sometimes it was unavoidable. Their main object was burglary, forgery, swindling, black-mailing—everything, in fact, that brought money into their coffers.

And these men—these baronets, bankers, doctors, officers, even a police-officer—were the brains that organised and directed the huge concern. Their members were in every part of Great Britain, and each member was in the hollow of the council's hand. A word, and any one of them could be arrested, while the traitor himself would be powerless to retaliate.

The names of the councillors were generally known to the common members, but what could they do? Who would believe a word they said? And if things did begin to look awkward for one of the council, there was always Detective-inspector Caine—one of the most important men at the Yard—to set things right.

But a common member had never turned traitor yet—they were treated too well—and Lord Mount-Fannell, the Chief, believed in openness. Other societies might be secret, but the Brotherhood of Iron was separate and distinct in itself, the biggest organisation of its kind in the world.

The twenty-five councillors seated themselves in various parts of this underground room, and waited for the Chief to speak. His lordship took his stand at the head of the table, and cleared his throat.

"The reason we have collected here to-night, gentlemen, is to discuss business matters with our new member, Mr. Milverton, who will, I hope, prove a useful addition to the Brotherhood. As well as that, it is getting near the time when Don Sebastian will have to pay his annual visit to the Iron Island. I should think that, after eight years of solitude, Philip Graydon will be getting his spirit broken."

"The traitor!" muttered Sir Robert Gissing.

"May I inquire who this Graydon is you refer to," said the barrister, "and what the Iron Island—"

"To be brief, Mr. Milverton, the situation is this," said Lord Mount-Fannell. He cleared his throat and proceeded, noticing the looks of interest that had betrayed themselves in the eyes of his singular audience—an audience respectable to all appearances, but as wicked and unlawful as any inhabitant of the vilest slum in London.

"Just eight years ago," said No. 1, as the Chief was called, "we enrolled a young fellow named Philip Graydon as a member of the council. He was intelligent, though somewhat lazy and sleepy-eyed. I imagine now that when he joined he was unaware as to what he was doing. He thought, probably, that the whole thing was a huge joke. Anyhow, as soon as he found out what the real object of the Brotherhood was, he proclaimed himself highly indignant, and threatened to expose the whole concern to the police. Of course, we were all greatly surprised, for we had imagined Graydon to be a certainty. I was less careful than I am to-day, or I should have come to a thorough understanding before admitting the young fellow into the council chamber—he was only twenty years of age."

"So he was really dangerous?"

"Extremely so. Something had to be done, and that quickly. We could not even let him loose, for he threatened to set the police on us immediately. The best way would have been to finish him straight off—you see, I am not choosing my words very carefully—for you understand that when people get troublesome—"

"The best way is to kill them?" interrupted Mr. Milverton blandly. "Quite so! I agree with you heartily."

The barrister laughed harshly, and Lord Mount-Fannell continued.

"There were reasons, however, why our young friend should be allowed to live. He was rich, and, I believe, friendly with a certain young lady, who was also extremely wealthy. If they married it would mean several hundred thousand pounds into our coffers, for, being a member of the council, he would have to hand it over in its entirety."

"Graydon, however, swore to expose us; and as we really wanted to go to the Iron Island at the time to store several cases of gold away, it struck me as a good notion to maroon him there. On hearing his fate, he seemed more determined than ever to have nothing to do with us, so we were forced to take him to the island."

"And he has been there ever since?"

"Yes. His fortune still lies accumulating; for there was no proof of his death, and his relations still hope he may turn up. The girl, I believe, really loved him, although by now her affection for him is probably dead. Now, if he would be reasonable, and consent to come back, all would be well, for on his return the girl's love may rekindle."

"But he is obstinate?" asked Mr. Milverton.

"Pigheadedly so, in fact. Every year my friend Don Sebastian has taken out bullion to the island—which is the very place for our purpose, being uncharted and miles out of the line of ships—but every year Graydon has been more

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emphatic in his denunciations. We have all decided that, in the event of his still remaining obstinate, to have done with him. The senior leaves England for the Pacific this week, and if he does not bring back Mr. Philip Graydon we shall know what has happened."

"I understand," said the barrister, looking up with a hard glitter in his eyes. "Will you fetch all the bullion away from the island as well?"

"Don Sebastian will bring some, but not all. It is the safest place in the world to store it. But there will be no necessity to go every year to take out tinned food, clothing, and such like. It has been a joke among us that we have provided him with ample clothing, but nothing in the shape of crockery, weapons, or, in short, anything at all."

"He will be firm," declared Don Sebastian, with a scowl. "We shall return without him, chief."

"Well, it matters little anyhow, after all these years," said his lordship carelessly. "Now, Mr. Milverton, I think that is all concerning our island friend. If you will go over with us all matters concerning yourself and affairs, I shall be glad. Then, when everything is settled, and you are quite satisfied, we will adjourn to the banqueting hall above, and commence that little game of cards we are supposed to be playing."

### The Hurricane.

Philip Graydon strolled out of the impenetrable shade cast by the banyan-tree, and stood for a moment looking at the sun. Then he shook his head slowly. The fiery ball was dull and coppery, while the sky, though cloudless, appeared to be pressing down on to the sea.

Not a sound broke the stillness—the leaves of the trees and bushes were as motionless as if carved in marble; the very air seemed to be vibrating with an unusual heat, to be gathering together before letting itself loose and changing into a howling tornado. For a storm was in the air—everything pointed to it. The man—the young man with flowing hair and beard—stood for a time, thoughtfully stroking the latter.

He was thinking, but not of the storm that would presently rise like magic and send the now placid sea roaring and coursing over the reef into the comparative calm of the lagoon. No, although his body stood on that little rock in mid-Pacific, his mind, his spirit, was back in England—that England he had not seen for eight years.

And the thoughts that passed through his brain were bitter—terribly bitter. His face was immobile, his eyes lazy and sleepy—they never altered their expression one whit. Eight years of solitude had changed Philip Graydon into another man. His body, his mind—his whole being, in fact—were like those of another person. The iron of the island had entered into his soul, and had changed his character. It had entered into his body, and had changed him from a weakling into a man of nerve, strength, and ability. It had entered into his brain, with the result that he was like no other man on earth.

And yet as he stood there, in the sultry, pale-looking sunshine, he would have seemed ordinary enough had his hair and beard been shortened. There was no outward sign of his difference to other men. To all intents and purposes, Philip Graydon was a sleepy, easy-going young man of the world—that world he had left behind for ever!

Ever? A flicker of a smile crossed his lazy-looking lips as the word lingered in his head. No, not for ever! He knew, just as certainly as he knew that a storm was gathering, that some day, not far distant, he would be among civilisation again—would take his active part in the world, just as other men were doing. It might be months, it might be years, but the time would come. And for this reason he kept himself fit. It would have been possible for him to walk straight into Piccadilly and be as other men were. Eight years of solitude had not changed the man outwardly—inwardly was another matter.

His one main thought was for that day when he would escape. Everything in him was held in check. His bitter thoughts against the Brotherhood of Iron and the dastardly scoundrels in charge of it were harmless. He was like a baby there. He could do absolutely nothing. But there would come a day—

But how was escape possible? How could he ever dream of reaching civilisation again? What hope was there of his accomplishing his one, always-present thought? None—none whatever! Yet Philip Graydon was certain that he would escape. He never troubled his head about wondering when and how. Something—something impossible to define—told him to wait in patience. And he was doing so.

Before the feeling obsessed him, however, he had been slowly giving way to despair. Once, indeed, he had been foolish enough to set out in the little home-made boat, hoping against hope that he might run into the course of ships. But apparently the Iron Island was right out of the track. During

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the whole eight years on the island Graydon had only seen three sails—with the exception of the steam-yacht which called once a year with supplies—and those three sails had been very low on the horizon; probably ships blown out of their course by some hurricane.

At all events, while out to sea in the frail little boat a storm had arisen, and had tossed the egg-shell about like a cork for ten hours—why it had not capsized had been puzzling Graydon for years—until finally, with the boat leaking like a sieve, he had just managed, by the skin of his teeth, to make the island again. That experience had been enough—it was the coup d'essai—and Graydon had realised that it would be suicide to try it again.

That had been in the second year of his enforced stay on the Iron Island, and from that moment he felt that some time he would escape—some time in the future he would leave the rock for ever, and mete out his revenge to the men who placed him there. He had never given up hope, but had spent all his time perfecting his every faculty, so that when the great day came he would be ready to fight the whole world!

And now, as he stood gazing at the copper-hued sky, he had a feeling within him that the great day was drawing near—that it was only a matter of months, perhaps weeks, perhaps days before he found himself a free man! Ah, what a time that would be!

The sleepy eyes, flashing with joyful recollection for a moment, changed their appearance, and for an infinitesimal portion of a second looked as hard—ay, harder—than the iron-stone upon which he stood.

And then, faint and far away, came a low mutter, which rose and died again. The air quivered, and the sea, which had been silent so long, commenced a gentle murmuring noise against the cliffs and beach. It was holding itself in—waiting for the wind to come which would send it roaring against the jagged rock, only to be flung back, impotent and menacing.

With another look round—now noticing that a thick, impenetrable bank of clouds was rapidly rising in the west—Graydon turned and entered the banyan-tree. Unconcernedly, although he knew what was very soon coming, he laid himself down upon the bed of leaves and slept. A curious-looking figure he was—young in body, young in features, but with hair and beard longer than that worn by any man of ninety!

His rest, however, was destined to be brief. Barely ten minutes had elapsed before, with a roar, the hurricane burst in all its tropical fury and suddenness. It brought with it a long series of white-crested waves that thundered over the reef and against the cliffs like heavy guns. Had the bay been open, the breakers would have rushed in and swept everything before them for dozens of yards.

But the reef checked their fury. The waves, their mad race interrupted by this insignificant rock, roared out their fury in vain. The Iron Island was immovable. As if by magic, the sky became as black as pitch, and every now and again a flash of blinding light would tear the clouds asunder.

Graydon strolled out just as he was, and nearly got carried away by the terrific rush of the gale. He was used to these sudden storms, however, and enjoyed the change. Then, just before the rain commenced to rush down, and while the waves were at their highest, a flash more brilliant than all the rest lit the furious ocean, and Graydon staggered as he saw, far out to sea, a sailing-vessel, stripped of all her canvas, running dead before the hurricane.

And the Iron Island, with its treacherous cliffs and jagged rocks, lay directly in the ship's headlong path! Unless a miracle happened—

Graydon waited.

### Frank Kingston.

For five hours the storm raged, then the wind dropped; as if by magic, the inky clouds rolled away, and the sun, golden yellow in the west, shone over the racing waters.

As it grew lighter Graydon, who had been watching on and off all the time, scanned the reef expectantly. Only that one glimpse of the ship he had had, but it was enough to tell him that it was rushing to its doom. But if he had expected to see the jagged remains locked between two of the fangs at the mouth of the lagoon he was mistaken.

Ahead lay nothing but a waste of storm-tossed water, rapidly quietening. The sky was now clear and blue, and the foliage of the banyan glittered freshly in the sunlight. Round about, on the hard ground, numerous leaves told of the struggle that had just been raging. The spray rose in snowy showers as the rollers struck the reef, while the dull boom told Graydon that their force was stupendous.

"She got clear after all, then?" he thought, pulling absently at his beard. "By Jove, I should have thought it impossible for any ship—Ah, what's this?"

His keen glance—although lazy-looking eyes, they took in far more than most men's—had suddenly alighted on a dark patch near one of the cliffs. Without waiting a moment, he



hastened down the slope to the object. For the first time for years, excitement showed itself in his eyes; but soon it had vanished, and he was his cool, unemotional self again.

He bent over the dark object, and drew in his breath sharply. It was a man—a clean-shaven man of about thirty. His eyes were closed, and his face ashen pale.

Dead?

Graydon quietly and methodically unfastened the poor fellow's waistcoat, and felt his heart. No, there was still a slight pulsating movement to be felt. Even in a case like this—the first stranger from the civilised world he had seen for eight years—Graydon treated it as a matter of course. Some men would have gone off their heads with excitement, but with him it was different—one flash, and the rest of his feelings he kept to himself.

With no more effort than if the castaway had been a baby, Graydon lifted him in his arms, and strode up the beach. His steps were springy, the great weight he was carrying making scarcely any difference to his gait. His burden moaned now and again, but he took no notice. He could do nothing there.

Straight into the banyan-tree he went, gently laying his burden down on the couch of leaves. He had felt, in carrying the poor man, that his left leg was broken, and wondered if he would ever recover consciousness.

Quickly, and as lightly as a trained nurse, Graydon stripped the clothes from the mutilated body. Great bruises showed themselves on the castaway's chest, and his rescuer shook his head gravely. It would be a strange thing if there were no internal injuries.

Soon the unconscious man was lying down, breathing faintly, covered by a blanket—a blanket made out of Graydon's old suits. The inhabitant himself was busily engaged in preparing something from numerous dried leaves that had been hanging on the wall. The operation did not take long, and presently Graydon was kneeling down, forcing something between the teeth of his patient, who had evidently swallowed very little sea-water.

"He's past all hope, I'm afraid," thought Graydon. "Even if he does recover consciousness it will be of brief duration. The man's dying. He can't last the day out!"

The castaway coughed suddenly, and for a second his eyelids flickered. Graydon bent forward. Again the lids quivered, and a hoarse sound came from the man's throat.

"The sharks!" he muttered faintly. "The sharks!"

A quick flash of understanding crossed Graydon's brain. The waters were infested with sharks, and it could only have been by a miracle that the man had escaped their terrible jaws. As it was, he had evidently had a narrow escape—otherwise the fearsome creatures would never have been uppermost in his thoughts.

"Yes," said Graydon gently; "what of them?"

"Take them away! They are after me!" the other muttered, his eyes rolling in terror. "Great Heaven, I can see them cleaving through the water!"

"Hush!" said Graydon. "You are all right now, my friend! See, you are out of the water, and lying at rest! Try and sleep. Your strength has—"

The man raised himself for a moment on his elbow, then fell back with a groan, his features twisted into an expression of agony. But the terrified light had died from his eyes, and a curious look of inquiry took its place.

"Who are you?" he asked. "Where am I? Why do you wear your hair in that peculiar fashion? I did not understand—Ah!"

Another spasm of pain crossed his features.

"Don't you worry yourself about me," said Graydon, in a quiet drawl. "I want to know who you are—where you come from—"

"Then I had better be quick! My strength is failing fast! I am dying—"

"Nonsense, man!"

"I tell you I am!" The castaway's face flushed painfully. "I can feel it in me. By Heaven, those waves—those rocks! It is a wonder I was not dashed to pieces! Yet, by some peculiar chance I got flung over the worst part, more dead than alive. Then, with a broken leg, I tried to reach the shore. It was terrible—terrible!"

"It is a wonder you were conscious."

"I wasn't—all the time. When I had traversed half the distance across the bay—fearing every moment a shark would have me—I suddenly became weak. In vain I tried to hold my senses together, and from that moment I remembered no more until I awoke—"

He closed his eyes with a moan of agony. It was plain to see the poor fellow's minutes were numbered. He was past all human aid—those terrible rocks had done their deadly work only too well. But Graydon was curious to know who he was, and what had become of the ship. He waited for his companion's eyes to open; he was breathing hard now; great



MAROONED  
ON THE  
IRON ISLAND!



drops of perspiration stood on his brow, and the pain he was suffering was evidently intense.

"Water!" he gasped. "Just a little drop of water!"

Graydon jumped up, and in a moment the other was sipping eagerly from one of the small gourds. Even in his dying state he displayed surprise at the strange drinking-vessel.

"I am better now," he muttered, though his eyes shone glassily. "Quick, I will tell you! I don't know where I am, or who you are, but you are an Englishman, and that is surprise enough in itself!"

Graydon drew closer.

"Three years ago I left England for the South African gold-fields—my name is Frank Kingston—and at the end of the first year struck lucky. Having scooped in close on three thousand pounds, I left the diggings telling my friends about my success, and that I was going into the interior after something big. Well, for eighteen months I remained at a place where gold is said to exist—does exist—and at last succeeded in collecting together another ten thousand pounds."

He paused for a moment. His face was deadly now, and his breath was painfully laboured.

"I made for the coast hot-foot, and arrived just in time to embark on the schooner Sunbeam, which was skipped by a friend; I even kept from him how much I had got. He intended sailing for England immediately, but by a round-about route. I didn't care about that, and eagerly packed my trunk aboard. I hadn't written the one or two friends I had at home during the whole eighteen months, and felt a little pleased at returning with a small fortune—"

"But your family?" Graydon inquired.

"I have no relations," whispered Kingston hoarsely. "Oh, this leg is burning fearfully! My chest feels numb and aching. No; my father and mother—all my relations—are dead, and in a few minutes I shall be gone, too. But to continue. I have the money in my clothes here—banknotes—and there are papers to establish my identity, too. Tell them—tell them—"

"What?" whispered the other gently.

"Tell them at home—the friends, if they still remember me—that I made a good lot after all. They thought I was no good, but—but I've shown them!"

A strange gleam had entered Philip Graydon's eyes—a gleam impossible to define. He poured a little water down the dying man's throat.

"Tell me," he asked tensely, "what became of the schooner. Were you washed overboard—"

"The schooner?" repeated Kingston, with a great effort. "It struck the rocks and went to pieces. The rest are drowned—must be drowned. It was only by a miracle—oh, great Heaven, I shall go mad! The pain—"

His head fell back on the couch, and his breathing became faint and erratic. Consciousness had fled. Graydon rose, and in two minutes had prepared another dose of medicine. He knelt by the castaway's side and took his hand. Then he recoiled, and gazed pityingly at the pale, agonised face before him.

Frank Kingston was dead.

### An Amazing Discovery.

With an effort Graydon turned his eyes away and looked out of the open door at the golden rays of the sunset. Everything seemed so fresh outside after the storm. The very air was cool and refreshing; the sea, quietening every moment, sparkled and glittered delightfully.

And there, inside the banyan tree—Graydon's face lost its set expression of languidness, and a pained look took its place. He stood motionless, his eyes averted from that thing on the couch—the couch he had slept on every night for eight years.

"What a shame!" he said to himself. "What a beastly shame!"

It seemed hard—it was hard. Three years of labour—three years of hardship, crowned finally with success, to end in this. After struggling and winning through, to be cast dying upon a desert rock. And he had done nothing to deserve it—he had not even had time to enjoy the fruits of his strivings. Graydon's heart was touched, and for a moment the great strength in him died away.

Then, with a shake, he turned round, himself again. It was a terrible task he had before him—a task many men would have shrunk from. But this man—this one honest member of the Brotherhood of Iron—was unaffected. The dreary expression had returned to his eyes, and he set to work in a brisk, business-like fashion.

The thought that he was alone on a desert island with a corpse for company did not in any way terrify him. His movements were as they had been before the coming of this ghostly visitor—quick and brisk, yet at first sight appearing to be lazy and slow. It was little short of marvellous how

Graydon got through the work; yet, to look at him, one would say he was taking it very easily.

There was no such thing as a spade, but Graydon had got over that difficulty very quickly by shaping one out of some hard wood that grew on the island. It was a clumsy affair, but surprisingly effective, considering the tools Graydon had to work with—none.

In an hour he had scooped a hole in the ground six feet deep. It was getting dark now rapidly, so without stopping to rest, he entered the chamber of death, and presently emerged with the poor, mutilated body of Frank Kingston on his shoulder. It was cold now—there could be no doubt as to his having breathed his last.

Without undue haste the exile lowered him into the grave, then, having had a last look, quickly shovelled the sand back into its place. When he had finished he levelled the spot as much as possible, and prepared to depart. But a thought struck him, and, laying the clumsy spade aside, he knelt down and raised his head to the sky, out of which the numerous stars were beginning to twinkle brightly.

For nearly fifteen minutes Graydon remained in that position; then he rose quietly, and returned to the banyan tree. It was dark in there—dark and shadowy. He did not even glance at the dead man's clothes, which hung near the door, but stirred the dried-leaf couch up a little, took a drink of water, then laid himself down and slept—slept on that bed, where, barely an hour before, a dead body had lain. These things, however, seemed to have no effect on this very singular individual. What emotions he did display were only momentary, and he could, if necessary, have even kept them in check.

Till dawn he lay there, sleeping restfully. Then, without warning, he awoke, and jumped to his feet. Just for one moment he made as if to stretch himself, then, with a shake, he refrained. He was training himself not to do these things as other men did—had trained himself not to, in fact. It was a triviality, but even trivialities are worth attending to. Possibly it would mean a lot when the day came.

The sun was already shining brilliantly, and before long, by the aid of his lens, he had a crackling fire on the go. The next thing he did was a peculiar one—peculiar, when it is remembered where he was. From the cavity in the ground he brought to light a round tin, and immediately proceeded to cut the top off by the aid of the opener. It was soup—tinned soup, such as can be bought at any grocer's in London.

This, with a few biscuits, made a good breakfast. It was supplemented by hot coffee, the coffee being of the liquid essence variety, and the milk condensed. The water had been boiled in an empty meat tin. The meal over, Graydon washed his "crockery," then made a tour round the island, walking within a foot of the cliff edge all the time, this enabling him to see the now placid sea quite distinctly.

Right round the island, from one side of the little bay to the other, he walked along the top of the cliffs, sometimes being three hundred feet from the sea, sometimes—at the extreme north—a thousand. The only way to land was by means of the tiny bay at the south; everywhere else, except to the west, where an agile man might possibly have scrambled to the top, the cliffs were sheer.

But although Graydon searched every inch, there was no sign of wreckage, no sign of any other living thing except the birds and insects. The unfortunate Sunbeam had been lost with all hands; no one could possibly have escaped, for there was no other land for scores of miles. It had only been by a miracle that Kingston had reached the shore alive. The others were food for sharks now, and the ship nothing but matchwood.

And as the exile returned to the south side of the island his thoughts were busy—very busy. This sad incident had given him an idea—an idea which would do him an immense amount of good, and anybody else not an atom of harm. Full of this, he hurried to his dwelling, and brought into the open the sodden clothing which had once been worn by Frank Kingston.

With methodical thoroughness he went through the pockets, laying their contents in a little heap on the sand. A pipe and tobacco-pouch turned up, and Graydon, who had not smoked for eight years, looked at them for a moment undecidedly. Should he smoke? Should he—

No. He had done without it for so long, and the habit was a bad one, anyhow. He'd be just as well off without it as with—perhaps better. So he laid the pipe and pouch aside, and went on with the work. As Kingston had declared, the thirteen thousand pounds was safely stowed away in his pocket-book. It had been a foolish thing to carry the notes about with him, but seemingly they had come to no harm.

In the same pocket-book were letters, showing where Kingston had lived in England, what friends he had had, etc. For a considerable time Graydon pondered over them; then he rose to his feet and did a remarkable thing. Not





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12/11/10



far from where he had been sitting lay a large stone—a peculiarly-shaped stone—and this Graydon fetched. Having again seated himself, he placed the stone at his feet and addressed it.

This may seem a strange proceeding, but it was a perfectly reasonable one. Graydon knew that some day he would rejoin his fellow-men—he had a presentiment of it. Therefore he would have to talk, otherwise his speech would become uncouth and noticeable. But if he talked at any and all times he would get into an unbreakable habit of doing so, and this would prove annoying—possibly disastrous—when he returned to civilisation. For this reason he made it a practice to talk only to this stone; when he felt he wanted to hear the sound of his own voice he placed the stone at his feet and talked to it. Occasionally he had sat for hours on end, going over old times, saying what he would do when he got free, addressing his cold and silent companion as if it were a fellow-being. He even went further—he had christened the stone Jack, and often called it by name.

"It's three days since we had a confab, isn't it?" he asked, in a quiet drawl. "By Jove, I shall be forgetting the way to talk if this goes on! The somewhat hurried arrival of our poor friend yonder has provided an interlude, however. It's a shame, Jack, that's what it is, for a young fellow in the glow of success to be killed like this! Still, I did my best for him, and no man can do more than that."

He paused for a moment thoughtfully.

"I'm glad he was thrown up here," he went on. "For one thing, he's decently buried, and for another it opens out something for myself that's been puzzling me not a little. You must remember, Jack, that he's got no relations—these papers prove that—and only one or two friends. He's been away from England for three years, and nearly two of those years have been spent in the interior of Africa. Even now his friends don't know where he is."

"Now, my idea is this: When I escape from this island I shall want an identity. I can't go home and say I'm Philip Graydon—if I did, I should be marked by the Brotherhood immediately. No, my little friend, what I want to do is to go to England as another man, with plenty of money, and do my work quietly and steadily. Frank Kingston will be my name as soon as I get free. It is known he had gone to the goldfields; who would ask questions when I turned up with over a million? Yes, there's every penny of that amount, and more, stowed away in the Brotherhood's treasure-house. And when I go I shall take it with me."

Graydon paused again, looking with his languid eyes far out to sea; then their glance returned to the stone.

"You don't believe I shall escape, do you? Well, I know it! Never mind how; perhaps my chance will come next week, when that scoundrel Don Sebastian is due to turn up. I've kept a strict account of the days and months, and next week will see the yacht here again, with that sneering, bad-tempered Spaniard. By gad, I'll make him smart one of these days!"

"Of course, I sha'n't touch poor Kingston's hard-earned money. No, Jack, I shall either send it to some hospital, or anonymously to his friends. It's a fine opportunity. It was evidently more than chance that sent him to this island—it was Providence. The path is open before me—when shall I be able to step along it, that's the question? Meanwhile, these will come in handy."

He pocketed a huge claspknife, a watch, and several other useful little articles. Then he rose, placed the stone where he had found it, and walked along the pathway he had previously traversed when climbing to the highest point. But instead of following the upward path, he chose the one that led through the tropical bushes. Here, just for a short distance, he seemed to be in a different atmosphere—the bare ironstone gave place to luxuriant verdure. On both sides of the way grew many-coloured flowers and bushes, while palm and other trees met overhead, and formed a delightful avenue.

Just a few yards further on, in a leafy corner, Graydon had made a little arbour. In this it had been his wont to spend many hours of the blazing days. It almost made him forget where he was, and that only three hundred yards away the bare rock stretched in all directions.

He strolled past this arbour now, lost in thought. Almost opposite was the spring from which he obtained his water—beautiful clear water, it was, cool and refreshing. A twist in the path, and he found himself face to face with a long shed, strong and well-made. He pushed open the door—it was fitted with proper iron hinges, for this erection had been built by the Brotherhood—and looked inside.

It contained nothing but seven solid-looking cases, dingy and battered. But inside those cases were bright yellow ingots—untold wealth—the vast secret hoard of the Brotherhood of Iron. Sometimes, when Don Sebastian paid his annual visit, he took some away with him; sometimes he

brought more to add. It was all according to the state of the Brotherhood's exchequer.

During the next few days Graydon set to work making numerous articles. The claspknife was a valuable acquisition, and many were the implements he furnished for himself. The watch, too, had to be thoroughly dried; that done, it ticked away merrily, and the exile began to feel quite among civilisation again.

He had had serious thoughts of cutting his hair short; then decided that as he had always been on the island, so he would remain. It would be quite time enough to cut it when he succeeded in making his escape.

And then, exactly a week after he had buried the poor remains of Frank Kingston, and when he was looking hourly for the arrival of Don Sebastian, he received the biggest shock since his banishment. He had journeyed to the west of the island in search of a certain wood, and had been in the act of crossing a patch of soft clayey soil—the only piece on the island—that lay half-way up the hill.

His thoughts far away, he had stepped across it, gazing sleepily at the distant horizon through a rift in the trees, for they grew luxuriantly here. Suddenly he felt his attention drawn to the ground. Although not looking downwards, he knew instinctively that something out of the ordinary was there. Quickly he altered the direction of his gaze, and gradually, little by little, the tired expression died from his eyes, and they became set and staring. He recoiled a step, and recovered himself.

"Great Heaven!" he muttered.

His emotion was every bit justified. The sight before him was amazing—stupendous—utterly unaccountable! For there, clearly impressed on the soft clay, was a footprint; but a footprint such as Graydon had never dreamed of seeing until he reached civilisation.

It was small, narrow, and dainty. The pointed toe, the delicate shape, the round imprint of the rubber-heel, all pointed to one amazing fact—to one indisputable conclusion.

The footprint was the footprint of a woman!

#### Dolores de las Mercedes.

"La Reine de France! La Reine de France!"

The good-natured, Parisian crowd cried out the words loudly, as, with a jamming of brakes, the electric-brougham pulled up outside the stage-door of the Theatre de Triomphe. Round there, at the back, the light was none too good, and the people pressed forward to catch a glimpse of the actress who claimed to be a descendant of the Comte de Paris, Louis Philippe; who declared herself to be the rightful Queen of France.

The chauffeur jumped down and opened the door, standing aside, and keeping the crowd back as much as possible. The stage-doorkeeper looked on interestedly, and switched on a couple of electric lights to illuminate the entrance, for this was the first arrival of the evening.

Mdlle. Dolores de las Mercedes, the talk of Parisian theatre-goers, stepped lightly to the ground. Dressed in the latest of fashion, chic and dainty, she looked a pretty picture as she stood for a moment smiling at the cheering crowd. Then she turned and passed inside to the accompaniment of "La Reine de France."

Some of the people were serious, others looked upon the matter as a joke, while still others, especially a group of dark-skinned men near the wall, waved their arms menacingly, and muttered angrily among themselves. Indeed, the claims of this actress were the talk of Paris, and everybody was crowding to the Theatre de Triomphe to see her.

Some people believed she really had a right to the Throne, and these, being Loyalists, grew enthusiastic and excited. Meetings were held, and the police had all their work cut out to keep order. The Republicans, smiling tolerantly, were, nevertheless, vastly interested, and flocked to see her. She was billed everywhere as the rightful heiress to the throne, and as her acting and dancing were really first-class, she became deservedly popular.

But there were others in the French capital besides the frivolous, light-hearted Parisians—there were Anarchists, who swore to wipe out this daring Pretender. They took the matter seriously, and, although she didn't know it, Dolores de las Mercedes went about in danger of her life. The police, with their eyes on her, were uncertain as to whether they should take strict measures or not.

She was certainly breaking no law in proclaiming herself Queen; and yet she was the cause of innumerable meetings and riots. Every day somebody or other would be creating a disturbance, and the police were getting tired of it. Something would have to be done; she would have to be suppressed; she would have to be made to drop her claim to the Crown. After all, it was only a huge advertisement



scheme—the authorities knew well enough who she was. As a means of drawing the crowds, the idea had been a magnificent success. But it must cease. She must either consent to dropping her claims, or be ejected forcibly from the country.

Being a lady, and an extremely beautiful one, the matter was delicate; but the Government would not hesitate—these riots were getting worse, and more than one death had occurred. It could not be said that the deaths lay at Dolores de las Mercedes' door, but it was an indisputable fact that they had been, indirectly, caused by her. Therefore, it was time something was done.

The audience at the Theatre de Triomphe that night was more enthusiastic than ever; the thing was unusual, daring, and deserved applause. Dolores was very beautiful, and the people liked to look upon her as the head of the house. The hostile section were very few.

After the performance was over, a bigger crowd than ever gathered round the stage-door, hoping to catch a glimpse of the famous actress "off." And those who did see her were not one bit disappointed: Dolores was every bit as beautiful off the stage as she was on. Amid numerous shouts, her brougham glided out into the gay and brilliant thoroughfare, en route for her little villa on the outskirts of the city.

Turning into the Boulevard Haussmann, the electric brougham whipped along that magnificent thoroughfare, and nobody noticed that a motor-cyclist kept immediately in its rear. On they went, down the Avenue de Friedland to the imposing Arc de Triomphe. The traffic here caused the brougham to slow down for a moment, and the cyclist, although there was ample room for him to slip through, still remained behind.

Presently the traffic dispersed, and Dolores was allowed to continue her journey. Unlike most actresses, she never remained after the performance, but drove straight home. And her friends, far from being among the "fast set," were respectable citizens, many of them Englishwomen. It was her very respectability that made the people like her. Nobody knew exactly who she was, or where she came from; but that mattered little.

The brougham was gliding down the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne now. As it chanced, there was little or no traffic about just then, and the vehicle had the broad roadway to itself. The man on the motor-cycle glanced swiftly behind him, and seeing there was no other conveyance in view, smiled grimly to himself. Then, quick as a flash, he produced something from one of his pockets.

Judging the distance between himself and the brougham in front, he raised his arm, and threw the object with steady aim. Unfortunately, however, at that precise moment, his machine happened to strike a piece of greasy road, skidded, and caused him to swerve giddily across the roadway. It was too late to recover his aim, however, and the missile, instead of striking Dolores' carriage, flew widely to the left. Bang!

As it struck the earth, it exploded violently, a huge cloud of smoke and dust arose, and the electric-brougham, catching the full force of the explosion, heeled over on its side, and crashed to the ground. The motor-cyclist, unable to pull up in time, endeavoured to steer round the wreckage. With a margin of an inch he shot past, and rode straight into the jagged hole made by the bomb.

In a moment he was pitched over the handlebars, struck the road heavily, and lay still. All this had not occupied more than a second of time, and there was still a heavy cloud of vapour obscuring everything. The sound of running feet made itself heard, intermixed with shouts and groans. Then suddenly everything was commotion; a crowd rapidly gathered, and several gendarmes busied themselves, attending to the chauffeur, who lay in evident agony, pinned down by the brougham. For the moment, nobody thought of looking inside the vehicle.

Dolores, happily, had escaped unhurt, however. The soft cushions had broken the violence of her fall. Having straightened herself, she managed to open the door above her head, and this was noticed by one of the officers. Calling a comrade, he went to the rescue, and a moment later Dolores was standing on firm ground, the centre of attention. Suddenly somebody sent up a shout.

"La Reine de France!"

"Mademoiselle de las Mercedes!"

The crowd pressed closer, but Dolores waved them back. She turned to one of the gendarmes anxiously.

"I hope no one is hurt," she said, in French. "I cannot understand what happened. How is the driver? Did he—"

"The driver, mademoiselle," answered the gendarme coldly, "is unhurt, save for a large bruise on his right leg. He is in considerable pain, but will be attended to at the hospital."

"But how did it happen?"

"Surely you can guess, mademoiselle! These Anarchists take you seriously, and are desirous of killing you! It is a grave matter—"

"A bomb?" questioned Dolores, just a little startled. "But who threw it? Have you not arrested him?"

The police officer turned and pointed grimly to two of his comrades who were bending over something on the ground.

"He needs no arresting, mademoiselle. He is in a worse plight than any, I imagine."

"He is dead?" said Dolores, in a whisper, her beautiful face turning pale.

"No, I think not as bad as that. A broken limb or two, but he will live to stand his trial. His plans did not carry properly, or you would have been blown to pieces. As it is, mademoiselle, you have had a lucky escape."

"I have, indeed. But is there any reason why I should stay? The accident is none of my doing, and the people are getting troublesome. The hour, too, is late."

"I will call a taxi," said the gendarme, still speaking coldly. He had no particular regard for Dolores, for she had caused the police a deal of trouble lately, and now it looked as if matters were getting really serious.

"Thank you," she said quietly.

In a few minutes the taxi-cab pulled up near the overturned brougham, having had a little difficulty in getting through the crowd, who pressed round, eager to catch a glimpse of what was going on. Other traffic was considerably impeded, and stakes were being driven in the ground round the jagged hole. The motor-cycle was a total wreck, and its owner and the chauffeur were awaiting the arrival of the stretcher. Already a couple of newspaper reporters were on the scene, and both were endeavouring to get near the famous actress. The incident would create a big sensation in the morning's papers.

But Dolores was too quick for them. She jumped into the waiting taxi, pressed a coin into the gendarme's hand, slightly modifying his cold looks thereby, and drove rapidly away. Her mind was a little confused, and a large bruise on her right arm was causing considerable pain. Certainly, she had never suspected her novel method of advertising would come to this.

For it was nothing else but advertising. As a matter of fact, she possessed not a drop of French blood in her veins. The scheme had occurred to her several weeks before, when she had been comparatively unknown, and it had answered in a way she had never dreamed of—at present, she was the most talked-of woman in Paris.

The taxi drew up, and she alighted. Her mind was made up—she would not give way to the Government an inch, and would run the risk of getting assassinated.

All this, at first sight, seems entirely off the track. What connection can it possibly have with the Iron Island and its solitary inhabitant? None at all, apparently. But it has a connection, and a very important one, too.

### The Prefect of Police Decides to Use Force.

"The woman must be stopped, Garnier! We cannot possibly allow her to continue her absurd pretence! The idea is ridiculous, on the face of it, and how the public can believe in her is a puzzle to me!"

"Oh, monsieur, you have not seen her! She is a wonderful actress," replied M. Garnier. "The people do not really take her seriously; it is only a few mad-brained Anarchists who are fools enough to believe her heiress to the throne."

"That does not alter the case," said M. Lemerre. The two men, both high officials of the Ministry of the Interior, were seated in one of the Government offices the morning after the bomb outrage in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne. As Dolores had surmised, it had brought matters to a head. M. Lemerre, who was responsible, intended to have no more of it. The matter was a serious one, for the previous night a riot had been created in the lower-part of the city, three men being seriously injured.

Unless matters were altered, very soon there would be something in the nature of a small revolution. Mdlle. de las Mercedes would have to be brought to her senses. She must understand that she could not do as she liked.

"Mademoiselle is obstinate," said M. Garnier, after a while. "She will never consent to our proposal. She will say she is free to do as she chooses, and send you about your business."

"In that case," exclaimed M. Lemerre grimly, "we shall have to use force!"

(Further thrilling developments of the grand new story in next week's Special Christmas Double Number of "The Gem" Library.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 144.

**GRAND CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER** of the "Gem" next **SEE PAGE 28.**  
Thursday.



## Concluding Chapters of this Great Sea Story.

## In the Service of the King.

By LIEUTENANT LEFEVRE.

## Read this First.

Oswald Yorke, a young ex-highwayman, joins the Navy as a midshipman under the name of John Smith. His ship, the Cynthia, is dispatched to the Island of San Andrade, to investigate the conduct of a certain family of planters named Wilson, who are suspected of complicity with the notorious pirate, Kester. The warship lands a party of bluejackets, who find the island laid waste and the Wilsons fled. Amidst the general ruin, however, a negro is found who is not quite dead, and attempts are made to revive him.

(Now go on with the story.)

## The Negro's Story.

"It's all over with the poor fellow," said Bigben. "I guess it was his hand as made them marks on that snake's throat," he added, glancing at the dead body of the pirate. "I reckon it were a struggle for liberty between 'em, and the fellow was trying to save the young woman, who, maybe, was his wife."

"I'd 'a' given somethin' to 'a' been here then!" he muttered, eying the corpse ferociously.

But now the negro gave signs of returning consciousness. He opened his eyes, and again attempted to speak, and this time the words came, though so feebly that Oswald had to go down on to his knees and bend his head close to the man's mouth.

"Pirates come and try to take black people away," he muttered. "Try to put dem in ship and sell dem, slabs. Massa Wilson, him go 'long wid pirates, and him say bring my people, we sell dem slabs; but some ob de black niggers fight, and dere is blood spilled."

"He says that Wilson has gone with the pirates, who have taken the negro servants with them to sell as slaves," said Oswald.

The negro nodded.

"One pirate tef take Mary—dat my wife—and I follow him dere and try save her; den he stab her to de heart wid him long knife, and him and me fight. I tink I kill him, but not certain. I hope so."

For a few moments the man relapsed into unconsciousness again, while Oswald waited eagerly.

"A little more of the drink, Bigben," he said; and when they had forced a few more drops between the man's white lips he again struggled back into sensibility.

"Mr. Wilson went with the pirates. His son went with him?" Oswald asked.

"Dey go togeder; dey was badder as de pirates demselves."

"And Miss Norah?"

"Her dey take, too; she cry and fume; but dey push her long, and make her go. She trow herself to de ground and cry and beg for marcy; but dey laugh and force her to her feet, and put her in dey boat. I see her face as dey row away from de shore."

Oswald drew a long breath. Norah was alive, but in the hands of those ruffians. But her uncle and cousin were with her, and surely they would protect her.

The negro's head had fallen back, his sightless eyes, wide open, were turned upwards to the sky; but he was still breathing. For some little time they stood around him, watching, and powerless to help. Then it seemed to them that he ceased to breathe.

"He's gone, poor fellow, sure 'nuff!" said the boatswain compassionately.

But the old man was mistaken. Suddenly a tremor passed over the body; the muscles contracted, drawing his knees upwards until they were on a level with his chest. For a moment he lay there writhing; then suddenly, with almost superhuman strength, he leaped to his feet. For a moment he stood glaring about

him with his sightless eyes; then he staggered forward, and, without a groan, fell face downwards across the body of his enemy.

"It is all over," said the boatswain. He motioned to some of the men to come forward.

"We'll place them where the birds can't touch them," he said, looking up at the pair of vultures that were still hovering high overhead, only waiting for their going, to swoop down and satisfy their horrible craving.

The men lifted the bodies of the two negroes and the little child, and laid them side by side on the earthen floor. Then they went out and closed the door, leaving them united in death.

## Mischief!

The two other parties had the same tale to tell when they met on the beach and compared notes. Dead bodies lying hither and thither, hidden among the tall grass, and all of them negroes—men and women. Many of the negroes had evidently made a stand for freedom, and had been cruelly butchered; and some of the injuries which the dead bodies exhibited proved with what inhuman ferocity the pirates had carried on the fight.

Very quietly the men embarked, and pushed off from the shore. The horrors that they had seen had sobered and quietened them, and scarcely a word passed between any until the frigate was reached.

With hands clasped before him, and his head hung down despondently, Oswald made the trip back to the Cynthia.

In his own mind he scarcely knew whether to be glad or to grieve that Norah was still living. He could imagine how her delicate, sensitive nature would recoil from the rough brutes by whom she was surrounded. Her life on board the pirate ship must be a daily horror to her.

He clenched his fists with impotent rage, and lifted his head to sweep the clear horizon with his eyes.

Not a speck nor spot, no sign of a sail.

His head dropped again despondently.

The boats ran under the frigate's counter, their crews clambered on board, and Mr. Briggs went aft to make his report to the captain.

Maxwell slipped his arm through Oswald's.

"That little brute means mischief!" he said, in an undertone. "Didn't you see the malignant look he gave you as he passed?"

"No," said Oswald indifferently.

His mind was filled with other thoughts than of the contemptible bully, Briggs.

"And really it wasn't you who snatched the stick out of his hand?" asked Maxwell.

Oswald smiled.

"Didn't you hear Garvin own up to it?" he said.

"Yes; but I didn't know. You were very close—"

"I will confess that Garvin only forestalled me by a quarter of a second. He did it; but I was going to," said Oswald.

"That Garvin isn't such a prig as we thought he was at first. Look here, old chap, it is no good worrying yourself," Maxwell went on, in a lower voice. "She has her uncle and her cousin with her, besides Kester. He's an infernal villain, I know; but there is something about the man that compels a certain amount of respect."

"I wish he were here now, standing before me, at this moment," said Oswald, between his clenched teeth.

"Well, he isn't, and so it's no good wishing. But, you take my word for it, it won't be many days before we see the cut of his jib. The skipper isn't going to give in just because those precious Wilsons don't happen to be sitting here waiting for him. The luck has been against us, so far, and that makes him only the more determined to carry out his orders. He's not Burgoyne, you know."

"I wonder where Burgoyne is? I wonder what he is doing?"

"I heard he had taken passage for England on board a merchantman. Whether it was true or not, I don't know. Anyhow, he isn't here; and that is something to be thankful for."

They had turned away, and were about to descend to their quarters, when Dicky Davis, with a scared expression on his face, came hurrying after them.

(This thrilling serial story will be concluded shortly.)

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