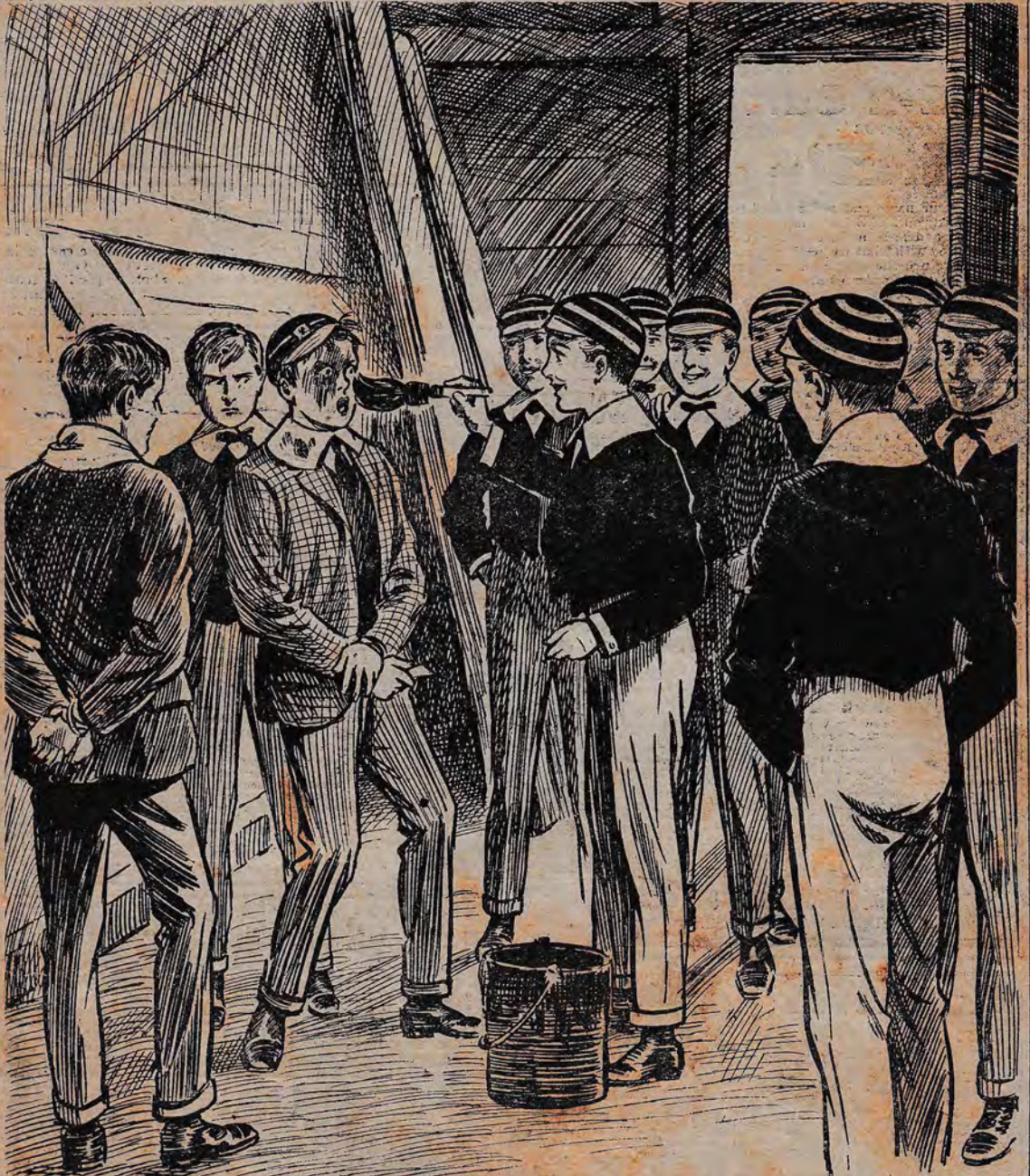


In this Issue

"SAINTS *versus* GRAMMARIANS."

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TALE OF TOM MERRY & CO.
AND THEIR RIVALS OF THE
GRAMMAR SCHOOL.



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"THE SCHOOLMASTER'S RESCUE."

Another Splendid Tale of Tom Merry & Co.
at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

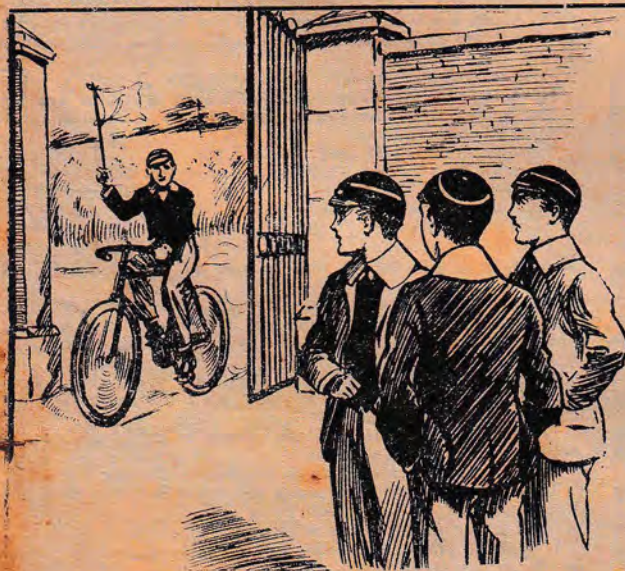
Every

Thursday



Complete Stories for All and Every Story a Gem!

Our Readers are informed that the characters in the following Story are purely imaginary, and no reference or allusion is made to any living person. Actual names may be unintentionally mentioned, but the Editor wishes it to be distinctly understood that no adverse personal reflection is intended.)



Saints versus Grammarians.

A Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale
of TOM MERRY & CO. of St. Jim's, and
their Rivals, FRANK MONK & CO., of
Rylcombe Grammar School.

— BY —

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

A Modern Knight-Errant.

"WHAT'S the matter with Gussy?"

Blake, the leader of the Fourth-Form juniors at St. Jim's, asked the question of his chum, Herries, and Herries asked it of Blake. Both of them asked Digby, who couldn't answer. Then all three questioned Tom Merry, who shook his head and gave it up.

The chums of Study No. 6 were puzzled, and so were the Terrible Three—puzzled and somewhat exasperated.

The extraordinary behaviour of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's, was worrying them at a time when they had sufficient to worry them already.

Warfare between the "Saints" and the neighbouring Grammar School in Rylcombe, always in the air, had recently broken out with redoubled energy, and the juniors of St. Jim's had enough to do to keep their end up against their rivals.

As a matter of fact, they had not succeeded in doing this very well lately. They had formed an anti-Grammarians Co., consisting of Tom Merry & Co., Blake & Co., and Figgins & Co., of the New House. The latter firm was reinforced at present by the presence of Marmaduke Smythe, the millionaire's son, who was a former member of the famous New House Co., but who had left St. Jim's, and was now on a visit to his old school. The anti-Grammarians Co. had been working on the principle of the Macedonians of old—they elected a new leader every day from among their number, with full powers of chieftainship—for the time. So far, this system had not proved a success. Blake, Lowther,

and Figgins had, in turn, led expeditions against the enemy, with results disastrous to the St. Jim's juniors.

The Grammarians were in high feather. Their success was unbroken, and they had actually won back two-thirds of a precious document which had been wrung from them in the past by their rivals. This document, which was an acknowledgment from the leaders of the Grammar School that they had been thoroughly licked, had been divided into three parts by the victorious St. Jim's juniors, and one third had been preserved for many a long day in the study of each of the three famous Co.'s. Now but one fragment remained to St. Jim's, and Frank Monk & Co., of the Grammar School, were confident of gaining that.

The juniors of the old college, on the other hand, were on fire to regain what they had lost, but the question was how this could best be accomplished?

This problem was exercising the minds of all the leading lights of St. Jim's—including D'Arcy—until one morning. Then Arthur Augustus had shown this strange preoccupation which was so puzzling to his chums.

The Terrible Three observed it in time. They exchanged notes with Blake, Herries, and Digby, but none of the six could throw any light on the subject.

They were talking about it after early chapel, when Arthur Augustus passed them, walking alone with a pensive brow.

The swell of the School House evidently did not see them staring at him. He walked by with his nose in the air, a far-away expression in his eyes, and what Blake described as an idiotic smile upon his chivvy.

"What's the matter with him?" muttered Blake. "Can he have gone off his rocker in the night?"

Next Thursday:

"TOM MERRY & CO." AND "THE BROTHERHOOD OF IRON."

No. 163 (New Series.)

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"Perhaps he's thinking out some terrific wheeze for bringing the Grammar cads down on their marrowbones?" suggested Tom Merry.

"Possibly. Let's ask him."

"If he is," said Digby, "he won't tell us what it is unless he's selected captain. You know what an obstinate mule he can be when he likes!"

"Well, let's ask him, anyway!" exclaimed Herries. "He looks as if he'd got something on his chest, or was composing a poem or something. He may be making up something for the next number of the 'Weekly,' you know. Poets often look like that."

The juniors approached D'Arcy, and so preoccupied was the swell of the School House with his mysterious reflections that he did not see them until he had walked right into Tom Merry, and dropped his eyeglass with the shock.

Then he gave a sudden start.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, that is extremewly wuff and wude of you!" he said crossly. "You ought not to get into my way, and make me wun into you!"

"Why don't you look where you are going, and not wander round like a giddy moon-calf?" demanded the hero of the Shell severely.

"Eh?" said D'Arcy vacantly.

"Why don't you look where you're going?" bawled Tom Merry. "Are you deaf?"

"Yaas, wathah! I mean, no, certainly not!"

"That sounds rather mixed. Are you off your rocker?"

"No—yes— Pway don't bothah me!"

The juniors looked at one another. It was certain that Arthur Augustus had something on his mind, or he would not have answered at random like that.

"Are you thinking about the Grammar School?" asked Blake, "Thinking out some wheeze for knocking Monk & Co. into a cocked hat?"

"Gwammah School?" said Arthur Augustus vaguely.

"What Gwammah School?"

The chums stared blankly at D'Arcy. What Grammar School? They could scarcely believe their ears. What Grammar School? Certainly D'Arcy must be right off his rocker!

"My dear kid," said Blake kindly, "if there's anything the matter with you, just confide it to your uncle. What's the trouble?"

"Twouble? I am twoubled by a set of inquisitive asses, you know!" said D'Arcy. "I haven't any othah twouble at pwesent!"

"Look here," said Dig, "you're going to work the right way to get used as a duster, Algernon Adolphus. Do you want to be used to wipe up the quad?"

"Certainly not. I distinctly wefuse. Pway don't wowwy me!"

"Then tell us what's the matter with you? What are you mooning about?"

"Nothin'. I do not wish to be bothahed—"

"There's to be a meeting of the Co. in the wood-shed—"

"Eh? Meetin'? I can't come!"

"What!"

Six voices howled out the word together.

The juniors were simply astounded. Not come to the meeting! The world was surely coming to an end!

"Are you wandering in your mind, Gussy?" asked Lowther. "If you want a doctor, say so, and we'll wire for one."

"Pway wotire and leave me in peace—"

"We'll leave you in pieces if we have much more of your rotting!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What the dickens do you mean by —?"

A bell began to ring, and the hero of the Shell broke off. The juniors trooped in to morning lessons. As they went into the Fourth Form-room, Blake caught Figgins's eye, and acquainted him with the strange mysteriousness which had haunted the swell of the School House that morning.

Figgins grinned expressively.

"I say, you don't know what's the matter, do you?" asked Blake, in astonishment. "We can't get on to it ourselves."

"Ha, ha! I think I can form a guess."

"Well, what is your guess, then?"

"Don't you remember the time when the doctor's niece was staying at the school?" grinned Figgins. "D'Arcy fell in love with her. He looked just like that then!"

Blake gave a start.

"My hat! Do you think, then—"

"Well, it looks like it. You can see that for yourself."

Blake rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"I remember that time, of course. Gussy was mooning about like a calf. But who is there at St. Jim's for him to fall in love with? It can't be Mary, the housemaid, can it?"

"Ha, ha! Perhaps it's Mrs. Mimms, the house-dame."

"Take your seats, boys," said little Mr. Latham mildly.

"You must not talk in the class-room. D'Arcy, you are late."

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"Yaas, wathah! I mean, I am sowwy, sir."

Arthur Augustus took his place. Figgins watched him curiously. Under cover of his books the swell of St. Jim's drew a letter from the inside pocket of his jacket, and began to read it, evidently not for the first time.

Figgins nudged Blake as he saw D'Arcy's action.

"You see that, Blake?"

"My word! Yes. I remember he had a letter this morning."

"That's it, then," chuckled Figgins, "and it's from some lady. My hat! There's going to be some more fun, I think. Gussy was excruciating the last time he was in love, and if he's got another attack, it will be something to keep us cheerful in the evenings."

The swell of St. Jim's was so absent-minded during morning school that any master but Mr. Latham would have been extremely exasperated. As it was, he escaped with an imposition, which he forgot before the class was dismissed.

The chums watched him go out into the quad. He drew the letter from his pocket again, and read it under the elms. The idiotic smile Blake had remarked upon was seen to play once more over his face.

"Hallo, look there!" exclaimed Digby suddenly.

Gore, of the Shell, whose lapses from the paths of decency were becoming sadly frequent of late, was approaching the swell of St. Jim's from behind, with the creeping motion of a cat, and all of a sudden he reached out and snatched the letter.

Arthur Augustus gave a shriek of rage.

Gore tore off with the letter, and D'Arcy started in hot pursuit. Gore was giggling as he ran, and the chums could not help laughing, too.

"Stop!" shouted D'Arcy. "Stop, you wascal! I say, stop him, deah boys! The wottah has stolen my beastly lettah, you know."

Tom Merry ran into Gore's path.

"Get out of the way!" shouted Gore.

Tom Merry, without replying, caught him by the collar. D'Arcy came panting up, and he tore the letter from Gore's hand.

"I have a good mind to give you a feafuhl thwashin', Gore," he exclaimed. "You are a weally wotten wascal, you know. I weally believe that you would have wead my letter."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Gore, walking away ill-temperedly. He had intended to read that letter out to a select circle of juniors, and he was disappointed.

D'Arcy put the letter into his pocket with a great sigh of relief.

"I am extremewly obliged to you, Tom Mewwy," he said. "That wascal would have wead the letter out, and it would have been vewy compwominisn, you know."

"What the dickens does it all mean?" asked Tom Merry. "Why can't you explain like a sensible, sane person? Who is that letter from?"

"From a lady," said D'Arcy—"a lady in gweat distwess. I cannot tell you more, as it would be bwreakin' the confidence the fair cweature weposes in me."

"Ha, ha! Beauty in distress, and you're going to rescue the fair damosel from the wicked enemy!" exclaimed Lowther. "Gussy, you're too funny to live."

"I uttably fail to see anythin' at all funnay in the matter," said D'Arcy frigidly. "There is nothin' funnay in beauty in distwess."

"My word, if you're not off!" said Blake, coming up. "Tell us who the letter is from, Gussy. Is it Mary, the housemaid?"

"Pway do not make such fwivolous wemarks on such a sewious subject, Blake."

"No, I know who it's from," said Lowther, shaking his head.

Arthur Augustus gave a start.

"Weally, Lowthah, I fail to see how you can possibly know—"

"But I do. It's from the girl in the confectioner's shop in Rylcombe—"

"Lowthah, I am uttably disgusted with the fwivoly of the suggestion."

"Then who is it?" exclaimed Digby. "Is it from Tom Merry's old governess?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Herries.

"Here, draw it mild!" said Tom Merry. "No jokes on that subject, please."

Digby made a graceful bow.

"Sorry! That was a slip. You know we all respect Miss Fawcett, Tom. But who can the lady be?"

"The doctor's niece isn't here—"

"Pway don't make such wemarks, deah boys! You pain me."

"Then you won't tell us?"

"Certainly not!"

"Gussy, are you looking for trouble?" asked Blake. "Are you yearning to be used as a duster to clear up some of the mud in the quad?"

"My dear chap, can you ask me to bweak a confidence?"

"No, of course not, but we know that's all rot."

"I hope," said D'Arcy, with emphasis, "that no gentleman pwsent doubts my word?"

"My dear lunatic—"

"I stwongly object to bein' addressed in that oppwobvious mannah."

"Never mind; you'll get used to it. We don't doubt your word, you know, but we think you are being hoaxed. In a word, the fair one is rotting."

"I have no more to say to any of you on the mattah," said Arthur Augustus haughtily. "A suggestion that the lady who has witten to me is wotting is simply unpardonable. I no longah wegard any of you as my fwriends."

The Co. gasped in unison.

Arthur Augustus was riding the high horse with a vengeance now.

"Suppose we made you captain—"

"Anothah time, deah boy. At pwsent I am occupied with more important affairs. Pway wun away and play!"

And D'Arcy walked off, with his nose in the air.

The Co. stared after him, and at one another. There was nothing to be made of Arthur Augustus. That was clear.

CHAPTER 2. The Tryst.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS, having escaped from his inquisitive friends, proceeded to a quiet corner of the old quadrangle of St. Jim's, and proceeded to read the letter over again.

It was written in a small and delicate hand, evidently that of a female, and it was couched in the most engaging terms.

No wonder it had made so deep an impression on the swell of the School House. It ran as follows:

"Dear Friend,—Will you pardon the boldness of one who admires and esteems you in thus venturing to address you without an introduction?"

"I am in great distress of mind, and need a brave and gallant friend to help me, and the moment I saw you I knew that an appeal would not be made in vain to your noble heart."

"You are so distinguished from your schoolfellows that my eye sought you out at once, and my heart told me that here was the friend I needed."

"Will you help me? Will you try to help me? What my trouble is I cannot tell you in writing, in case my persecutor should— But I must not say more. I dare not! Will you meet me and let me confide all to you?"

"I rely upon you. I know that you are courage and generosity personified. Take pity on an unhappy one who has no one but yourself to help her, and meet me at the stile in Rylcombe Lane at half-past three this afternoon.—Yours imploringly,
A PERSECUTED MAIDEN."

D'Arcy had read the letter through a dozen times already, but his eyes flashed and his fists clenched as he read it again.

"A persecuted maiden!" he muttered. "Howwible! I am just the right fellow to help her. I will dwp on the persecutah like a sack of bwicks, and give him such a feafuh thwashin' that he won't be able to cwawl about for a week. Yaas, wathah!"

Then his face softened.

"Distinguished fwom my schoolfellows!" he murmured. "Yaas, wathah! Women have such keen insight, wathah, and they can see these things. I should nevah get Blake or Tom Mewwy to admit it, but this lovely girl can see it at once. I will wush to the wescue! Wathah!"

He put the letter in his pocket at last.

Then he went into the School House with a slow step and a thoughtful brow. He had something of more consequence than a row with the Grammarians to think of now.

He looked at his watch. It wanted an hour and a half to the time of the meeting, and as the walk might take half an hour, it was time to dress.

D'Arcy snatched a hurried dinner, and repaired to his quarters to dress. The place was littered all over with shirts and ties, hats and spats, waistcoats and collars, before he had finished.

He was going to meet a lady in distress, and it was, of course, requisite to put on his very best gear, and D'Arcy did not fail to do it.

When he had finished dressing he certainly looked as neat as a new pin, and quite fit to win the heart of any lady, distressed or otherwise, in the United Kingdom.

He surveyed himself in the tall glass which had been brought into Study No. 6 at his own expense, pier-glasses not being as a rule furnished in Fourth Form studies.

The result was quite satisfactory.

From the summit of his high, shining topper to the soles of his shoes, from his beautifully set tie to his nobby spats, from his diamond sleeve-links to his gold-rimmed eyeglass, from his fancy waistcoat to his lavender kid gloves, Arthur Augustus was a picture.

"Yaas, I weally think I look wathah nice," he murmured. "Distinguished from my schoolfellows! Yaas, wathah! What keen insight the girls have, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus picked up his gold-headed cane, and walked out of the School House.

Many an admiring eye watched him go.

"My word!" said Monteith, the head-prefect of the New House, to Kildare. "Gussy looks more ripping than ever! That kid ought to be in a shop window."

Kildare laughed.

"Whither bound, D'Arcy?" he inquired, as the swell of the School House passed.

D'Arcy looked at him languidly.

"I am goin' out for a little wun, Kildare," he said.

"Going out for a little one?" said Monteith, looking puzzled. "What little one? Whose little one? You're not going to mind a baby, are you?"

D'Arcy gazed at the New House prefect with a perfectly withering expression.

"I am going for a wun," he replied coldly.

And he walked on with his nose held high.

He passed out of the gates of St. Jim's as the clock in the tower boomed out the quarter past three.

Arthur Augustus gave a start.

"A quartah past!" he murmured. "Weally, it has taken me longah to dwess than I expected. I shall have to wun like anythin'."

And he started at a trot down the lane.

It was impossible to "wun like anythin'," however, as the wind showed a strong inclination to blow his silk hat off, and it was impossible to look after it and to keep his eyeglass on at the same time, especially as he had to carefully avoid the mud in the lane for the sake of keeping his beautiful spats clean.

That run along Rylcombe Lane was, in fact, a torture to Arthur Augustus, but he faced it manfully in the cause of chivalry.

The stile came in sight at last, and D'Arcy could now hear the village church clock, which chimed out the half-hour.

He was just in time at the rendezvous. He stopped breathless at the stile, and was rather relieved to see that no one was there. The lady was not on the spot yet. It gave him time to look himself over and remove all traces of his hurry.

He rubbed two or three spots of mud from his trousers, and wiped his eyeglass and adjusted it. He settled his collar and tie to his satisfaction. Then, five minutes having elapsed, D'Arcy looked up and down the lane.

But there was no beauty in distress to be seen.

D'Arcy's heart sank a little. He remembered the immemorial privilege of the gentle sex, to be as late for any appointment as their humour might dictate. How long was he destined to wait at the stile in Rylcombe Lane?

It was very cold weather, and a keen wind was blowing from the wood. D'Arcy was warmly clad, but it was cold work standing still. He looked this way and that way, hoping that the fair damsel whose wrongs he had come to right would soon appear on the horizon. He was so engaged when a sudden sound of sobbing broke on his ears.

It came from the other side of the stile, and in a moment D'Arcy whirled round and glanced along the footpath which led into the wood.

Under the trees, half-hidden from view, he could see a form, and the garb showed that it was a member of the superior half of humanity. D'Arcy could have kicked himself. Of course, the persecuted maiden was waiting under the trees to escape general view from the passers-by; just the thing a modest and retiring persecuted maiden would do!

Arthur Augustus crossed the stile and approached the female form under the trees. The persecuted maiden was wearing a long cloak, which covered her to her feet, and a very large hat. Her handkerchief was held to her face, and so D'Arcy could not see it, and the sound of sobbing increased as she heard the footsteps of the swell of St. Jim's. Although her face was covered, she had doubtless had a peep at the junior from behind the handkerchief.

"My dear young lady—" said D'Arcy, raising his topper in the most graceful way—a salute which was quite lost on the maiden, as she did not look up.

The sobbing increased in violence, and Arthur Augustus, who fully understood how his voice must have made the lady's heart beat, was quite concerned.

"My dear young lady," he said, "I—I weally wish you would twy to calm yourself! You are in no dangah now."

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If your persecutah should come along, I will give him a feahful thwashin'!"

A gurgling sound came from underneath the handkerchief. But for the fact that the fair unknown was stricken with grief, D'Arcy would have imagined that she was laughing. But that, of course, was impossible.

"You are quite safe with me," said Arthur Augustus, approaching nearer. "Pway calm yourself! I weceived your lettah at the school. It was you who w'ote that charmin' lettah, of course?"

"Yes," came in a faint whisper from under the handkerchief.

"I was weally extwemely honoured by your confidence," said D'Arcy. "I made up my mind at once to wush to the wescue, and I huvwied like anythin'. But I do not think that I know your charmin' name."

"I—I will tell you later."

The words were murmured in broken tones.

"Pway do not cwy!" said Arthur Augustus. "Pway wemove that handkerchief, so that I may see your beautiful face, my deah friend!"

Again that gurgling sound.

"No, no; I cannot! I must remain unknown," said the maiden, in a hurried whisper. "If you should see my face all would be lost."

"I weally do not compwehend."

"I will explain afterwards. Even now my enemies may be on the track, and they may find me here at any moment. Suppose they should find me with you?"

And the fair unknown trembled violently.

The swell of St. Jim's grasped his gold-headed cane, and looked decidedly warlike.

"Let them all come!" he exclaimed. "I do not care if they come, my fair friend. You are quite safe with me. I will pwoteet you. I should weally and twuly like to meet your base persecutah at this moment. I would give him a feahful thwashin'!"

"Yes, yes; but I am afraid—I am afraid!"

"There is absolutely nothin' to be afraid of," said Arthur Augustus reassuringly. "There is no one in sight. And if there was, am I not here to pwoteet you to the last drop of my blood? Pway weassure yourself!"

"But I tremble—I tremble!"

"Pway do not twemble!"

"But I do. And—and, oh, come farther into the wood, where I may tell you my terrible story unseen!"

"With gweat pleasuah!"

With her handkerchief still held to her eyes, its folds quite concealing her face, the persecuted maiden led the way farther into Rylcombe Wood. In spite of the handkerchief, she seemed to see her way pretty well.

D'Arcy followed, feeling rather nonplussed. He had come there to rescue a distressed beauty from some terrible danger, and how was he to do it unless he knew what was the matter? And a horrid fear was weighing on his mind that the persecuted maiden might go into hysterics.

The persecuted maiden stopped under the thick trees, some twenty yards from the lane. There was a sound of sobbing again.

"How brave, how noble of you to come to my aid!" she murmured. "But I knew the appeal would not be made in vain—I knew that you would come! Are you not distinguished from all your schoolfellows by your courage and your noble bearing?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Are you not the bravest and the handsomest of all the juniors at St. Jim's?"

"You weally flattah me."

"Not at all. Could I fail to see how you stand, in every respect, head and shoulders above any other fellow at St. Jim's?"

"Well, no, pewwaps not," said D'Arcy.

Then he looked round quickly.

A sound had come from under the trees, and it sounded so remarkably like a suppressed chuckle that D'Arcy was alarmed. But there was no one in sight.

"Could I," went on the persecuted damsel enthusiastically—"could I mistake that noble bearing, that haughty glance, that fiery eye, which seemed to tell me that a Paladin had revisited the earth in—in an Eton suit?"

"You are vewy flattahin'," said D'Arcy. "I weally—" Then he swung round again.

This time he was certain he had heard a chuckle behind him. He screwed the eyeglass into his eye and stared among the trees. The colour mounted to his face as he distinctly saw a foot showing from behind the trunk of a big oak.

It was a boy's boot he saw, and he could not have any further doubt that the scene had witnesses—probably from the Grammar School.

And a terrible suspicion shot into his mind. Was it all a hoax? The persecuted damsel—was she a humbug, and had

she led him into a trap? It was curious that she should have persisted in keeping her face covered all this time.

"No," went on the maiden—"no, I could not be mistaken! When I saw your gallant form and imposing brow, I knew that I was saved, and that I had only to—to write you a note, to make you 'wun like anythin' to the wescue.'"

D'Arcy gave a jump.

It was certainly not in keeping with a persecuted maiden's character to parody his exquisite style of speech in this way.

"Weally—" began D'Arcy haughtily.

There was a shout of laughter behind the trees. The spectators could contain it no longer. D'Arcy turned crimson. "I am afraid that a deception has been pwactised on me," he said. "I am weally snupwised at your conduct, madam."

"Oh, say not so!" cried the persecuted damsel, in great distress. "If you look upon my face you will know why I have led you hither."

"Then pway let me see your face!" said D'Arcy, relenting a little.

The handkerchief was lowered at last. D'Arcy looked at the face under it, and nearly jumped off the ground.

It was not a grief-stricken female face he saw; it was the grinning countenance of Frank Monk, the chief of the Grammar School juniors!

"Fwank Monk!"

CHAPTER 3.

The Ransom.

"HA, ha, ha!"

It was a yell of laughter from the wood.

"Fwank Monk!" repeated Arthur Augustus dazedly. He could only stare helplessly at the persecuted maiden, who had turned out in such an unexpected manner to be the Grammarian leader.

Monk was nearly hysterical with laughter, long suppressed. "Fwank Monk, you are a beastly cad!" said D'Arcy indignantly. "So you w'ote me this wotten, beastly lettah, did you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" gurgled Monk. "I got my sister to write it for me."

"And you bwought me here for nothin', did you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as a cad—as a beastly wottah! I considah you a wank outsidah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I despise you feahfully!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I would give you a feahful thwashin', but you are not worth it!" said D'Arcy; and he turned to stalk away majestically.

But half a dozen Grammarians were crowding out from their ambush, and Carboy and Lane blocked the path of the indignant swell of St. Jim's.

Frank Monk, hiccoughing with laughter, threw aside the cloak and hat, and stood revealed in his proper person.

"Stand aside!" exclaimed D'Arcy, as the Grammarians stopped him. "Stand aside, or I shall pwobably lose my tempah and stwike you with violence!"

"Collar him!" shouted Frank.

"We've got him!" grinned Carboy, and he laid his hand on D'Arcy's shoulder.

But Arthur Augustus was in earnest, and his fist crashed on Carboy's nose with a force that made the Grammarian roll over on the ground, and split D'Arcy's glove.

"Ow!" roared Carboy. "He's nearly busted my boko! Hold him!"

Lane was already holding him. Several other Grammarians came to his aid, and Arthur Augustus was secured. He did not resist very much. A rough-and-tumble scramble would have spoiled his clothes.

"Pway do not lay your unpleasant paws on my collah!" said Arthur Augustus frigidly. "I am your beastly pwisonah, but I stwongly object to havin' my collah soiled!"

"I'm afraid you're going to get the collar and the rest of you soiled," said Frank Monk. "What price rolling him in the pool in the wood?"

"Good!" said every voice at once.

Arthur Augustus shuddered.

"Pway do not do anythin' so extwemely beastly!" he exclaimed. "You are a beastly set of wuffians, I know, but you should dwaw a line somewheah."

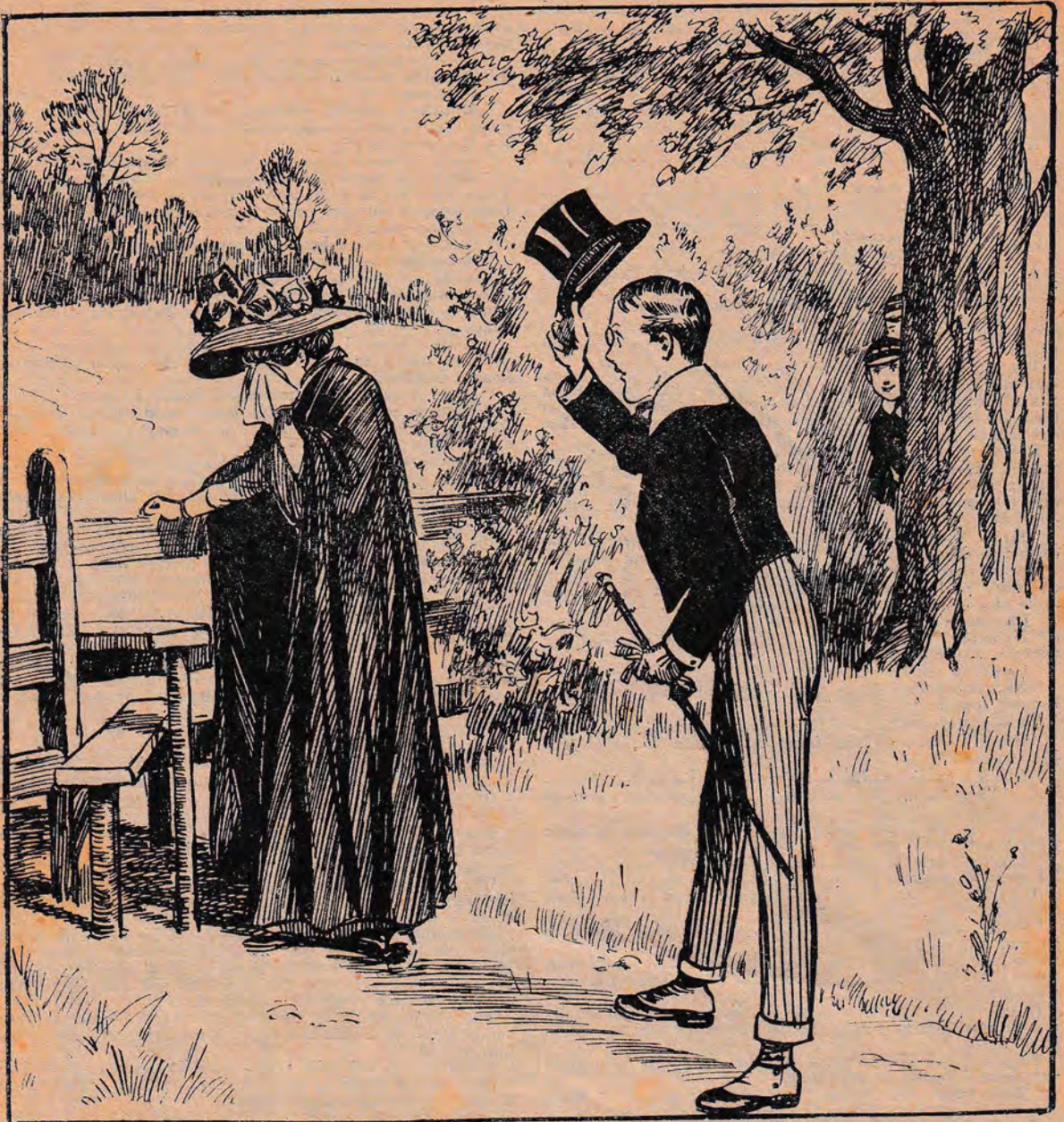
"Lemme see," Frank said, considering. "Of course, you know what we've played this little jape off on you for, Gussy Adolphus?"

"My name is not Adolphus."

"Well, Algernon, then. You know what we want?"

"Yaas, wathah! You want a feahful thwashin'!"

"Ha, ha! I don't mean that. We want the remaining part of the surrender document which you fellows have in Study No. 6 at St. Jim's."



"My dear young lady," said D'Arcy, raising his silk hat in the most graceful way, "I—I weally wish you would try to calm yourself! You are in no dangah now! If your persecutah should come along, I will give him a fearful thwashin'." (See page 3.)

Arthur Augustus gave a start.

"Ah, is that the weason of this wascally pwoceedin'?" he said. "Well, I assuah you that you will be disappointed, you know."

"I don't think so. We haven't taken all this trouble for nothing."

"Let's souse him in the pool!" said Lane impatiently.

"I wefuse to be soused in the pool."

"Wait a bit!" said Frank. "Where's that letter? He's got it about him. Now, Gussy, how would you like that touching epistle made public property at St. Jim's, and the story of this pathetic meeting in a wood told to all the chaps?"

D'Arcy turned pale at the thought. He stood a great deal of chipping from the juniors of St. Jim's with great serenity. But this would be a different matter. If the whole school knew how he had been taken in, he felt that he could never face the fellows again.

His ears burned at the thought of the chaff he would have to undergo. Figgins & Co. would get hold of it, and never

let him hear the end of it. There would be endless references to it in "Tom Merry's Weekly."

Frank Monk watched the expression of D'Arcy's face, and knew that he had won.

"Now, make up your mind," he said. "We're after the document, and we're going to have it. We've got two-thirds of it, and we want the other third. Then we're going to paste it up together, with an inscription on it to the effect that we licked St. Jim's hollow, and got it from them as a trophy of victory, and we shall keep it hanging up in the common-room. See the idea? We've got to have that document. If you don't let us have it, Gussy, you'll get chipped to death."

"I should wegard it a bweach of confidence to tell any of these cires, to the fellows at St. Jim's."

"Rats! Pay up your ransom, and we'll keep mum, of course."

"Weally, Fwank Monk—"

"Come, yes or no. If you don't agree, we'll send this letter to Gore at St. Jim's, with a full explanation of the

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whole thing. He's the chap to spread it over the school and make the most of it."

"Pway don't do anythin' of the kind!"

"Are we to have our document, then?"

"It is weally not my property. It belongs to the whole study, and there are four of us."

"Yes, I know; but the word of one binds the lot," said Monk. "I know your rules. If you promised to give up the document, Blake would let you do it."

"Yaas, wathah; but they might give me a study lickin' for pwomisin'."

"I shouldn't wonder. That's your look-out. Are you going to send us the document, or are you going to be shown up at St. Jim's, and rolled in the pool into the bargain?"

"I am in your hands."

"You agree?" demanded Monk.

"Yaas, wathah!" said the swell of the School House, with a sigh. "But I considah—"

"Never mind what you considah—you promise?"

"Yaas, wathah! Honah bwight!"

"Good!" said Monk, with much satisfaction. "Let him go."

The Grammarians escorted Arthur Augustus to the stile, and saw him down the lane to St. Jim's. The swell of the School House walked away looking very crestfallen. The Grammarians howled with laughter as he went, and that sound was the last D'Arcy heard of them.

In a dejected mood the swell of St. Jim's entered the old gates. There he ran right into the Co. They stared at him, noting his changed demeanour instantly. They surrounded him, and asked questions, and there was no escape for Arthur Augustus.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Have you rescued the damsel in distress already? You haven't been long gone."

"Gussy has established a record for rescuing damseis in distress," said Lowther. "Have you restored her to the arms of her sobbing parents, Gussy?"

"Oh, pway don't wot! Let me pass!"

"Nonsense!" said Blake. "Haven't you any thrilling adventure to tell us about?"

"Certainly not."

"No hairbreadth escapes in the imminent deadly breeches—I mean breach?"

"Pway don't make such fwivolous wemarks!"

"Haven't you slew the traitor? Haven't you slain the Jabberwock?"

"I wefuse to discuss the mattah at all," said Arthur Augustus. "Pway let me pass, or I shall pwobably lose my tempah and stwike you."

"Rats!" said Marmaduke Smythe. "Explain instantly what deadly perils you have been in, Gussy."

"I haven't been in any beasty deadly pewils," said D'Arcy.

"I want to speak to you three fellows—Blake and Hewwies and Digby—on an important mattah. Let these othah boundahs go and play at marbles."

"Come along, then," said Blake. "You other boundahs go and play at marbles."

The chums of the Fourth marched off to their study with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, leaving the rest of the Co. considerably puzzled.

D'Arcy did not speak a word till they were within Study No. 6, and then he closed the door carefully and turned to his comrades.

They watched him in some surprise. D'Arcy seemed to find some difficulty in beginning.

"Well, what's the matter?" asked Blake at last. "Have you something to say, Gussy? If you have, old fellow, say it, and don't keep us here all the afternoon."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Come, get it off your chest, Gussy. Did you find that the damsel in distress had changed her mind and run away with a soldier?"

"Pway be sewious, Blake! This is a sewious mattah. I hardly know how to begin."

"The beginning is a good place," said Blake.

"Or you could tackle it in the middle if you found that come easier," suggested Digby.

"Or begin at the end and work backwards," said Herries.

"If you fancied it that way."

"Pway allow me to speak. I have had a most unfortunate encounth with the Gwammah School cads, you know."

"Have you? And what happened?"

"I was a pwisonah, you know, and I have pwomised to send them the fwagment of that document of suwwendah, you know, which we have in the study—"

The swell of the School House was interrupted by a howl from three throats simultaneously.

"What!" roared Blake, Digby, and Herries.

"I have pwomised to send them—"

"You—you—you howling bounder!"

"You utter ass!"

"You frightful lunatic!"

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"I wefuse to be called a fwightful lunatic. I wefuse to be chawacterised as a howlin' boundah. I uttably wefuse to be designated as an ass."

"You—you—you— Oh, there ain't a word!"

"The—the villain! The wretch! The crocodile!"

"I wefuse—"

"Monster!" howled Blake. "Don't you know that that scrap was all St. Jim's had left to show that they had licked the Grammarians?"

"Yaas, wathah! I was quite aware of that—"

"Don't you know that Tom Merry's share is gone, and Figgins's share is gone, and that we've been crowing over them because we were taking better care of our little bit?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And now you've been and given it away!"

"It couldn't be helped, you know."

"Gr-r-r! There are times, Gussy, when you need killing, and need it awfully bad. When that last bit is gone, what is there to show that we ever licked the Grammar School?"

"It can't be—"

"You ought to have helped it! Have you promised, honour bright?"

"Yaas; I have weally pwomised, honah bwight!"

"Then it will have to be done," said Blake. "We're diddled, dishd, and done. The trophy of victory will depart from the walls—"

"All through Gussy playing the giddy ox!" said Digby.

"Well, he knows what to expect," said Herries. "A study licking is a light punishment for this. He wants boiling!"

"Boiling in oil," agreed Blake. "We can't do that, but a study licking is quite in order. Gussy, are you ready?"

"Certainly not! I wefuse to have a study lickin'! I—"

"You can refuse till your hair turns ginger, but you are going to have it all the same. You horrid image!"

"I should say so!" exclaimed Digby. "You helped to give Blake one when he let the study down one time, I remember, and we made him fairly squirm!"

"That was a vewy diffewent mattah. Blake can be licked wuffly if you like. But as for myself, I have to considah my dig, and it would go against my dig, to allow you to treat me with diswespect!"

"Collar him!"

"I wefuse—"

But D'Arcy's refusal did not save him. His chums seized him, and for the first time in his career D'Arcy experienced a study licking.

He did not enjoy it!

Exactly what happened he did not know then, and never quite knew; but it seemed to him as if an earthquake or a cyclone had suddenly struck Study No. 6.

When it was finished, D'Arcy sat in the middle of the floor, looking round him, and wondering whether the world had come to an end.

His clothes were dishevelled and dusty, his hair ruffled and wild, his collar torn out, and his tie hanging over his shoulder. His face was streaming with a mingling of red and black ink. He was sitting on his silk hat, which was crushed into the shape of a concertina.

The chums had left the study. Arthur Augustus rose slowly to his feet. He had never felt such a wreck in all his natural life.

"I—I weally feel quite exhausted!" he murmured. "And I shall nevah speak to those feaful wuffians again! I no longah wegard them as fwends!"

CHAPTER 4.

Defiance.

THE afternoon post the next day brought a letter to St. Jim's from the Grammar School, acknowledging the receipt of Study 6's share of the famous surrender document—which had been posted by Arthur Augustus, as in honour bound.

"The bounders!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "We'll be quits with them again soon. Any more, Blake?"

Blake was reading out the letter, which had been addressed to Study No. 6. He nodded, with rather a curious expression.

"Yes," he said. "There's a postscript. Listen!"

"Go on!"

"P.S.," read out Blake. "Under the circumstances, we, the juniors of the Grammar School, are quite willing to allow the warfara to lapse between us, on the understanding that the position is perfectly equal. Having won back the document you won from us, we are satisfied. Now that we have got our own back, and proved that the Grammar School is top dog, we are willing to admit you to terms of equality."

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Tom Merry burst into a laugh. "Well, of all the cheek!" he exclaimed. "Top dog—eh? That mouldy old Grammar School top dog! I like that!"

"We're not going to agree!" said Figgins.

"Not much! When they acknowledge us top dog, we'll make peace."

"Wathah, deah boys!" said D'Arcy. "I weally think we had better weply in stwong terms to Fwank Monk, you know."

"Rather!"

"Let me see," said Tom Merry, taking a pen, "how shall we start? Dear Monkey—"

"That sounds wude," said D'Arcy. "In a case like this I should wecommend a dignified style, and I weally think you had better let me write the lettah, Tom Mewwy."

"Rats! Dear Monk—Yours to hand." That will do. "Many thanks for your kind suggestion, but we are far from admitting that the Grammar School is top dog—"

"That's all right," said Monty Lowther. "Tell 'em we consider it bottom dog, and a low-down sort of a mongrel of a bottom dog at that!"

"That would be disrespectful—"

"Far from admitting that the Grammar School is top dog," went on Tom Merry; "and, as a matter of fact, we consider it a bottom dog, and a measly, mongrelly sort of one into the bargain—"

"Good!" said several voices.

"As for the document you have managed to collar on the instalment plan—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We're going to get it back again, unless you destroy it; and if you do that, we shall take it as a confession that you're afraid we shall get it back—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I hear that you are framing it, and putting it up with an inscription—"

"Yaas, that wottah Monk told me so, you know."

"And keeping it as a trophy. You won't keep it long. We are going to collar it back again, unless you lose your nerve and make it safe by burning it."

"Good!" said Figgins. "That'll make it all right. Monk would as soon burn off his eyebrows as burn the document after that!"

"That's the idea, of course."

"But how are we going to get it back?" said Marmaduke doubtfully. "That ransom business wouldn't work, you know. They wouldn't give it up."

"Oh, wait till I am captain, deah boys!" said D'Arcy. "I shall think of a wippin' plan when the time comes. Only wait—"

"Wait till you've done it before you start gassin', Gussy."

"If any gentleman pwsent accuses me of gassin'—"

"Oh, dry up while I finish this letter!" said Tom Merry. "Let's get it posted and done with. You can take it to the letter-box, Gussy."

So the letter was posted, and, as the Co. expected, it brought a prompt reply from the leader of the Grammar School juniors, in which Frank Monk declared that the document in question would never be destroyed, and that it was hanging in a frame on the wall of the common-room at the Grammar School, ready to be taken by the juniors of St. Jim's if they could get at it.

"And you won't be able to work the ransom business," the letter went on, "because I've made all the fellows swear that it shall never be given up under any circumstances whatever. And they won't go back on their word. So you can get it if you are able. You're welcome to try, if you like."

"We'll try," said Tom Merry, "and we'll do it, too."

But how it was to be done was a question that remained to be answered.

Tom Merry was thinking it out, but he had not hit upon any idea yet, and the others confessed that it was too much for them.

And just at present there was another matter occupying the minds of the Co. Digby had received a letter, to his dismay, to say that his father was coming down to the school, and Dig was to return home with him. Sir Robert Digby had conceived the idea of sending his son to school in France, for a time, at any rate, to improve his knowledge of the language. Digby did not like the idea at all, and his chums were prepared to do all in their power to keep him with them. Unless something could be done, Dig would be gone on the morrow, and unable to take any further part in the campaign against the Grammar School for the rest of the term.

"We've got to persuade Sir Robert to leave him here," said Tom Merry decidedly. "The only question is—how's it to be done?"

Digby shook his head dolefully.

"You see, my governor won't understand the importance of our giving the Grammar School the kybosh, and my being here to lend a hand," he remarked. "I've often noticed that

grown-up people don't attach sufficient importance to the things that really matter."

Tom Merry nodded. He had noticed that himself.

"Let's think of a jolly good reason why Dig should stay," he said. "I suppose your governor is a reasonable chap, Dig, and will listen to reason? I dare say he wouldn't understand about the Grammar School, as you say; but—"

"Blessed if I can think of anything!" said Blake. "We could say that Dig ought to stay because we want him—"

"But Sir Robert mightn't think that convincing enough," Lowther remarked.

"Exactly. So what's to be done?"

"I don't know about that," said D'Arcy. "As a gentleman, Sir Wobert Digby would be bound to respect the wishes of othah gentlemen, and if we put it to him politely—"

"My dear Gussy, your politeness would be absolutely wasted on a chap's obstinate governor," said Tom Merry. "We've got to think of a good gag."

"I think you are quite w'ong, Tom Mewwy. I weally think I could pwevail on Sir Wobert to allow Dig to remain if I twied," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"I'm afraid you couldn't, Gus," said Digby despondently.

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows. He thought hard, and when Tom Merry thought hard, he usually succeeded in getting some result from it. A sudden smile broke over his face, and the Co. knew that he had thought of an idea.

"What's the weeze?" demanded ten voices at once.

Tom Merry grinned.

"I say, Dig, your pater is an old sport, isn't he?" he said. "He thinks a lot of cricket and football, and that kind of thing?"

"Rather!" said Digby, somewhat surprised by the apparently irrelevant question. "He's an old Blue, and he never misses a cricket match in the summer, or a football match in the winter, if he can help it."

"Good! I've got a plan. It's been mooted about meeting the Grammarians in a football match again, on their own ground this time, and, of course, you will play for St. Jim's if you are here."

"Of course. But—"

"When is your governor coming down?"

"To-morrow afternoon. He was coming on Saturday, but he left it over the week-end. But I'm blessed if I can see what you're getting at, Tom Merry."

"Listen to the words of wisdom, then. Before your governor arrives at St. Jim's, I'll buzz over to the Grammar School, and fix up about the match. I can whizz over on my bike after morning school to-morrow, and take a flag of truce, you know. There's no time to write, as we must have the thing settled before your governor comes. We'll fix up the match with Monk for next Saturday, if possible. When Sir Robert comes, we'll wait on him in a body, and explain to him that you're in the eleven, going to play on Saturday in an important match, and that we can't spare you."

Digby gave a jump.

"My hat! That's a ripping idea. I don't know if it will work, but if anything would persuade the pater, that's it."

"Then we'll fix it up with Monk, and trust to luck," said Tom Merry. "If Sir Robert is a sportsman, he couldn't refuse to let you remain till the end of the week for the sake of playing for us. And by the end of the week, kids, we'll have had that paper back from the Grammarians, and given them the giddy kybosh!"

CHAPTER 5.

A Flag of Truce.

BUZZ-Z-Z! It was a bicycle-bell, buzzing loudly and imperatively, and Lane who was standing at the gates of the Grammar School, turned his head to look. He had just time to jump aside as a bicycle, with Tom Merry in the saddle, came dashing up from the direction of St. Jim's, and turned into the gateway.

"Hallo, you rotter!" yelled Lane. "What are you up to? You nearly ran over me! You—"

But Tom Merry was gone. He was cycling at top speed right through the playground. The ground was pretty well crowded with Grammarians, and a shout went up at sight of Tom Merry.

"Hallo, a St. Jim's rotter!"

"It's Tom Merry! Collar him!"

And there was a rush to get hold of the bold cyclist. But Tom Merry, ringing his bell furiously, dashed right up to the steps of the school, and there he sprang to the ground, and leaned his bicycle against the balustrade. He faced round quite coolly, and waved a white pocket-handkerchief in the faces of the excited Grammarians.

"Pax!" he exclaimed. "Stand off! I'm a flag of truce!"

"You're a what?"

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"A flag of truce. I've come with a message to your giddy chief. Keep your distance, and respect the white flag, my infants!"

The Grammarians looked rather puzzled.

They did not like being bearded in their own den, as it were, by the chief of the St. Jim's juniors, but Tom Merry's evident faith in their honour could not fail to appeal to them.

They hesitated, and looked round for their leader. Carboy and Lane were soon on the scene, the latter very red and indignant.

"What are you doing here, you outsider?" demanded Lane. "You nearly ran over me just now!"

"Well, I've cycled over lots of lanes before now," said Tom Merry. "What's a lane for?"

Some of the Grammarians chuckled. Lane turned redder. "I can see that you have come here for a hiding," he remarked. "You've come to the exact right spot to get one, and—"

"Can't you see the white flag? I'm a messenger. I've got a message for your giddy chief. Where's Monk—the young Monkey, I mean?"

"Here I am!" said Frank Monk, pushing his way forward. "What have you got to say for yourself before we frog-march you, Tom Merry?"

"You can't do it; you must respect the white flag," said Tom Merry coolly. "I've come to bring you kids a challenge from St. Jim's."

"We'll accept it, whatever it is," said Monk instantly. Tom Merry laughed.

"I believe you kids fancy you can play football—" he observed.

"Yes," said Monk. "I believe we fancy something of that sort. We fancy we can play it better than any of you young asses over at St. Jim's, too!"

"I don't see what could put that idea into your head. I've seen you play, and it was enough to make a Hottentot weep to see you; it was, really!" said Tom Merry, shaking his head.

Frank Monk breathed hard through his nose.

"If you keep on like that, that giddy flag of truce won't protect you long!" he remarked. "What message have you got for us, kid? Have you come to say you've changed your mind, and are willing to accept the terms of our letter?"

"Couldn't be done, my dear fellow," said Tom Merry, with a decided shake of the head. "We're going to have that giddy document back, you see, and we sha'n't be happy till we get it; and, besides, you've got to admit that we are top dog, you know. But to come to business, kiddies, we want you lot to meet us in a football match. I thought I'd come over and tell you instead of writing, as I wanted to get the matter fixed up at once, if possible."

"Oh, that's all right! We'll meet you anywhere you like, and give you as big a licking as you require," said Frank Monk. "Anything else you want?"

"No; not at present. Shall we say Saturday next for the match, on your ground, kick-off at half-past two? We've got that date still open, if you have?"

"We can fix it. We have only a practice match on for that afternoon."

"Then it's settled?"

"Certainly! Come, and we'll wipe up the ground with you to your heart's content," said Frank. "I've often thought it would be a good thing to teach you college youngsters how to play football, and now we'll give you a lesson. You beat us before by flukes, of course!"

"Look out for another fluke, then," grinned Tom Merry. "We'll come over in good time, and I expect most of our chaps will come over to look on. It will be pax for the lesson. You beat us before by flukes, of course!"

"Right you are!" said Carboy, with a grin. "We want a lot of you here to see you licked!"

"I don't suppose they'll see much in that line, kid," Tom Merry remarked. "But we shall see about that. We licked you on our ground, and we're going to do our best to lick you on your own, and I think we shall do it. That's about all I've got to say."

"Good!" said Frank. "It was like your cheek to come here like this, Tom Merry, but we'll respect the flag of truce. I'll walk down to the gates with you."

Tom Merry wheeled his bicycle down to the gates, accompanied by Monk, Lane, and Carboy. They chatted amicably on the way, and not at all like deadly foes.

"Hallo," exclaimed Carboy suddenly, "there's Hake! Look out!"

Hake, the bullying Grammarian senior, with whom Tom Merry & Co. had more than once come into rough contact, was coming towards them. The expression on his face showed that he recognised Tom Merry, and, besides, the St. Jim's boy was at once known by his cap.

He came quickly towards the four, and planted himself in

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the way of the bicycle. Tom Merry came to a stop, looking on the alert for trouble.

"What are you doing here, you young rascal?" was Hake's polite greeting.

"Chuck it, Hake!" said Frank. "He came on a message, and we're seeing him out."

Hake gave him a black look.

"Who asked you to speak?" he said. "Keep your lip to yourself, young Monk! You can't put on airs towards a senior because your father is head-master of the school, I assure you!"

Frank flushed angrily.

"It's never crossed my mind to do so, and you know it!" he exclaimed. "Only a cad like you would suggest such a thing, Hake!"

"Cad—eh?" The big Grammarian made a step towards the junior. "I shall have to teach you manners, you whelp! I'll see to you first, though, Tom Merry," he added. "I owe you something that I can pay now. You have come into the lion's den by coming here!"

Tom Merry sniffed.

"More like into the dog's-kennel!" he remarked.

Hake reached out to clutch hold of him. The three Grammar School juniors at once lined up with Tom Merry to stand by him. Hake looked at them in amazement and rage.

"Clear off, you youngsters!"

"Sha'n't!" said Frank Monk determinedly. "He's under our giddy protection, and you're not going to touch him, Hake! You ought to know better!"

Hake gritted his teeth.

"Mind what you do, Monk! I'm a monitor, and I'll make you smart for this! Clear off, you three; I give you the chance!"

The three Grammar juniors did not stir.

Tom Merry looked uneasy.

He knew that it would be a serious thing for the Grammar juniors to defy a monitor, and that it would probably have very unpleasant consequences for them.

He did not want the trio to get into trouble on his account, but Hake was evidently in a determined temper.

"Are you going?" shouted Hake.

"No; I'm coming!" said Tom Merry.

And he rushed his bicycle forward, straight at the angry senior who stood in his path.

Hake had no time to get out of the way.

He had planted himself directly in front of the bicycle to stop Tom, never thinking that the hero of St. Jim's would venture to clear him off the track in such a drastic manner.

The front wheel of the bike struck against his legs, and he was bowled over as if he had been shot, and Tom Merry went treading over him, and the bicycle was wheeled across him as he lay dazed on the ground.

Tom Merry was past in a moment.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Monk, Lane, and Carboy. "How did you like that, Hake?"

Hake staggered to his feet, red with rage.

The three Grammarians were doubled up with laughter, but the bully did not pay any attention to them. He rushed furiously after Tom Merry. He had lost his cap, his tie was disarranged, and his clothes covered with dust. His aspect drew glances from all sides, but he did not stop to think of that.

"I'll—I'll break your neck, you young hound!" he roared.

But Tom was on his cycle in a twinkling, and pedalling away towards the gates at top speed. Hake was left behind, and Tom Merry reached the gateway a dozen yards ahead.

Hake paused, gasping for breath. He could never overtake the cyclist, and he knew it. But in the gateway Tom Merry slackened down, and seemed to lose speed.

Hake gritted his teeth.

Something seemed to be wrong with the bike, for Tom was free-wheeling as he turned into the lane, and looking down anxiously at the crank.

Hake dashed after him again. If something was out of order with the machine, the cool junior from St. Jim's might be overtaken yet. The Grammar School senior put on a spurt, and tore out into the lane after Tom Merry.

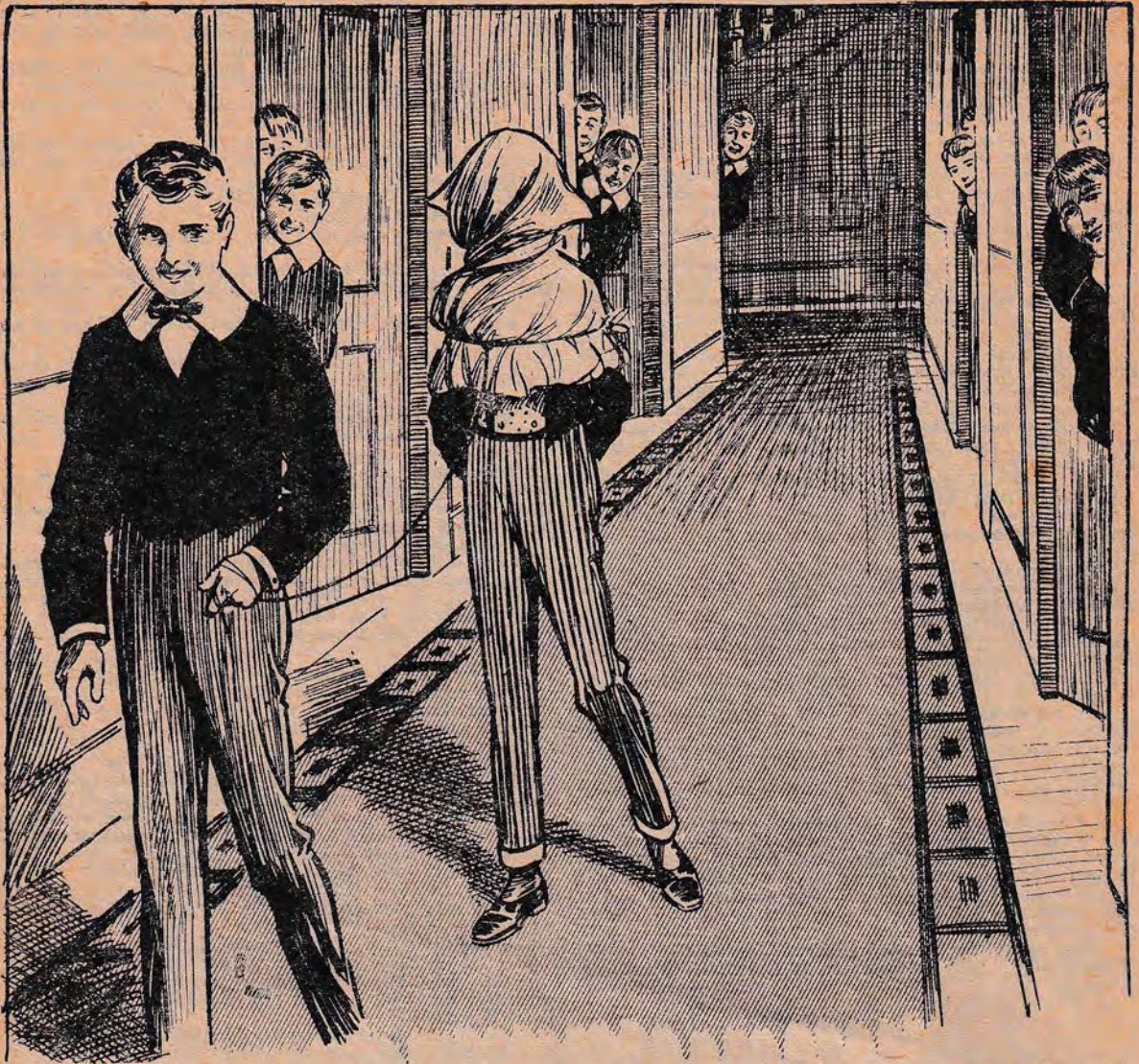
Tom Merry was not more than a dozen yards from the gate, and he was still free-wheeling, and apparently still puzzled by the action of the pedals, for he was looking down at his right foot with a concerned air.

"I've got the little beast!" muttered Hake.

He dashed forward. He was only a yard behind the cycle when suddenly Tom Merry's feet began to revolve like lightning, and the bike shot forward and escaped Hake's outstretched hand. It went on like a shot for twenty yards, then slackened again.

Hake ran desperately forward.

Again he was close upon the cyclist, and again the bicycle suddenly shot away, the junior pedalling suddenly and



"Gentlemen, this is an ourang-outang of the species *Gustavus*," said Tom Merry as he led the reluctant D'Arcy along the corridor. "On the least attack upon his dig, he becomes ferocious, and then has to be tied up in the way you see." (See page 14.)

strongly. Hake halted, gasping for breath. The cyclist slackened down again, and looked back.

"Come on!" he called out encouragingly. "You'll manage it this time!"

Hake shook his fist frantically at the grinning junior.

He was not to be caught again, however. He knew now that Tom Merry had purposely slackened down each time so as to tempt him to pursue, and that he had never had any chance of catching the elusive youngster from St. Jim's.

"You young hound!" he roared. "Wait till I catch you, that's all! I'll—I'll—"

"Sorry I can't wait, Hakey! See you another time!"

And Tom Merry, kissing his hand to the infuriated Grammarian, pedalled off at full speed and vanished along the lane, leaving Hake to return to the Grammar School in a fearfully bad temper.

CHAPTER 6.

A Guest in Study 6.

TOM MERRY, grinning gleefully over the adventure, rode his machine into the gateway of St. Jim's, and was immediately met by the Co., anxious to know the result of his mission.

"It's all sereno!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Everything in the garden is simply ripping! We're to meet the Grammarians on their own ground next Saturday afternoon,

and lick them. They think they're going to lick us. But that's a detail."

"We had a hard fight last time, when they came over here to play us," Blake remarked.

"Well, we're not afraid of a hard fight again. I wouldn't give twopence for a game of football that was a walk-over! We shall lick them, and that's enough—at least, I hope so. If we're licked, we'll fall with honour."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We shall have a stronger team than last time, with Marmaduke and Digby in it," said Figgins. "We shall kick the winning goal."

"But shall I be in it?" said Digby lugubriously. "My governor is coming down to-day, you know, and he means to take me back. If Tom Merry's idea proves a success

"Well, let's hope it will," said Tom Merry. "We'll put it to him straight, you know, and make him see reason. That's the best we can do."

Afternoon school was almost over when the sound of wheels was heard in the quadrangle, and a little later Digby was called out of the Fourth Form class-room with the news that his father had arrived. Ten minutes later the Fourth were dismissed; and as Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy hurried out into the passage Dig met them, looking very excited.

"Where is he?" asked Blake, in a tragic whisper.

"In No. 6," said Dig. "I persuaded him to come and

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look at our quarters. Go and talk to him prettily while I hunt up Tom Merry."

"Right-ho!" said Blake. "Find Figgins & Co. as you come out, Herries, and bring them along. We must tackle the Jabberwock in a body."

"The what?" exclaimed Digby.

"The honourable baronet, I mean," said Blake. "Come on, Gussy! You and I will go and keep him engaged till our forces come up."

"Yaas, wathah! Perhaps you had bettah wemain outside the study, though, Blake. This is a delicate mattah, and wequires to be handled with gweat judgment. It would weally be bettah to leave it entirely in my hands, deah boy."

Blake did not seem to think so, however, for he marched straight on to Study No. 6, and entered. A tall, soldierly man was standing before the fire, looking about the study. He had a face like granite, but there was a kindly gleam in his grey eyes.

"Good-afternoon, sir!" said Blake. "How do you do, Sir Robert? You remember me, sir?"

"Certainly!" said Sir Robert Digby, shaking hands with Blake, and then with Arthur Augustus. "I have seen you before, Blake, and I am glad to see you again. I have come to take my son away with me. I'm going to pack him off to France for a bit."

"We don't want to part with him, sir."

Sir Robert Digby laughed.

"Perhaps not. And I am glad to find that he is so popular. But he is wanted, you know, and I must take him away with me."

"Pway considah—" began D'Arcy.

Blake trod on his toe and stopped him. D'Arcy adjusted his monocle and stared at Blake.

"I weally wish you would not twead on my toe," said he. "I fail to see any necessity for such an extwemely obnoxious action!"

The baronet looked at them curiously, and Blake looked daggers.

"My lad wished me to pay a visit to his quarters," said Sir Robert. "Cosy little place, I must say. Do you know, I was in this very study when I was at St. Jim's, forty years ago!"

"Were you really, sir?" said Blake, genuinely interested.

"We—"
He was interrupted by the entrance of the Terrible Three with Digby. Sir Robert knew them, and he shook hands all round. He had scarcely finished when Herries came in with Figgins & Co., and there was more hand-shaking. Sir Robert looked a little surprised. He wondered how many more Lower Form boys were going to cram themselves into that not very extensive study.

"These are all my friends, dad!" said Digby, with a wave of the hand. "We're always having fearful rows, and we get on rippingly!"

Sir Robert laughed.

"That sounds rather contradictory," he remarked, "but I think I understand you. Now that I have seen your friends, Arthur, I think we had better prepare for our journey."

"I hope you are not in a hurry, sir," said Tom Merry glibly. The Co. had not had time to elect a captain, and Tom Merry naturally fell into the place of leader. "I really hope you are not in a hurry, sir. We—we thought that while you were here you might like to have tea in the study, just as a reminder of old times, and—"

"H'm! Really—" hesitated Sir Robert.

"Of course, we don't want to bother you, sir, only we've made some preparations, and if you would be kind enough to stay to tea—"

It was impossible for an old St. Jim's boy to refuse an invitation like that. Sir Robert's face, bronzed by the burning sun of India, broke into a smile.

"Well, in that case, I must not disappoint you," he said kindly. "I will certainly etay to tea, my lads."

"Thank you, sir," said Tom Merry, with great relief. "It is very kind of you, sir. I don't know whether you'll care for the tommy, but we'll do our best, sir. The arm-chair, Figgys."

Figgins pulled out the armchair for the baronet, and Sir Robert, being fairly in for it now, sat down.

"Don't lean too much to the right, dad," said Dig hurriedly. "The chair is a bit rocky on that side. So long as you bear to the left, it's rippingly comfy."

"I will remember," said Sir Robert, laughing.

"Lay the cloth, Blake, while we get in the grub," said Tom Merry. "Would you like to look at the paper, sir, while we're getting tea?"

"Certainly! Dear me! What is this?"

"Latest number of 'Tom Merry's Weekly,' sir—our magazine."

Sir Robert laughed, and began looking over "Tom Merry's Weekly," turning a studiously deaf ear to the whispers going on among the juniors.

"The cloth is rotten!" Blake murmured to Tom Merry. "We haven't had a clean one this week. And Dig spilled a cup of cocoa on it yesterday, and there were some sardines upset—"

"You must get a clean one. Go and borrow one off Kildare. He's a ripping good sort, and won't say 'No' on an occasion like this."

"Suppose he's not in his study?"

"Borrow it, all the same."

Blake grinned, and went out. Digby came close to the hero of the Shell.

"There's no grub," he muttered. "We've got nothing in, and we're stony. Even D'Arcy is broke till a remittance arrives."

"That's all right. I'll go down to the shop, and get all we want."

"Good! I'll put the kettle on. I say, what about crockery? We haven't anything like enough for twelve, you know."

"We'll all bring our own, and collar all we can out of the Fifth Form studies."

"And as for seats—"

"There's not room in the study for twelve people to sit down, so some would have to stand, anyway. Those who stand can be behind Sir Robert's chair, you know, and he won't notice," said Tom Merry hopefully.

"Yes; I didn't think of that."

Digby filled the kettle at the tap in the passage, and put it on the fire. Herries got out the caddy and teapot ready. Arthur Augustus cleared the table, and had it ready by the time Blake came back with Kildare's clean tablecloth. He passed the Terrible Three going out, and Tom Merry whispered to him:

"You've got it?"

"Yes; under my jacket."

"Was Kildare there?"

"No. I got it, all the same."

"Good for you!"

Blake strolled into the study, and when he was quite behind the baronet's chair he whipped the tablecloth out from under his coat. Unfortunately, Sir Robert turned his head at that very moment to make some remark about a sketch in the "Weekly." He stared at Blake in amazement. Blake grinned rather sheepishly.

"A—a new conjuring trick, sir," he explained. "The vanishing tablecloth, you know."

"Oh, I see!" said Sir Robert, settling himself in his chair again.

The table was laid. Manners and Lowther came in with chairs, which they smuggled in unseen, as they fondly thought. Tom Merry was longer gone, and when he returned it was with Figgins and Kerr, and all three had bulging pockets.

Fatty Wynn and Herries went in and out of the study several times, and each time they returned the store of crockery on the table grew larger.

A loud hissing and spitting announced that the kettle was boiling over, and Sir Robert drew his legs hastily away from the fender. Tom Merry made the tea, while the others opened the sardines and the jam and marmalade. Marmaduke Smythe came in with a pile of plates under his arm and a grin of triumph on his face. He had evidently been exploring in the nether regions—that mysterious domain below stairs, which was sacred to Mrs. Mimmis, the house-dame, and her satellites, and he had brought his plunder to Study No. 6. The plates were a windfall indeed.

The tea was made. Sir Robert laid down the "Weekly," over which he had laughed heartily, and turned politely to the tea-table. Bread-and-butter and sardines and a fragrant cup of tea were really tempting. The granite face of the old soldier relaxed more and more as boyish recollections rushed upon his mind. Forty long years had passed since, a lad of fifteen, he had given a study "feed" in that very study. The forty years seemed to shrivel away now, and he was a boy again.

"This is extremely pleasant," he said, putting down his cup and attacking the provisions with a gusto which proved that he had not lost his appetite in India. "I feel a lad again. Same old study, too, and not a bit changed! A bit dingier, perhaps. Same old school; and I suppose you play the same old games?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Rather!" said Tom Merry. "Especially footer, sir."

"Ah, there have been some developments in football in my time!" said Sir Robert. "Do you know, I've been out of England so much that I haven't seen a game played by St. Jim's since I left the school."

Tom Merry's eyes sparkled.

The baronet was approaching the very topic the hero of the Shell had planned to lead up to by slow and artful degrees.

"Would you like to see a game, sir," he said—"a real good, ripping game between St. Jim's Juniors and the strongest side they ever meet?"

"Ah, yes; I should certainly like it!"

"Could you come on Saturday, then, sir, when we meet the Grammar School?"

Sir Robert pursed his lips.

"Fellows who know," went on Tom Merry, "say that the match will be as good as anything ever played by the St. Jim's first eleven—the seniors, you know, sir. Our second team is a very strong one. And the Grammarians are a powerful side, and always fight to a finish."

"Let me see. Perhaps—"

"And—and, sir, if we could venture to ask you a favour—"

"Why, of course you can, my lad!" said the baronet good-naturedly. "What could I do for you?"

"Why, we've challenged the Grammarians to the match, sir, so, naturally, we want to put our strongest possible side in the field."

"Yes, of course."

"We've picked out the best players in the Shell and the Upper Fourth, and—and we're depending on Digby for inside-right, sir."

Sir Robert looked grave.

"We can't spare old Dig, sir," said Tom Merry eagerly. "If he's not there, we shall have to put Kerr forward, and play Jimson at half. The team will be weaker. Jimson is a good sort, but not up to Kerr at back; and Kerr isn't up to Dig in the front line, as he'll tell you himself."

"That's so," said the Scottish partner in the Co., with a nod. "It's quite right, sir. We hope you'll let Dig play, sir."

"Yaas, wathah! You can't wefuse, sir, when it's a question of the honah of St. Jim's bein' at stake, my deah sir."

"But, really—"

"You'll let Dig play, sir?"

Sir Robert's face remained grave for a minute, then he broke into a laugh.

"Come, you have fairly caught me in a trap!" he said. "I don't know what I shall say to Arthur's schoolmaster in France. But I suppose I cannot refuse you."

"Hurrah!" shouted Herries.

"Bwavo! Bwavo!"

Tom Merry rose to his feet

"As captain of the junior eleven of St. Jim's," he said. "I thank you, Sir Robert. You've lifted a weight off our minds. Dig, you're going to stay."

"Hurrah!" shouted Dig.

Sir Robert beamed upon the juniors as he finished his fourth cup of tea.

"And I will come down and see the match," he said. "And if you don't play up like an International, my boy, you will hear from me! Another cup of tea, please, Figgins."

Sir Robert had his cup of tea, and another, and another, the while they talked football and bygone times at St. Jim's, and after tea, as the baronet had decided to catch a later train, there was some singing. Tom Merry sang "The Land of the Long-ago" as most appropriate under the circumstances. And finally the party broke up in the highest of spirits.

And when Sir Robert had driven off to the station, leaving Arthur Digby behind, the Co. voted him a jolly good fellow, as indeed he was.

"You stay to the end of the week, Dig!" exclaimed Blake, slapping his chum on the shoulder. "And by that time the Grammarians are going to have the proper kybosh. And when you leave you'll have the satisfaction of knowing that they'll sing smaller. We shall lick them on the footer-field as a proper wind-up."

"Yaas, wathah! But you haven't decided yet how you are goin' to get the document out of the common-room in the Gwammah School."

"Where there's a will there's a way."

"Yaas, wathah! And if you choose to elect me captain, I am pwetty certain I can find—"

"Oh, rats!" said the Co. in chorus. And they parted.

CHAPTER 7.

Captain Tom Merry.

"**W**HERE'S Gussy?" "Blessed if I know!" said Blake. "Haven't seen him for a dog's age. Have you, Herries?"

"No," said Herries. "I believe he's gone out scouting."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, the meeting must proceed without him." He looked round the wood-shed. "Ten of us here. We're all here except Gussy."

The Co. were in conclave again, met together for the purpose of electing the captain of the day, and deciding upon further operations against the Grammarians.

Ten juniors had turned up to the meeting. Arthur Augustus was conspicuous by his absence, and, according to the rules of the Co., he lost his chance of getting the captaincy when the lots were drawn. That was his own lookout.

"Gentlemen, we are here once more upon this old familiar spot," said Tom Merry. "Only one member of the Co. is absent, and he doesn't count. We have the aid of our esteemed friend Arthur Digby, Esquire, till the end of the week, and by that time we have got to give the Grammarians the complete and crushing kybosh!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We have got to recover that precious document which they have basely deprived us of, and take better care of it next time."

"If you mean to hint that I didn't take good care of it—" began Blake.

"Well, you lost your little bit, anyhow."

"Not I! It was Gussy."

"Well, it was all in the family, anyway. If you had kept a dog-chain on Gussy it wouldn't have happened. You shouldn't allow him out alone."

"What about Lowther? When he was captain—"

"Oh, give us a rest!" said Lowther.

"Yes, we'll give you a rest as captain, Lowther, and no error! You'll have a jolly long rest before you lead us into a trap again, I can tell you!"

"Peace!" said Tom Merry. "Let there be peace, before there are pieces! It's time to draw lots for a new leader. D'Arcy will have to be left out of it as he's not here. Shove the names in the bag, Monty!"

"Right you are!"

The slips with the names of the remaining candidates were shuffled in the bag, and Figgins drew one out.

He held it up to the light of the bicycle-lantern which illumined the meeting, and the name of Tom Merry was visible to all.

"Tom Merry!" said Blake, with a sniff. "Well, you've got it, Tom Merry. I hope you'll do better than the other rotters, that's all."

"I've no doubt I shall," said Tom Merry serenely. "But we'll see. My idea is that we ought to put our heads together, and give the Grammarians a really hot time. On Saturday we're going to wind up the campaign by giving them the knock on their own football-ground. The Co. will just make up the eleven if we play D'Arcy."

Blake gave a snort

"If!" he exclaimed. "There's no 'if' about it, Tom Merry. Of course we shall play D'Arcy."

Tom Merry looked dubious.

"Well, you know, he's been such a howling ass lately!" he explained. "You know what a coughdrop he is yourself, Blake."

"A chap who plays footer in an eyeglass—" began Figgins.

"Oh, rats! I cured him of that!"

"Of course, I know he's a good sprinter, and he can dribble the ball well," Tom Merry remarked; "but I've seen him stop in the middle of a rush to put his hair straight."

"Ha, ha! And do you remember how he got a penalty kick given against us once by collaring a chap who charged him over?" exclaimed Manners.

"Never mind," said Blake, "Gussy's a good forward, and it's simply impossible to have a chap belonging to Study No. 6 left out of the team. As reasonable human beings, you must see that for yourselves."

"Blessed if I see it!" said Kerr. "I—"

"Well, we'll give Gussy a trial," said Tom Merry. "We shall have to play up, you know. We chip the Grammarians about their football, but among ourselves we must admit that they play a jolly good game; and we had all our work cut out last time. But now about the next move against the Grammar School. Has anyone thought of a wheeze?"

There was a general silence.

Tom Merry looked round the meeting. Apparently ideas were at a discount, for nobody was in a hurry to speak.

"Well, we didn't come here to call a rigiddy Quaker

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meeting!" Tom Merry remarked pleasantly. "I'm waiting for some of you chaps to speak. Don't all speak at once, but, on the other hand, don't leave it till next term."

"Who's leader of this giddy Co.?" demanded Blake.

"I am."

"Well, if you're leader, think of something. Blessed if I'm going to do your work for you!" said Blake. "What's the good of taking a back seat if you have to do the thinking? You're leader. Think it out."

"That's right," said Monty Lowther. "You're leader, Tom. Set your wits to work."

"Good!" said Marmaduke. "I'm not going to think out any giddy schemes till I'm leader. It's your place to do that, Tom Merry."

"We want to keep the ball rolling," Kerr remarked. "We ought to give the Grammarians some sort of a dig. No good getting rusty, or giving them a rest, that I can see, and so I call upon Tom Merry, as leader, to propound an idea."

"We all call on him," said Fatty Wynn. "If he's leader, let him lead. What are we going to do against the Grammarians to-day, Tom Merry?"

"Here, I say, give a chap a chance!" said Tom Merry.

"What's the wheeze?" demanded Digby, interrupting him.

"What's the scheme?" exclaimed Marmaduke.

"What's the programme?" inquired Figgins.

"I tell you—"

"You needn't tell us anything, unless it's how we're going to give the Grammarians the kybosh," said Figgins. "As a matter of fact, chaps, his mind is a beautiful blank, and he's not got any ideas—not even of anybody else's."

"That's it," said Blake. "I was afraid from the beginning that he would be no good. We've given him a trial, and he can't keep the ball rolling."

"Look here," exclaimed Tom Merry hotly, "you're a set of asses! You haven't given me a chance. I—"

Blake took out his watch.

"I suggest that we give him five minutes to think of an idea," he said. "If he can't do it by that time we'll depose him, and elect another chief."

"Good!" echoed Figgins & Co. together.

Monty Lowther and Manners said nothing. Herries said "Good!" Tom Merry looked extremely wrathful. Blake held out his watch, with his eyes fixed on the dial. Digby grinned assent.

"Look here—" began Tom Merry.

Blake waved his disengaged hand soothingly.

"Don't waste time, old chap. You've got nearly five minutes before we fetch you down off your giddy perch. Make the best of it."

"I'm not going to—"

"Make the best of it," said Figgins & Co. solemnly.

"But, confound you, I tell you—"

"Hallo, deah boys! I was wathah aftaid I should be late for the beastly meetin', don't you know?" a familiar voice broke in at the door of the wood-shed.

Blake looked round as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy entered.

"Hallo! Here's the image!" he exclaimed. "Where have you been, Adolphus?"

"I have so often remarked, Blake, that my name is not Adolphus, that I weally wondah that you continue to address me in that wickidulous mannah."

"Oh, rats! Where have you been? Why didn't you come to the meeting?"

"I have been scoutin'," said D'Arcy.

"Found any mare's nests?"

"No, certainly not, Lowther! I have been on the twack of the Gwammah cads."

"Didn't they go for you?" asked Dig.

"They did not see me. I twacked them like a boy scout, or an Indian bwave," explained D'Arcy. "I am an awfully deep fellow, you know, sometimes, and I weally flattah myself that I did this little twick in a mastahly mannah."

"Well, what's the result of it?" asked Tom Merry.

"Two more minutes, Tom Merry," said Blake solemnly, looking at his watch.

"Oh, rats! What's the upshot of your scouting, Gussy?"

"I have made a great discovery."

The Co. looked rather sceptical. They had very little faith in Arthur Augustus and his skill in the Buffalo Bill line. But the swell of the School House was looking very serious and earnest. He adjusted his monocle and beamed upon the assembled Co. with the air of one who had reason to be very well satisfied with himself.

"Well, get it off your chest!" said Tom Merry. "Can't you see that we're all simply on tenterhooks of curiosity, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah! That is only natuwal, under the cires," assented D'Arcy. "Vewy well, Tom Mewwy, I will welieve your cuwiosity. I have been scoutin'—"

"I fancy I heard you say that before," Figgins remarked.

"Don't intewwupt, Figgins. If there is anythin' I weally can't stand, it is these constant intewwptions from you wude youngstahs. I was scoutin', when I fell in with a vewy unpleasant chawwactah from the Gwammah School. It was not one of our fwends the enemy, but that owahgwown person whom we wagged on the wivah, named Salmon or Codfish or something—"

"Do you mean Hake?" asked Tom Merry, with interest.

"Yaas, wathah! I knew it was something fishy," said D'Arcy. "Well, I met him, and he acted most wudely. He actually had the feahful impertinence to lay hands upon me and push me into the hedge in a wuff and violent mannah!"

"He did, did he? The horrid boulder! He couldn't have known whom you were," said Tom Merry gravely. "If he had known that you were the one and only Gussy—"

"Oh, pway don't wot, Tom Mewwy! I wegard this as a sewious mattah. He pushed me with such extweme violence that I bwoke through the hedge, and fell with gweat wapidity into the ditch on the othah side. Fortunately, the ditch was a dwy one, or I should have spoiled my coat and waistcoat; but as it was, my twousahs were howwidly wumped, and I was in a state of extweme wage. I was so ewaged, in fact, that I quite lost my tempah, and I scawbled fwom the ditch and wushed upon Codfish to stwike him!"

"Ha, ha! And was he stwuck?"

"No; he had the feahful cheek to take me by the collah, and sling me thwough the hedge again," said D'Arcy. "I fell into the ditch with gweat violence, and he looked down on me, and gwinned, and said that if I got out again he would jump on me!"

"The wretch! It makes me almost weep to think of your trousers at that terrible moment!" said Tom Merry, with a sob.

"Pway be sewious, Tom Mewwy! I was feahfully ewaged, but I thought upon the whole it would be bettah to wemain where I was till the shockin' wuffian was gone. I was weally feelin' most ewasted. I was not aftaid, of course, but I knew that he was quite capable of wuinin' my waistcoat if I pwovoked him. So I considahed it vewy much wisah to wemain there till it was safe to scawble out."

"What a thrillin' tale of adventure!" said Monty Lowther. "It is awfully interesting, but what has it got to do with the washing, Gussy?"

"Pway allow me to explain. While I was westing in the ditch thwee persons passed along on the othah side, and they were talkin'. They were the thwee boundahs who tied Marmaduke to the college gates the othah night."

"Monk, Lane, and Carboy?" asked Kerr.

"Yaas, wathah! Now, you see, I knew their voices, and I immediately caught on to what they were saying. Some fellows wouldn't have thought of it, but you know I am awfully deep—"

"Yes; we know how awfully deep you are, Gussy. Go on."

"Monk was saying that to-night would be the vewy time, as it was misty, and it would be easy to slip into the gwounds of St. Jim's without bein' noticed."

Tom Merry gave a start.

Up till now he had preserved rather a sceptical countenance, but just then he became really interested. It looked as if Arthur Augustus had really discovered something after all.

"Go on," said Tom quickly.

D'Arcy saw the impression he had made, and purred.

"Yaas, wathah! When Monk said that, I was awfully careful you know to wemain quite still, and see if I could discovah anythin' else. Of course, you all know that as a gentleman I would despise a fellow who listened to a pwivate convahsation—"

"Yes, yes; go on!"

"But as a scout in the enemy's countwy I was bound to gathah all the information I possibly could as to their movements—"

"Yes, yes; we've thrashed all that out before. Go on!"

"Therefore," went on D'Arcy obstinately, "I considahed it quite en regle to hear all I could that the wascals were sayin'—"

"Of course. What else did they say?"

"Oh, I didn't hear anythin' else!"

"You—you utter ass! Then what have you been giving us this long rigmarole about?" exclaimed Marmaduke, in disgust.

"I was explainin' my views and sewuples—"

"Blow your views and scruples!" ejaculated Blake. "You ass! What do your views and scruples matter if you didn't hear anything more? Gussy, you're wearing me out!"

"Wats!" said D'Arcy. "I didn't hear any more, though I listened like anythin'. But it's perfectly plain that the Gwammah cads intend to come into our quartahs to-night to play some twick on us."

"Looks like it," said Digby. "Pity you couldn't learn more. Did you let them see you there?"

"Certainly not, Digby. I waited till they were quite gone, and then scambled out of the ditch. I only stopped to bwush the dust off my twousahs, and then huwried here as fast as I could wun, deah boys!"

Tom Merry was looking very thoughtful. It was evident that he attached the greatest importance to the information brought in by the scout.

"Well, if they come, we'll be ready for them," said Blake. He looked at his watch. "Time's more than up, Tom Merry. But, as Gussy has taken it all up with his thrilling stories of hairbreadth escapes, we'll allow you an extension. If you've got an idea, spout it out. If you haven't, own up!"

Tom Merry's eyes were sparkling now.

It was pretty plain that he had a "wheeze" in his mind, but he did not seem to be in a hurry to communicate it to the impatient Co.

"Well, what is it?" demanded half a dozen voices impatiently. "Out with it, Tom Merry!"

Tom Merry shook his head calmly.

"Not at all. I've got an idea for making the Grammar kids wish they hadn't thought of invading our territory, but for the present, I'm keeping it to myself."

There was a simultaneous howl of indignation from every member of the Co.

"What the dickens do you mean, Tom Merry?" exclaimed Blake. "Do you think we are going to stand that? Come off your perch, you rotter, or we'll yank you off!"

"My dear chap, you were telling me just now that I was captain of the Co.—"

"So you are; but, of course, we're entitled to know all about the operations against the enemy," said Blake hotly. "Do you think we're going to have you riding the giddy high horse?"

"A wise and experienced general," said Tom Merry calmly, "never explains to his troops in advance what his operations are going to be. For military reasons, you see, it's necessary for a leader to keep secrets from the common or garden rank-and-file—"

"Look here!" said Blake and Figgins together. "We're in this beastly Co., and we've a right to know the beastly plans. Just get it off your silly chest, you bounder!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Can't! For military reasons I cannot allow my plans against the enemy to become known until the time arrives for putting them into execution."

"Military humbug! Execution bosh! Tell us what the wheeze is! We're going to know before this meeting breaks up!" said Kerr warmly.

"Yaas, wathah! As the plan is founded upon the news of the enemy's movements brought in by me, I at least have a wight to know all about the beastly ideah!" said D'Arcy.

"Quite so!" exclaimed Blake. "Now, Tom Merry, get it off your chest. If you've got such a first-class plan for bringing the Grammar cads off their perch, let us know it. We shall all have a hand in it, anyway. Why don't you speak, you bounder?"

"I've got nothing to say."

"It's all rotting, then! You haven't an idea in your head?"

"Oh, yes, I have—a first-rate, ripping one!"

"Then tell us!" howled the Co.

"Can't be did! For military reasons—"

"You—your humbug! You ass! Tell us!"

"Explain!"

"Rats! For military reasons I can't—"

"Oh, he's as obstinate as a mule!" growled Blake. "There's no getting anything out of him! I believe it's all humbug, and he's pulling our leg!"

"My dear chap, I wouldn't pull your august leg for anything!" said Tom Merry. "I've got an idea in my mind which I believe will make the Grammar cads wish they hadn't entered here. A great general never confides his plans to his followers. You will be called upon to help, but you're not going to be told the plans. You can't expect it. For military reasons—"

"Blow your silly military reasons! I tell you what, chaps—we'll give him the chance, and if he doesn't live up to this we'll depose him, and elect a new leader!" said Blake.

"Hear, hear!"

"You understand, Tom Merry? This is not going to be merely a jape on the Grammarians, but you're on your trial. If the joke doesn't come off in first-chop style, you get the order of the boot instanter, and you're incapacitated from ever leading the Co. again!"

"Hear, hear!" shouted the Co., in unanimous approval.

"I'm agreeable," said Tom Merry, smiling serenely.

"Then we'll let it go at that. About time this beastly

meeting broke up, I fancy, I'm getting hungry. Come on, kids!"

"Yaas, wathah! But wait a moment, deah boy. Tom Mewwy, I quite admit that you have ewery wight to keep the secwet of your intentions, as a gweat geneval, but as I bwrought in the information of the enemy's movements—"

"Sorry, Gussy! You'll know all about it in good time."

"But, weally, Tom Mewwy, I must insist upon my wight—"

"Travel along, Adolphus! You are making me tired."

"Tom Mewwy, as I bwrought the information, I must once for all insist upon my wight to share this secwet!" said Arthur Augustus, with emphasis. "It is extremely pwob. that I can give some advice upon the subject, as you must admit that two heads are bettah than one, especially when one of them is mine. I—"

"Blake, that thing belongs to you. Take it away!"

"Come along, Gussy. It's time to go!"

"I wufuse to come along," said Arthur Augustus. "It is a question of dig. with me. I am not bein' tweeked with pwopah respect, and I must wesent it. Tom Mewwy, I have stated—"

"Good-night, Gussy! Come along, Monty—Manners!"

"Stop, Tom Mewwy! I insist upon your stoppin' and heavin' what I have to say! Unless you suwwendah on this point, I shall have no alternative but to thwash you!"

Tom Merry looked terribly alarmed.

"Oh, Adolphus," he exclaimed, "unsay those fearful words!"

"I wufuse—I distinctly wufuse! I shall give you such a feahful thwashin'—"

"Hold him while I run away and lock myself up somewhere!" gasped Tom Merry, apparently in a state of terror. "Hold the dangerous ruffian!"

And Tom Merry dashed off towards the School House. D'Arcy attempted to pursue, but was promptly collared by Blake, Herries, and Digby.

"No, you don't, Gussy," said Blake.

Figgins & Co. walked away laughing. Monty Lowther and Manners followed Tom Merry at a more leisurely pace, chuckling to themselves. But the swell of the School House was in deadly earnest. His dignity was involved, and that was always a matter of great importance to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Blake, let me go! Hewwies, welease me! I no longah wegard you as fwiends!"

"Now, don't be a bigger fathead than you can help, Gussy—"

"I wufuse to be chawactewised as a fathead! I wufuse to wemain here! Welease me at once, or I shall get angwy and stwike you!"

The three juniors staggered away in affright. Arthur Augustus bolted from the wood-shed on the track of Tom Merry. Blake sat down on a pile of faggots, and laughed till he was out of breath.

"That chap will be the death of me!" he gasped. "Here, let's follow him and see what he's up to. Come on!"

And the chums of the Fourth followed on the track of the indignant swell of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 8

A Desperate Encounter.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS was really excited. He bolted across the dusky quadrangle, and passed Manners and Lowther like a flash. Manners uttered an exclamation.

"There goes Gus! Oh, my hat! That chap ought to be in a museum!"

"Ha, ha, ha! There are going to be ructions!"

"Come on; let's follow the ass!"

But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was already out of sight. He ran up the steps of the School House, and bolted into the hall. The dusk was thick, and the gas had not yet been lighted. There was a yell as the swell of St. Jim's dashed blindly into someone who was coming out of a study.

That someone went flying, and sat down gasping for breath. D'Arcy staggered away, and caught at the hat-stand for support. He gave it a violent jerk, and a shower of hats descended upon him.

"My word!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Deah me! My deah fellow, I hope I have not hurt you! Gwacious goodness, where are all these hats comin' fwom?"

The injured party jumped up, and promptly collared Augustus.

"You young ass! What do you mean by bolting into me like that?"

It was the voice of Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's.

"Pway excuse me, Kildare. It was a most unfortunate THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 163.

accident. I weally did not see you, and it is so extwemely dark here."

"What do you mean by bolting about in the dark like a mad bull?" demanded Kildare, shaking the swell of the School House till he squirmed.

"Pway do—do—not—not—sh-sh-shake me, Kildare," gasped Arthur Augustus. "You disturb my nervous system, you do weally. I wegwet this catastwyphie vewy much, and it is weally all due to the carelessness of the servants in not lightin' the gas, you know. How was I to see you in the beastly dark, deah boy! I am vewy sowwy. Have you seen Tom Mewwy pass?"

"No, I haven't!" Kildare administered another shake. "Are you looking for Tom Merry?"

"Yaas, wathah! He has been wude to me, and I am going to give him a feahful thwashin'."

"Ha, ha, ha! I think I can see you doing it. Well, don't start bolting about like that again, D'Arcy, or you will get shaken a bit harder next time, and licked into the bargain."

"I will be more careful, Kildare. Pway welease my collah. I am sure you are soilin' it, and I know you are cwumplin' it feahfully. I shall have to change it, I am afraid. Pway welease me, deah boy. I should be sowwy to stwike you, as I have a gweat respect for you, but weally—"

Kildare let him go. The captain of St. Jim's was a good-tempered fellow, and he soon regained his good-humour, though he had had a startling shock.

"Get off!" he said. "Travel, you young ass!"

D'Arcy travelled. He screwed his eyeglass into his eye, and mounted the stairs three at a time. He reached the door of Tom Merry's study and pounded upon it.

The door was locked. Evidently the hero of the Shell was in a state of terrible affright, and desired to escape the vengeance of Arthur Augustus.

"Open this door, Tom Mewwy!"

A gasping, scared voice came from within.

"Who is there? Oh, who is there?"

"It is I, D'Arcy. I have come to give you that thwashin'."

"Oh, Gussy! Oh, Gussy! Don't!"

"I am sowwy, but I have no alternative. You may as well have it now, Tom Mewwy. If you don't open this door, I shall wait till you come out, and stwike you."

"You won't let me off, Gussy?" came that quavering voice from within.

"Certainly not. I am sowwy, but I am compelled to considah my dig. You have insulted me, and I have no alternative but to thwash you."

"Then—then I may as well let you in, as you are so fearfully determined."

"Yaas, wathah."

There was a sound of the key turning back in the lock. Arthur Augustus tried the door again, and it opened to his touch. The swell of St. Jim's rushed in. The study was pitch-dark inside, for the blind was down, and there was no light. D'Arcy dashed recklessly in—and the next moment gave a yell.

His foot had caught in something, thoughtfully placed there in readiness for him, and he measured his length on the carpet.

He went down on his hands and knees, his eyeglass dropping off, and for a moment he remained there, too startled to move.

That moment was enough for the hero of the Shell.

D'Arcy felt someone drop astride of him, a good deal as if he were a rocking-horse, and his wrists dragged up behind him.

"Welease me!" gasped D'Arcy, squirming on his face. "Welease me! I forbid you to tie my wists togethah! I wefuse to be tweated like this. Welease me, you howwid wuffian!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In a twinkling the looped cord Tom Merry had ready was over Gussy's wrists, and tightened and knotted, and the swell of St. Jim's wriggled on the floor with his hands secured behind his back.

But that was not the end. He sat up, furious, and as he did so, a large bag was slipped over his head, and drawn tight and fastened round his neck.

"Welease me! What silly twick is this! I ordah you to welease me!"

D'Arcy's voice became faint and muffled from the interior of the bag.

Tom Merry gave a shout of laughter. He jumped up and lighted the gas. Arthur Augustus staggered to his feet. He looked a curious object with his hands fastened, and the bag covering his head down to the neck.

"Is that all right, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry anxiously. "Anything more I can do for you, kid?"

"Welease me! Welease me at once, Tom Mewwy!"

"I—I—I'm afraid. You're too dangerous. I'm afraid for my life," said Tom Merry. "I don't think you'll get suffocated Gussy; I've cut some holes in the bag to let in the air. It's your own bag. I fetched it out of Study No. 6, so that doesn't matter."

"You—you feahful beast! You wuffian!"

"You see, you're too dangerous to be let loose. I'm so afraid of you when you get into a fearful temper, Gussy. Come along!"

"Welease me immediately!"

"Certainly not! Now I've captured you, I'm going to exhibit you," said Tom Merry, fastening a cord to Gussy's tied wrists. "Follow me. Tread carefully, or you'll take a tumble. I should really be sorry if you broke your neck, or anything like that."

"I wefuse to stir fwom this study," came the muffled voice from the bag. "I wefuse to appeah such a widiculous sight. I distinctly wefuse!"

"It doesn't sound very distinct, Gussy. Come along!"

"I wefuse—I—"

But Tom Merry was pulling on the cord, and Gussy had to go. He stumbled blindly down the corridor, and fellows came to their study doors to look on in amazement and merriment.

"I say, what have you got there, Tom Merry?" called out Gore.

"My latest capture," said Tom Merry. "Gentlemen, this is an ourang-outang of the species *Gustavus*. It is a peculiar animal, and its native habitat is any old study."

"Tom Mewwy, if you do not instantly welease me—"

"Ha, ha, ha! It's D'Arcy! I thought I knew those trousers."

"I ordah you to welease me at once, Tom Mewwy!"

"The animal is found wild in the wood-shed," continued Tom Merry, with the air of a showman, as he led the reluctant Gussy along the corridor, between two rows of open study doors and grinning faces. "On the least attack upon his dig, he becomes ferocious, and has then to be tied up, in the way you see. Its face is covered out of consideration to the spectators, who would otherwise suffer considerably from the sight."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tom Mewwy, I weward you as a beast. Welease me!"

"Come on, Gussy! This animal, gentlemen, when in a ferocious state, as at present, has to be confined in the cellar, and left there for a few hours to cool."

"Take him along! Ha, ha, ha!"

Gussy marched on perforce behind his leader. Tom Merry led him directly to the corridor upon which the Fourth Form studies opened.

"Tom Mewwy, if you dare to put me in the beastly cellah—"

"It's the only place where you're safe, Gussy."

"I wefuse to be shut up in the cellah! I wefuse—"

"Well," said Tom Merry, with an air of thoughtfulness,

"GEM" FREE HAMPER WINNERS.

The Six boys marked with a X on the photographs published on the back page of No. 162 of the GEM Library, having sent in their applications, have duly received the six GEM Free Hampers. The names and addresses of the lucky winners, who attend the Public Higher Grade School, Blackburn, and the Grammar School, Wolverhampton, are as follows:

PUBLIC HIGHER GRADE SCHOOL, BLACKBURN.

MASTER HERBERT CALVERT, 60, Moss Street, Great Harwood, Blackburn.
MASTER G. C. MILLER, 30, Higher Enam, Blackburn.
MASTER JACK EATOUGH, 7, Broom Street, Blackburn.

GRAMMAR SCHOOL, WOLVERHAMPTON.

MASTER L. J. FLEMING, 8, Marchant Road, Wolverhampton.
MASTER M. H. GOODYEAR, Park Mount, Wombourne, Near Wolverhampton.
MASTER J. BURGE, 23a, North Street, Wolverhampton.



The combatants advanced and shook hands; instead of letting go, Tom Merry retained his grip on D'Arcy's right hand glove, and held it as in a vice. "Tom Mewwy, welease my hand!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I'm—I'm so frightened!" sobbed Tom Merry. (See page 17.)

"there's that old disused box-room on the top landing. Would you prefer that?"

"I wefuse to be shut up anywhere. I ordah you—"

"The box-room will do. There are lots of rats there, but you will not mind that, will you? Come along! Get a move on!"

Blindfolded as he was, Gussy could not see or guess in what direction Tom Merry was taking him. Tom marched him up some stairs, and down others, until he had lost every clue to his whereabouts. Finally, he marched him into Study No. 6, his native quarters, D'Arcy at the same time being fully persuaded that he was being led into the disused box-room at the top of the School House—a room far from the studies, and seldom entered by anyone.

"Here we are," said Tom Merry, striking a match and lighting the gas. "Here we are, Gussy. Ugh! How cold it is! Can you hear those beastly rats scuttling?"

"Tom Mewwy, if you dare to leave me in this feahful place—"

"Yes, it is a rotten hole of a place," said Tom Merry. "Never mind, there's a chair here, and you can sit on it. Sit down!"

"I wefuse to sit down. I distinctly—"

"Rats! There you are!" Tom Merry pushed Gussy into a chair, and in a few seconds fastened him there, in spite of his struggling and wriggling. "There, that will do. Now, you won't be able to get out, kid. You'd better remain in

this box-room all night, I think, and you will be in a better temper by the morning."

"If you leave me here, Tom Mewwy, I shall shout for help," mumbled Gussy. "I shall shout for help with all my stwength; so I warn you."

"You can if you like, Gussy. Nobody will hear you. Good-bye!"

"Tom Mewwy, I wegard you as a bwute. I nevah thought you could be so feahfully bwutal as to shut a fellah up in a beastly box-woom like this. I insist upon your weleasin' me this vewy moment, Tom Mewwy!"

"Sorry that it can't be did, Gussy. You're too awfully, feahfully dangerous, you know."

"I will let you off that thwashin'. I will pardon you for your extweme impertinence. I will allow you to go scot-free, if you—"

"Good-night! See you again in the morning."

The door closed.

Arthur Augustus was alone. He wriggled in the chair, and called to Tom Merry, but there was no reply—only the muffled echo of his voice.

"The howwid bwute has weally gone and left me," murmured the swell of the School House. "How vewy bwutal. I weally nevah thought it of Tom Mewwy. He has nevah weally tweated me with pwopah wespsect, but I nevah suspected him of bein' such a feahful wuffian as this. Fancy leavin' a chap shut up in a beastly box-woom among the beastly wats! Howwid!"

And Arthur Augustus began to shout for help. He wasn't going to be left in that lonely box-room all night, if he knew it; and if Tom Merry meant to carry out his threat, the only way to escape was to attract attention. If there was a row, that was Tom Merry's look-out. Gussy could not be expected to think of that now.

"Help!"

He shouted as loudly as the muffling bag over his head would permit.

"Help, help, help!"

CHAPTER 9.

Licked!

TOM MERRY joined Manners and Lowther when they came in. The hero of the Shell was grinning, and his chums grinned, too.

"Where's Gussy?" demanded Monty Lowther. "Has he slain you?"

"I think he's gone to his study."

"What's the little game?" asked Manners. "I can see you're up to something."

"D'Arcy fell over a cord stretched between two chairs when he chased me into my study," explained Tom. "Then somebody tied his hands, and fastened a bag down over his head, and walked him off to Study No. 6. He's fastened up to a chair there now."

"Help! Help!"

It was a faint, distant, strangely-muffled shout from upstairs.

Monty Lowther and Manners started simultaneously as they heard it, and looked at Tom Merry. Faint and far away as the sound seemed, they thought they knew the dulcet tones of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, that's Gussy," he said. "He fancies he's tied up in the disused box-room on the top floor. He must have come to that conclusion from some words I let drop. Curious, wasn't it? I never told him anything of the kind, of course."

"Ha, ha, ha! Awfully curious!"

Blake, Herries, and Dig came in, and looked at the Terrible Three.

"I say, where's Gus?" asked Blake. "You don't look as if he had slain you, Tom Merry. Where has he got to?"

"I think he's in your study, Blake."

"Help! Help!"

Blake gave a jump. Herries and Digby stared.

"Why, that's his voice! It sounds peculiar, as if he'd got his head in a box. Come along, kiddies! Let's go and sort him out."

The chums of the Fourth ascended the stairs. A shout of laughter followed them. They found a good many Fourth-Formers making for Study No. 6. The muffled shouts of Arthur Augustus had fallen upon many ears.

"Hallo, Blake!" exclaimed Mellish. "There's something wrong in your study. That's the sweet voice of your pet lunatic."

Blake nodded shortly. He opened the door of Study No. 6. Tom Merry had turned the light out before leaving, and the place was pitchy dark.

"Help! Help!"

Blake struck a match. The light glimmered upon Arthur Augustus, fastened to the chair, with the fastened bag completely concealing his aristocratic features.

D'Arcy heard the scratch on the box, and gave a gasp of relief. His shouts had brought help at last. Blake lighted the gas.

"Help!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Whoevah you are, pway welease me! Who is it? Pway welease me at once, deah boy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"Blake! I'm glad you've come. I've been shoutin' for hours!"

"How on earth did you get like this?"

"Tom Merry did it. He made me a pwisonah by a twick in his study, and then brougnt me to this beastly box-woom, and left me here among the wats. They have been cwawlin' all over me for hours, the howwid bwutes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the group of Fourth-Formers at the door, and Blake laughed, too, till the tears ran down his cheeks. It seemed too funny for Arthur Augustus to imagine that he was in the disused box-room at the top of the house, when he was really sitting in his own chair within the familiar walls of Study No. 6.

The swell of the School House spluttered with indignation inside the thick bag as the sounds of merriment penetrated to his ears.

"You feahfully heartless wuffians!" he gasped. "I do not see anythin' to laugh at. I have been tweated with fighwifull diswepet. I have sat here for hours with the howwid wats cwawlin' all ovah me, and bitin' me all ovah in the most cwuel way."

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"My hat! You ought to be a poet, with an imagination like that, Gussy!" Blake exclaimed. "It is only ten minutes or so since the meeting broke up in the wood-shed."

"Nonsense! How can you tell such a feahful whoppah, Blake? I am surprised. I have been here at least two hours, suffewin' feahfully."

"You've been here about two minutes, I suppose," said Blake. "Where do you think you are, Adolphus Aubrey Algernon?" He was unfastening the bag with deft fingers. "In that beastly box-woom," mumbled D'Arcy. "Those feahful wats have been cwawlin' ovah me, and I am afwaid have soiled my clothes."

Blake jerked the bag from his head.

D'Arcy looked round him—at the familiar room, and the group of almost hysterical juniors in the doorway. He was utterly amazed.

"Why—what—how— This is our study!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Blake. "Oh, Gussy, you are the champion ass!"

"How—how did I get here?"

"You've been here all the time. Those rats! My hat! Gussy, your imagination would do credit to a patent-medicine advertiser!"

"But I distinctly felt them cwawlin' ovah me," said the bewildered swell of St. Jim's. "I believe I felt them bitin' me cwuelly."

"Imagination, dear boy," Blake released the swell of the School House, who was still looking round him like one in a dream. "There you are! Now, I think you've had enough war-path for one night. You kids there can travel along; I don't want a whole flock of geese cackling in my doorway."

The juniors were screaming with laughter. Gussy's expression was funnier than anything else. He evidently could not yet make up his mind quite where he was.

"Clear off!" said Blake. "Go and cackle in your own studies. Herries, get me my squirt, will you, and shove some ink in it."

"Right-ho!" said Herries.

The laughers at the door melted into thin air. The chums of the Fourth were left alone in their study. D'Arcy dusted down his trousers with a rueful air.

"Let that be a lesson to you, Gussy," said Blake severely. "Let dogs delight to bark and bite, it is their nature to. Let Kerr and Figgins growl and fight, they've nothing else to do. But, Gussy, you should never let such angry passions rise; your little fists were never meant to black Tom Merry's eyes."

"I shall certainly considah it my duty to give Tom Mewwy the thwashin' of his life," said Arthur Augustus. "This insult can only be wiped out by—"

"By getting a licking?" asked Blake. "That's what you'll get, ass. Now, don't be a bigger lunatic than you've been already, Gussy."

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as a lunatic. I wefuse to let Tom Mewwy off that thwashin'. He must give me satisfaction. I am goin' to look for him now."

"Will you never know when you've had enough?" said Blake. "Hallo, here he is! Tom Merry, what do you mean by twentin' Gussy with diswepet?"

The Terrible Three were looking in at the door. They were laughing like hyenas, and Gussy turned red with indignation at the sight of them.

"You wude bwutes!" he exclaimed. "There is nothin' to laugh at in this extremely unpleasant and diswepetful twick. Tom Mewwy, take off your jacket. I—"

"My dear Gussy, don't get excited. It was really funny, you know. You don't know how much you add to the gaiety of existence."

"Tom Mewwy, I am determined to thwash you. It does not mattah a little bit what you say; you have insulted me too feahfully for pardon. Nothin' but a thwashin' will wipe out the insult. Are you weady?"

Tom Merry bestowed a wink upon the company in general, which Arthur Augustus was too excited and indignant to see. "Ye-e-es," said Tom Merry, in a tremulous voice. "If you won't let me off, Gussy, I suppose I must stick it out. But you'll have the gloves on?"

"No, I will not have the gloves on. This is a sewious mattah, and I am compelled, out of considewation for my dig., to give you a feahful thwashin'."

"Rot!" said Blake decisively. "You're not a giddy prizefighter, Gussy. You're going to have the gloves on, and to have it out here where we can all see fair play." Blake had caught Tom Merry's expressive wink, and was ready to join in the joke. "I'm going to be timekeeper and referee, and I'll see you through."

"I wefuse to have the—"

"You know perfectly well that you can't buck against the decision of the referee," said Blake severely. "I am surprised at you, Augustus!"

"Oh, vewy well! I weally do not wish to hurt Tom

Mewwy, but it is strictly necessary for me to inflict a severe thwashin' upon him. I will have the gloves on, deah boy."

"Thank you, Gussy!" said Tom Merry, almost tearfully. "In after years; when you are a white-haired, doddering grandfather, you will look back upon this hour in the vineyard study where your boyish years were passed, and be thankful that you tempered justice with mercy, and spared the—"

"Oh, don't wot, Tom Mewwy! Take your beastly jacket off, and stand up and take your beastly licking. I am in a fearful wage."

"Who's going to be my second?" asked Tom Merry, looking at his chums. "I must have somebody to back me up in this awful encounter."

"We'll both be your seconds," said Monty Lowther promptly. "You'll need two seconds to back you up against a fearful fellow like Gussy."

"That's so," said Manners solemnly. "We shall have to pick you up off the floor a lot of times, I expect, Tommy, and we can take it in turns."

"Thank you," said Tom, with deep feeling. "That is very kind of you. And—and if anything should happen—if Gussy should let himself really go, and I should fall a giddy corpus at his feet, you'll—you'll—you'll take the news to—the old folks at home, and plant a sprig of mistletoe on my grave?"

"We will—we will!" said Manners and Lowther together, with great solemnity; and the Terrible Three shook hands upon it with a perfectly owl-like gravity.

Arthur Augustus sniffed indignantly.

Serious as the chums of the Shell looked, D'Arcy had a feeling that he was being made fun of, especially as Blake, Herries, and Digby were cackling away like a trio of excited geese.

Blake jerked off D'Arcy's jacket, and rolled up his sleeves for him. Then he produced a sponge and a bowl of water and a pair of boxing-gloves.

"Choose your weapons, Tom Merry!" he exclaimed, throwing the gloves to Tom. "Ah, sorry! I didn't mean them to land on your nose!"

Tom Merry donned a pair of gloves, and then Gussy did the same. The swell of the School House was looking awfully warlike.

Blake took out his big silver watch to act as timekeeper. Herries was ready with the sponge, and Manners and Lowther sat down on the table to watch.

"Time!" said Blake. "Gentlemen, the performance will now commence!"

The combatants advanced and shook hands with the gloves on, but instead of letting go, Tom Merry retained his grip on Gussy's right hand, and held it as in a vice.

D'Arcy struggled in vain to release it. He fixed a withering glance upon the hero of the Shell.

"Tom Mewwy, welease my hand! Blake, I appeal to you!"

"Mewwy, welease his fin!" said Blake, with an air of severity. "What do you mean by captuwing the fin of Arthur Adolphus Algernon? Welease his awistocwatic fin immediately!"

"I'm—I'm so frightened!" sobbed Tom Merry.

Tom Merry jumped back in alarm, and the fin was released. D'Arcy brandished his fists, and advanced upon the hero of the Shell.

The great combat had commenced.

Monty Lowther and Manners, sitting on the table, clung to one another, apparently overcome by the awe of the scene. Tom Merry was driven round the ring by the warlike Gussy, and his defence was very feeble. Tom Merry had licked the best fighting-men in the Shell in his time, but now he certainly seemed nothing like a match for the swell of the Fourth Form.

Certainly, none of Gussy's blows reached him, except for a light tap or two on the chest. But he got in nothing in return, and he was driven round and round.

"Pway wemain still!" exclaimed D'Arcy, gasping for breath. "What do you mean by walkin' wound and wound when I am twyin' to thwash you? Pway wemain still."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Blake. "Why don't you stand still and put your hands in your pockets, Tom Merry? That would make it much easier for Gussy to thwash you."

"Go for him, Gussy!" exclaimed Herries encouragingly. "He's weakening, you know. Give him the kybosh in the first round."

D'Arcy took the advice. He made a terrible rush at Tom Merry, and his fists beat the air like Indian clubs. Tom Merry went right over, and dropped on his back. Gussy's fists had not touched him, but he was down on the floor all the same.

"Bravo!" shouted Blake. "Bravo, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus stepped back. A smile of satisfaction illumined his face. He allowed Herries to sponge his heated countenance.

"Strictly speakin'," said Arthur Augustus, "I should be entitled to keep on, and not give Tom Mewwy a west until time is called, but I am lettin' him down lightly."

Manners and Lowther ran forward and picked up Tom Merry. He hung a heavy weight upon them. They dragged him to a chair, and sat him in it and moistened his face.

"Feel fit to go on, Tom?" asked Monty Lowther anxiously.

"Ha, ha—I mean, oh dear! Yes, I think I can stick another round," murmured Tom Merry. "I think I will try, kid."

"Time!"

The adversaries toed the line again. Arthur Augustus, much encouraged by his great success, resumed his forcing tactics, and went at Tom Merry like a bull. Tom was driven right round the ring, and went down upon his back again with a thump.

"Get up!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, dancing excitedly round him. "I insist upon you getting up, Tom Mewwy, so that I can knock you down again!"

Tom Merry seemed to be suffering from some internal complaint for a few moments. Then he got upon his feet. Again the swell of the School House rushed upon him, and again the hero of the Shell flopped on the floor.

D'Arcy's boxing-gloves had just touched him, that was all, but a mere touch seemed sufficient to floor Tom Merry in this extremely peculiar encounter.

"Jump up!" shouted Gussy excitedly. "Jump up! Tom Mewwy, get up immediately!"

Up jumped Tom Merry, only to be floored again in the same easy manner. Then Blake called time, and the second round was over.

Manners and Lowther picked up Tom Merry. They were grinning and cackling now, which was certainly very heartless, considering the licking their chief was getting.

"Can you—ha, ha!—go on any longer, Tom?" asked Manners.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I'm afraid not," he replied. "Gussy has licked me. Oh, Gussy, I never thought you had it in you! I have had a most fearful thwashin'!"

Blake and Herries shrieked. Arthur Augustus peeled off the gloves and came over to Tom Merry. He screwed his eyeglass into his eye, and regarded the chief of Tom Merry & Co. with a placable gaze.

"My deah fellah," he exclaimed, holding out his hand, "I have been compelled to thwash you, as it was a question of dig, but I have weally no ill-feelin' on the mattah. I was in a tewwible wage, but that is all ovah now. I am perfectly satisfied, and I am willin' to be good fwends again!"

"Ha, ha—that is to say, bravo! You're a good little ass, Gussy!" said Monty Lowther, as Tom Merry shook hands cordially enough with the swell of the School House.

"I object to that remark, Lowthah. It is extremely disrespectful to chawactewise any gentleman as an ass—"

"I withdraw the words," said Monty Lowther, with affrighted haste. "Don't give me a thwashin', Gussy! Pway don't!"

Tom Merry staggered to his feet. Manners and Lowther each took one of his arms to help him away. Gussy looked concerned.

"I say, Tom Mewwy, I hope I haven't weally hurt you vewy much!" he exclaimed. "I should be vewy sowwy, you know, old chap!"

Tom Merry grinned.

"That's all right, kid. I shall recover in the morning!" he gasped. "You can't expect a chap to get over a fearful thwashin' like that in a hurry. Help me home, kids!"

Manners and Lowther helped him out of the study, and he went along the corridor leaning heavily upon them. D'Arcy watched them go, and then turned back into the study. To his surprise, he saw Blake, Herries, and Digby rolling on the carpet, screaming with laughter.

"Oh, I say!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "That is vewy unfeelin', you know, when Tom Mewwy is so cut up, you know. I weally wish I had not been in such a fearful wage, and not hit him so feahfully hard, you know. Pway stop that untimely mewwiment!"

But Blake, Herries, and Digby seemed quite unable to stop their untimely merriment.

They rolled on the carpet, laughing like hyenas. The swell of the School House fixed them with an indignant glance. It was absolutely without effect. They went on shrieking, and Arthur Augustus walked out of the study with a scornful sniff.

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NEXT WEEK: "THE SCHOOLMASTER'S RESCUE."

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CHAPTER 10.

Trapped!

TOM MERRY then made his way down to the gates, leaving the others, for he had a deep scheme on hand. He knew that if the Grammar juniors intended to enter the territory of St. Jim's, they would leave it as late as possible, so that the quadrangle would be clear; but as they knew the time the gates were locked, they would have to come before then. As a matter of fact, nothing was easier than what Frank Monk designed to do, and Tom Merry wondered that it had never occurred to him to carry the war into the enemy's country in the same way.

Within the house the lights were shining, but in the quadrangle it was hardly dark yet. The mists of the spring evening made it seem darker than it was. Tom Merry went down to the gates, and took up his position to watch. The mists which Frank Monk had counted upon to favour his design, concealed Tom Merry also.

"All serene!"

Tom Merry drew a deep breath as he heard the whisper in the ancient gateway.

He had calculated well, and he had not been on the watch ten minutes when that whisper warned him that the foe were at hand.

"It's all serene, kids!" whispered the voice again; and Tom Merry recognised the tones to be those of Frank Monk. "The coast is quite clear."

There was the sound of a suppressed chuckle.

"They're not expecting this, Frank!"

"Of course not! It hasn't crossed their minds that we might carry the war into Africa like this," chuckled Monk. "We shall have to see that they don't return the compliment when they're put up to the wheeze."

"Yes, rather! It will be a bit of a surprise for them."

"Come in! We've got to get out again, if possible, before the gates are locked. We could get out over the wall, I dare say, if we had to, but we don't want to be late for calling-over at home."

"That's so! Come on!"

Three dim forms loomed up in the gloomy fog.

Tom Merry, keeping well back in the shadows, knew that the forms were those of Monk, Lane and Carboy.

The three Grammarians stole out of the shadow of the deep old gateway, and crossed the quadrangle with quick, silent steps.

Tom Merry stepped quickly to the gates. He drew a length of thick, strong wire from his pocket, and wired the lock fast, so that the gates could not be opened. It was quite as secure now as if Taggles had been there with the keys.

Then, grinning to himself, the hero of the Shell hurried on the track of the Grammarians. He was curious to know what they intended to do. He had his whistle ready for calling up the members of the Co. as soon as they should be needed.

He quickly came in sight of the three raiders again. He saw that Frank Monk was carrying something under his arm—he could not quite make out what. Once a chuckle floated back to him from the Grammar chums.

"What the dickens is their little game?" murmured Tom Merry. "Hallo, they've stopped!"

Monk, Lane, and Carboy had stopped under the huge old elm that grew near the steps of the School House, and in summer shaded them with its foliage. Tom Merry, keeping the tree between him and the enemy, drew nearer.

Close as they were to the house now, the three Grammarians were quite safe from observation in the mist. But for Tom Merry being on the watch, they would have carried out their plan with perfect ease and impunity.

Monk opened the parcel he had been carrying under his arm, and Tom Merry, straining his eyes through the fog, saw, to his utter amazement, that it was a funeral-wreath that came to light.

Tom was bewildered. What on earth the Grammar juniors could have brought a funeral wreath to St. Jim's for was past his comprehension.

"Got the card, Laney?"

"Rather! Here it is!"

"Pin it on the tree, and I'll fasten the wreath round it."

"Ha, ha! That's soon done!"

Lane produced a mourning-card from his pocket, and pinned it upon the trunk of the elm facing the School House door. Then the funeral-wreath was fastened upon the tree encircling the black-edged card.

"Read it out," said Frank Monk, with a catch in his voice.

"Read out the mournful inscription, Lane, and let us weep."

"Certainly," said Lane, deeply affected. "In loving memory of Tom Merry & Co., liked out of existence by the Rylcombe Grammar School. Let them R.I.P."

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Tom Merry could hardly help breaking into a chuckle. It would have been an extremely telling wheeze—if it had worked. The mists of the winter night hid the wreath and the card on the tree, and they would not be discovered until the morning, when they would be on view to the whole of St. Jim's.

The fact that the Grammarians had penetrated into the very school, and there erected a memorial to the memory of Tom Merry & Co., would have been about the hardest knock the Co. had had, and Tom turned red as he thought of the utter ridicule which would have fallen upon them.

The joke would have appealed to the whole school, and Tom Merry & Co., instead of being the respected leaders of the juniors, would have been scoffed at by the smallest fags in the lower Forms.

"My word!" murmured Tom Merry. "It was lucky we got on to this! I fancy the jape won't seem quite so funny to those bouncers before they're through with it!"

Monk was pressing his handkerchief to his eyes. "P-p-poor fellows!" he murmured. "So young, too, and so silly! Licked out of existence! Ain't it awfully, fearfully sad?"

"Ha, ha! St. Jim's will think it funny to-morrow! Tom Merry will feel inclined to kick himself hard," said Lane.

"Shouldn't wonder if it busts up the Co.," grinned Carboy. "It's about the most screaming wheeze we've given them, so far. It's a simply ripping idea! If the Co. don't hide their diminished heads after this, it will be funny!"

"Come on!" said Monk. "We've done the trick, and it's no good hanging on! But I should like to be here in the morning when they find this, that's all!"

Chuckling softly, the three Grammarians stole away into the mists.

Tom Merry waited silently for them to go. He knew that they could not get out of the gates. He hurried up the School House steps, and ran into Arthur Augustus in the hall.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I wish you——"

"Get a move on, Gussy!" said Tom Merry hurriedly. "Go and fetch Blake and the rest, quick! There's not a second to be lost!"

"Weally, what is the mattah?"

"The Grammar cads are in our hands, that's all."

That was enough for D'Arcy. He dashed up the stairs.

"Wight you are, Tom Mewwy!" he called back. "I'll wun like anythin'!"

"Call Manners and Lowther, too."

"All wight."

Tom Merry ran down the steps again. The shrill blast of the whistle rang through the foggy quadrangle, carrying the alarm to Figgins & Co. Monk and his comrades heard it as they went down to the gate.

"Hallo! What's that?" exclaimed Frank Monk, stopping.

"Only a whistle," said Lane. "Nothing to do with us, I suppose."

"I wonder if it means——"

"Don't see how it can matter to us. Anyway, let's get out. If there's anything found out, we're safer on the other side of the gate," said Carboy.

"Yes, that's true enough."

And the three Grammarians broke into a run.

They reached the gate, and Frank Monk tore at it. It remained fast, and he dragged and dragged again—in vain! Carboy uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"My hat! Have they locked up already?"

"No," exclaimed Monk. "I know it's not the usual time yet—the clock hasn't struck. The gate has got jammed somehow. My word! There's a lot of wire twisted round the bars."

"Wire! Somebody has fastened it up on purpose!"

The three Grammarians stared at one another in the mist.

"Trapped!"

The word broke from three mouths at once.

There could be little doubt about it now. They had been seen to come in, and the gates had been fastened behind them.

Frank Monk tore desperately at the wire. The joke played off on the St. Jim's fellows was a good one, but it would be a poor ending to it for the Grammarians to be caught on the enemy's ground and made an example of.

But Tom Merry had done his work well with the wire. With time Monk could have untwisted it, but he was not given time. Forms were already looming up in the gloom.

"They're at the gate!"

It was the voice of Tom Merry. Tom's whistle had brought Figgins & Co. out of the New House in a twinkling. In spite of their captain's refusal to take them into his confidence, the loyal Co. held themselves in readiness for his signal. The whistle had been immediately followed by the arrival of Figgins & Co.—Figgy, Kerr, and Marmaduke first,

and then Fatty Wynn, who had delayed a moment or two to remove a pan of frying sausages from the fire.

As they joined Tom Merry at the School House door, Study No. 5 came out, followed fast by Manners and Lowther. The whole Co. met together round Tom Merry, full of eager inquiries.

"What is it?"

"Have they come?"

"What's the row?"

"What's—"

"Look at that!" said Tom Merry, pointing to the card and the wreath on the trunk of the elm-tree facing the School House steps.

The Co. looked, and looked again, and grinned rather sheepishly.

"In loving memory of Tom Merry & Co., licked out of existence by the Rylcombe Grammar School," read out Figgins. "'Let them R.I.P.' My only pyjama hat! What astounding cheek!"

"Nice if all St. Jim's had woke up in the morning and found that there!" said Blake, as Tom Merry tore the wreath down and jumped on it.

"Yaas, wathah! If I had not scouted, deah boys—"

"Come on!" said Tom Merry, snatching the mourning-card from the tree. "They're not gone yet, and we're going to make them eat their words!"

"They're bound to have scuttled off—"

"I've fastened the gate, and they can't."

"Hurrah! Come on!"

And the Co. swept down to the gate through the mist. Tom Merry's voice rang through the fog as he caught sight of the figures wildly tearing at the wire on the gate. It was half undone, and a few minutes more would have seen Monk & Co. at liberty. But Tom knew that he had them.

"Got 'em!" yelled Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Collar the cads!"

Carboy and Lane faced desperately round to stop the rush, while Frank Monk went on tearing wildly at the wire. It was twisted together in a baffling way, and his hands were cold. Carboy and Lane hit out furiously, but they could not stem that rush.

The Saints came on irresistibly, and fairly jammed up the Grammarians against the closed gates.

Two or three pairs of hands seized each of the Grammar School trio, and Monk & Co. were helpless prisoners.

They struggled, but in vain, pinioned by such long odds.

"Chuck it, chaps!" said Monk at last. "They've got us. I say, whose idea was it wiring up the gate like this?"

"Mine," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Well, it was a neat dodge. We had no idea the gate was fastened. You must have known that we were coming."

"Yaas, wathah! I have been scoutin', you see, and I learned the plans of the enemy, you know," said Arthur Augustus. "You weally owe all this to me, Fwank Monk. It is a return for your little joke about the persecuted maiden, you know, deah boy."

"Ha, ha! Well, we can afford a reverse after all the lickings we've given you," said Frank Monk coolly. "I suppose you've found the wreath?"

"Yaas, wathah! And it's bwoken to bits."

"Got the card, too? 'In loving memory'—ha, ha, ha!—of Tom Merry & Co." Ha, ha—

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Carboy and Lane.

"The rosters are taking it pretty coolly," Monty Lowther remarked.

"Why not?" said Lane. "You can't eat us! We've come into your quarters and japed you; and you can't get out of that, anyhow."

"Yes, you've come into our quarters," said Tom Merry, "but you're not out again yet, my pippins! I've got that mourning-card here. I regard the words as a libel on Tom Merry & Co."

"Yaas, wathah! A weally pwovokin' pwewawication."

"When a chap libels another chap," said Tom Merry, "the proper thing for the chap to do is to make the other chap—"

"My hat! What a lot of chaps!"

"Silence, prisoner at the bar! When a chap libels another chap," repeated Tom Merry severely, "the libelled chap ought to make the libeller eat his words!"

"Possibly. But you couldn't do it!"

"My dear fellow, that's just what we're going to do. Here's your words, written on this giddy mourning-card. If you eat the card you'll eat the words, too. That's as clear as anything in Euclid."

"Do you think we are going to—" broke out Monk hotly.

"I don't think—I know!" said Tom Merry tersely. "Bring them along to the wood-shed, kids, and then gather the clan to see them do the trick! Come along!"

And the Grammarians were hustled along by their captors.

CHAPTER 11.

Prisoners of War.

THE glimmer of a bicycle-lamp broke the darkness in the interior of the wood-shed. In the light of the lamp Tom Merry & Co. had met. In the middle of the shed stood the three prisoners of war, looking decidedly sheepish and uneasy.

The door of the wood-shed was open, and juniors were pouring in in twos and threes. The word had gone forth that the Grammar School trio had been captured on the St. Jim's ground—within the entrenchments, as Blake put it—and the followers of Figgins and Tom Merry were pouring in from New House and School House to see the fun.

The wood-shed was a pretty large place, but it was soon crammed. Round the prisoners Tom Merry & Co. had formed a circle, to guard them. Outside the circle the rest of the juniors of St. Jim's were at liberty to pack themselves; and they did so, in a thick crowd, which completely cut off any chance of the unfortunate Grammarians' escape.

Tom Merry held the mourning-card in his hand. He waited till the shed was pretty well packed, and then held it up to view.

"Gentlemen of the Shell and the Fourth Form at St. Jim's—"

"Excuse me," said D'Arcy politely. "The Fourth Form takes precedence of the Shell."

"Shut up, Gussy!"

"I wufuse to shut up! I—"

Two or three pairs of hands seized D'Arcy and shook him, and Tom Merry went on:

"Gentlemen, you are called together to see three animals which have been captured within the borders of St. Jim's. These three reckless bounders have come within our walls for the purpose of erecting a memorial to Tom Merry & Co., upon the pretence that they have licked us out of existence. They look like licking anybody out of existence just at present, don't they?"

There was a laugh.

"We've caught them in the act," went on Tom Merry. "And as we regard this card as a libel on the honourable firm of Tom Merry & Co.—"

"What's on the card, then?" demanded Gore. "You haven't told us that yet, fathead!"

The hero of the Shell read out the inscription on the mourning-card. There was some grinning among the juniors; the joke appealed to their sense of humour. But the laugh was decidedly against the Grammarians, as it turned out.

"Now," said Tom Merry, "Monk, Lane, and Carboy having libelled Tom Merry & Co., they are going to eat their words!"

"Hear, hear!"

"They do not like the idea, but it's got to be done, all the same. They will eat their words by the simple and effectual process of eating this mourning-card."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good wheeze!"

Tom Merry divided the card into three equal portions. The crowd of juniors watched him with breathless interest. Would the Grammarians submit to the ordeal? It would be a more crushing defeat than they had yet sustained if they actually did eat their words in the presence of the assembled juniors of St. Jim's.

Their looks were not very promising. Monk's brow was clouded, Lane was frowning darkly, and Carboy had set his teeth like a vice.

"Are you ready, my children?" asked Tom Merry.

"If you think we're going to eat that card," said Monk, "you're jolly well mistaken, Tom Merry! We're going to do nothing of the sort!"

"Nothing of the sort!" echoed Lane and Carboy.

Tom Merry smiled sweetly.

"Do you refuse?"

"Yes, we do, and be hanged to you!"

"Very well. Figgins, kindly bring out Taggles's tar-pot."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Right-ho!" grinned Figgins; and he dragged a fearsome-looking pot, half full of sticky tar, into the circle.

There was a large brush in the tar. Tom Merry took it by the handle and stirred the sluggish mass.

"Do you see this tar, my dear infants?"

"Yes, confound you!" growled Monk apprehensively.

"Do you particularly desire to be anointed with it?"

"Hang you, no!"

"Well, you will be if you don't eat that card, and sharp!"

"You—you won't!"

"Oh, yes, I will!" Tom Merry dragged the brush out of the tar. "Now, then, hand them their pieces, Digby. Monk first."

Dig handed a scrap of the mourning-card to Frank Monk, who took it gingerly.

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NEXT WEEK: "THE SCHOOLMASTER'S RESCUE." Another Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Eat away!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"I won't!" yelled Monk; and he made a bolt for the door. He might as well have tried to run through a stone wall. The thick crowd of juniors was impenetrable. He was collared and dragged back in a moment, and Lane and Carboy were pinioned at the same time.

Tom Merry advanced the tar-brush to within an inch of Monk's nose.

The eyes of the Grammar School leader were fixed upon it in a sort of weird fascination.

"D-d-d-don't!" he gasped. "Play the game, you know!" Tom Merry laughed.

"My dear kid, we're playing your own game. Do you remember how you handled Marmaduke Smythe, our tame millionaire, the other day?"

"Well, he was a rank rotter!"

Marmaduke coloured.

"Don't rub it in, Monk," he said. "Perhaps I didn't take the thing in the right spirit. But you'd have coloured me up, all the same, anyway."

"And can you recall the tuckshop, where you biffed the noble features of Montague Lowther, Esquire, into a box of stale eggs?" Monk could not help grinning at the recollection. "So you see," said Tom Merry, "we're more than justified in using strong measures with you, my Grammarian beauties. And we're going to tar you till you're as black as niggers unless you eat your words—and the mourning-card!"

"I won't! I— O-o-o-o-o-och!"

The tar-brush had dabbed in Monk's face, cutting short his speech. He gave a horrified gasp at the taste of the tar. A yell of laughter went up as his face was seen smeared over with black. Lane and Carboy shuddered.

"Are you ready for that little feed now?" inquired Tom Merry politely. "There's no hurry. We've got plenty of time—and plenty of tar."

"I—you—you beast! I'll—I'll wring your beastly neck!" mumbled Monk. "And I won't eat the card, so there! O-o-o-o-ow!"

A second dab fairly smothered his face.

"Are you going to eat your giddy words? Yes or no?"

"Ye-e-e-e-es!" growled Monk.

"Eat away, then, and buck up about it!"

There was no help for it. The Grammarians were fairly in the toils. After the example they had set, they had no right to complain. Frank Monk, with immense reluctance, slowly put the fragment of the mourning-card into his mouth and masticated it, to the intense delight of the St. Jim's juniors.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The wood-shed rang with laughter. Frank Monk having satisfactorily eaten the fragment of card, Lane and Carboy followed the example of their leader. The morsels were too small for the prisoners to care much about the actual eating; it was the humiliation of eating their words in public at the bidding of Tom Merry that made them wild.

The last fragment having disappeared, Tom Merry replaced the tar-brush in the pot with a cordial smile.

"Well, you've done it," he said, "and you might as well have done it first as last, and saved wasting Taggles's tar."

"You—you horrid, beastly bounder!"

"Ha, ha! What price St. Jim's now? Who's top dog?" demanded Blake. "Let's see them to the gates, chaps. Taggles will be locking up any minute now."

The prisoners were escorted down to the gates through the mist by fifty or sixty laughing juniors.

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

"Rats!" said Monk. "You haven't got back the surrender document, anyway. We've got that safe, and we show it to visitors as a proof of how we licked St. Jim's."

"Oh, we'll have it before long!" said Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 12.

A Ripping Proposition.

THE mists were dim and shadowy on the old school. The morning sun gleamed a yellow ball through the fog, and the gas was lighted in the class-rooms.

"Jolly nice weather this for a half-holiday!" Blake grumbled, as the Fourth Form came pouring out after morning lessons. "Hope it will be a bit better on Saturday, or the game with the Grammar School will be a muck-up after all!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, who had an unusual shade of thought upon his face. "I say, Blake, deah boy, is there a meetin' of the Co. this afternoon?"

"Of course there is, image! Do you think we shall allow a half-holiday to pass without improving the shining hour? We're to meet in the haunted priory, at the solemn hour of

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midnight—I mean, we're to buzz off to the wood-shed after dinner."

"Vewy good! I have a pwoposition to make——"

"Gussy, don't make it. We're fed up with your propositions. Blessed if they're not more bother than the propositions in Euclid. Don't do it!"

"But this is weally——"

"Oh, I'm off!" said Blake.

And he strolled away.

"You are!" said D'Arcy indignantly. "Off your silly wockah! I say, Hewwies, I have weally a wippin' pwoposition to make."

"Another time, Adolphus," said Herries, following Blake. "Wude—wewy wude!" said D'Arcy, shaking his head. "I say, Digby—Dig! My word! He's gone, too! These boundahs do not tweat me with pwopah respect. I shall have to weserve that weally wippin' pwoposition till the meetin' in the wood-shed."

After dinner the Co. gathered in the place of meeting. They were all there—eleven good men and true, as Blake put it.

"Gentlemen," said D'Arcy, adjusting his monocle, and taking a survey of the meeting, "befoah we pwocceed to the business of electin' anoathah beastly captain, you know, I have a pwoposition to make. My ideah is this—that as a captain gets the ordah of the boot as soon as he is defeated, he ought to be allowed to wetain the command so long as he is victorious. I think that's a weally wippin' ideah!"

"Hear, hear!" said several voices.

"Of course, when I become captain, that would lead to my being permanent captain," said D'Arcy modestly. "But at pwesent Tom Mewwy is captain, so you cannot wegard my pwoposition as bein' in the slightest degwee self-seekin'. I put it to you."

"Well, I approve of the idea, of course," said Tom Merry. "It can't be denied that once upon a time when this gang was Tom Merry & Co. it was successful, and that since Figgy's idea of a continual change of leaders was adopted we have been knocked sky-high by the Grammar School. I don't want to brag, you know, but I really think I manage you silly asses pretty well, considering what asses you are!"

This tribute from Tom Merry was not very well received. But D'Arcy's idea was taken up, and discussed fairly. The general opinion was that it was a good one.

"You see, it's a poor wule that won't work both ways," said D'Arcy. "I weally think you will find this a good ideah—like most of mine. Let the leadah continue leadah so long as he defeats the enemy—that's the ideah!"

"Well, it's not a bad wheeze," said Blake. "I admit that circumstances were against me when I was leading, and Tom Merry has made the best of it so far."

"Circumstances were against me, too," said Lowther thoughtfully. "I——"

"Oh, no, you can't say that, Lowther! It was your fatehaded——"

"Eh?"

"Circumstances were against me," said Figgins. "You admit that——"

"Not much," said Manners. "A good leader makes his own circumstances."

"Something in that," said Figgins—"except in my case. That couldn't be helped——"

"I don't see it," said Lowther. "You were pretty rotten as a leader. But Gussy's idea is good, and it has one great advantage that Gussy hasn't thought of."

"What is that, pway?"

"Why, my dear Gussy, so long as Tom Merry is leader, we shan't have to draw lots again, and we escape the terrible danger of getting you for a captain."

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled the Co. "Gussy's idea is better than he thought. Adopted!"

"Adopted!"

"Weally, I did not look at it in that light. I——"

"Ha, ha! Gussy's idea is adopted," said Lowther, grinning. "You've been and gone and done it now, Adolphus."

I move that the meeting pass a vote of thanks to Arthur Augustus Algy, in recognition of his having saved them from a terrible danger—the danger of getting him for a leader!"

"Wats! I weally pwotest——"

"Passed!" shouted the company. "Passed unanimously!"

D'Arcy's face was a study. The Co. adopted the proposition without a dissenting voice. Tom Merry made his bow.

"Gentlemen, so long as you are satisfied with me as a leader, I'm willing to keep the post," he said. "I thank you for this proof of confidence, and I thank Arthur Augustus Aubrey FitzPercy for his invaluable suggestion."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"And now let's get to business, as the important question of the leader is settled," said Tom Merry. "Have you noticed that it is a trifle foggy this afternoon?"

"I think I've noticed something of the sort, Tom Merry," said Blake. "What the dickens are you getting at?"

"You haven't forgotten that the Grammarians invaded our quarters last night?"

"Are we likely to forget it?" exclaimed Kerr. "Get on with the washing, and cut the cackle!"

"Yaas, wathah! Cut the beastly cackle, deah boy!"

"Patience, my infants. I have thought over the matter, and I have compiled a wheeze. We can't possibly be put in the shade by the Grammarians. If they come within our sacred borders, we must penetrate within theirs!"

"I suppose you're not going to suggest an attack on the Grammar School?" ejaculated Figgins. "I should think that rather too tall an order even for Tom Merry & Co."

Tom Merry laughed.

"No; I'm not thinking of anything quite so heroic as that," he said. "I'm thinking of that document the Grammarians have boned from us. We can't get it back without going into the Grammar School. The fog this afternoon favours the enterprise; as well as the fact that most of the Grammarians will be out of gates."

Blake gave a whistle.

"But a gang of us could hardly think of going into their quarters without being spotted!" he exclaimed. "Tom Merry, I'm afraid that you're talking out of the back of your head!"

"You haven't heard all yet," said the captain of the great Co. serenely. "Why shouldn't a couple of us—Kerr and myself—get into the Grammar School in disguise?"

"Jolly good idea!" exclaimed Kerr instantly.

The rest of the Co. remained silent in sheer astonishment at the boldness of the idea.

"Kerr is wonderful at making up," went on Tom Merry, "and I've had a lot of practice in private theatricals. The weather is so dull and foggy that nobody would get a really good look at us. What do you think of the wheeze?"

"Ripping!" said Kerr.

"Jolly good," said Figgins slowly, "if it can be worked. But if they found you in their quarters they'd simply skin you, after the way we wiped them up last night!"

"They won't find us out; but if they do we'll stand the row," said Tom Merry. "I'm game, and I know Kerr is."

"Rather!" said the Scottish partner in the Co. promptly.

"We'll stick it out if they collar us; but they won't."

CHAPTER 13.

The Brothers Smith.

"**R**IPPING!"

"Great!"

"Marvellous!"

Such were the comments of Figgins, Fatty Wynn, and Marmaduke, as Kerr and Tom Merry completed the process of "making-up," and stood up for inspection.

The metamorphosis was really wonderful.

Kerr was a born actor, and his skill in impersonation had often afforded fun to his chums of the New House. He had played many parts in his time. Tom Merry was quick and clever, and Kerr willingly gave him the benefit of his experience. The result was really worthy of the commendation bestowed by Figgins & Co.

There had been some doubt in deciding what characters to adopt. Fatty Wynn had suggested capturing a couple of Grammarians and personating them. But the idea was given up as impracticable. It was Tom Merry who decided upon a plan. It was simply to enter the Grammar School with perfect boldness, and if questioned to assume the name of Smith, and state that they had come in the half-holiday to see their cousin of that name at the Grammar School.

"You see, I know there are five different Smiths at the Grammar School," said Tom Merry; "and if we happen to be questioned by one of them, he'll suppose that we're the giddy relations of one of the others. I don't see how the wheeze can be found out, so long as they don't recognise us."

"And they won't do that," said Kerr.

And Figgins & Co. agreed that they wouldn't. The disguise was made by only a few light and artistic touches, but it was perfect. The skins were darkened, the eyebrows and lashes blackened, colour added to the cheeks, and a dark tint to the hair. The two boys then had the appearance of lads of a somewhat foreign aspect, and no one would have dreamed of recognising Tom Merry's fair skin or the sandy complexion of Kerr. They put off the Eton suits and dressed in tweeds, with ordinary caps. Figgins & Co. hardly knew them when the disguise was finished.

"Ripping!" repeated Figgins enthusiastically. "I never thought that even Kerr could do it so well! It's safe as houses!"

"Rather!" said Marmaduke. "If I came into the study now, I shouldn't know you!"

"And I—— Hallo, Monteith!"

The head-prefect of the New House opened the door of the study.

"I want you, Figgins—— Hallo!" He broke off as he saw the two strangers. "If you're entertaining company, never mind!"

"Ha, ha!" howled Figgins. "Don't you know two St. Jim's kids when you see them, Monteith?"

The prefect stared.

"What do you mean, Figgins? These kids don't belong to St. Jim's. Are they new boys?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who are you?" asked Monteith, turning to Tom Merry, but without the slightest recognition in his face.

"If you please," squeaked Tom Merry, "I'm William Arthur Smith, and I've come to see my cousin. This is my young brother Alfred."

"Well, you can go and see your cousin, for all I care," said Monteith. "What are you kids cackling at? Do you want your ears boxed?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Figgins. "Don't you know Tom Merry and Kerr?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted the brothers Smith. "It's us, Monteith!"

The prefect stared, and then grinned.

"What is the meaning of this nonsense?" he asked.

"Only a little joke," said Figgins. "It's not going to be played in our House, so you needn't come down in your wrath, Monteith."

The prefect laughed.

"Well, you can come with me, Figgins, then."

"Right-ho!" said Figgins. "I'll see you kids when you come back, and don't forget to bring the missing document with you!"

Tom Merry and Kerr left the New House, and went down to the gates. A good many glances were cast at them, but nobody recognised them. They left the school, and walked down the lane towards Rylcombe.

A few minutes more brought them to the gates of the Grammar School.

Misty as the afternoon was, most of the Grammarians were out for the half-holiday, in the fields or on the river. There was some practice going on on the football-field, but this was some distance from the school, and so it caused the coast to be clear. Tom Merry and Kerr marched boldly in at the open gates into the playground.

Tom Merry looked round him keenly.

He did not know the lie of the land very well within the walls of the Grammar School. The valuable document he had come to capture was framed and hung up in the junior common-room, he knew that. But where was the room?

There was a tap on his shoulder. He turned his head and saw Mr. Phipps, one of the masters of the Grammar School.

"Are you looking for anyone, my lad?" asked Mr. Phipps. "You are a stranger here, I think?"

"Yes, sir; thank you!" squeaked Tom. "I am William Arthur Smith, and this is my young brother Alfred. We have come to see our cousin. Can you kindly direct me to the common-room, sir?"

"Your cousin is a Lower Form boy, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir!"

"Then that is your way. You expect to find him in the common-room?"

"Well, we haven't been able to find him out of doors, sir."

"Well, that is your way—down that passage, and the last door, facing you."

"Thank you, sir!"

"Thank you, sir!"

And the brothers Smith marched down the passage.

They entered the common-room, and, as Tom Merry expected, found it empty. It was not likely to be occupied on a half-holiday which was fine enough for the boys to be out of doors. Tom closed the door.

Then he broke into an irrepressible chuckle.

"My word!" he said. "What would Monk & Co. say if they knew we were here? But don't let us lose a second. Somebody may come in at any moment."

"It won't take us long to find the thing," said Kerr. "If they've framed it and hung it up in the room, as they said, it's easy enough."

The two juniors from St. Jim's made a hasty examination of the room.

It was a large, white-washed apartment, with a fire-grate at one end, and there were several pictures and maps hanging on the white walls.

It did not take the juniors long to find the one they were in search of.

A gilt frame was hanging directly over the mantelpiece, as the most prominent spot in the room, and in it, nicely mounted, was the document they sought.

The original confession of surrender, extorted from the

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NEXT WEEK: "THE SCHOOLMASTER'S RESCUE."

Another Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Grammarians, had been written out on cardboard, and signed by Frank Monk and his chums. The St. Jim's juniors had not agreed as to the possession of it, and in the struggle it had been torn into three pieces.

The three successive fragments had been won back again by the Grammarians, and had been carefully pasted up on the mount, and now made a whole document again. But over the writing on the card was an added inscription in red ink, daubed on with a brush in letters of a size that quite put the writing in the shade: "Won back from St. Jim's, and preserved as a trophy of the licking we gave them."

Tom Merry grinned.

"There'll be another inscription on that card when we hang it up in the School House," he remarked.

"In the New House, you mean," said Kerr pleasantly.

"Give us that chair, and I'll get it down! We may be interrupted at any moment."

Tom Merry stood on the chair and reached down the frame. To take the back out and remove the mount was the work of a very few moments. The valuable document was pasted there, but Tom Merry soon had it off with his penknife.

"Got it!" he exclaimed triumphantly.

He thrust it into his breast-pocket.

"Here, I say, hand it over—"

"I tell you we'll settle that at St. Jim's! Let's shove the frame up again! But wait a tick! We ought to leave them a message."

Kerr grinned. The idea was a good one.

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows in thought for a moment. There were pens, ink, and papers on a table at hand. Tom picked up a pen, and traced a word in large letters on a sheet of paper, and Kerr grinned approval. The word was quickly blacked in, and then Tom blotted it, and the paper was flattened on the glass, and the back of the frame put in place again.

Then Tom hung it up in its former place over the mantel-piece.

From the gilt frame, instead of the trophy of victory, a single aggressive word stared in bold, black letters from white paper.

RATS!

"My hat!" murmured Kerr. "I would give a week's pocket-money to see Monk's face when he reads that."

"Ha, ha! So would I, but we can't stop! The thing now is to get safe away with the giddy document."

"Come on, then!"

They went to the door. Tom Merry's hand was on it to open it when it was opened from outside, and Monk and Lane, coming in, nearly ran into the two juniors.

CHAPTER 14.

A Narrow Shave.

FRANK MONK stared at the two strangers.

"Hallo! You're in the wrong kennel!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing here?"

Tom Merry had been startled for a moment by the sudden appearance of the enemy, but he was quickly himself again.

"If you please," he squeaked, "I'm William Arthur Smith, and this is my young brother Alfred. We've come to see our cousin."

"Oh, you have, have you?" said Frank Monk. "Then go and see your cousin, or go and eat coke, or anything you like!"

"Certainly! Thank you very much!"

"Wait a tick, though!" said Monk good-naturedly. "You don't know your way about the school, I suppose, do you?"

"Thank you; not very well," squeaked Tom Merry.

"Well, I'll help you find the chap, then. You can get that letter out of my desk, Lane, and bring it to me. Come along, you kids! Now, which Smith is your cousin. There are five kids of that name at this school."

Tom Merry's eyes met Kerr's with a glance of dismay.

"He may use any of his Christian names here," suggested Tom Merry, struck with an inspiration. "His full name is John Henry Frederick William Sydney Smith."

"Well, there's enough of that," said Frank Monk. "I dare say it's Sid Smith you want. There's a chap of that name here. But it's very queer!"

And something like suspicion came into Frank Monk's eyes. It occurred to him that these innocent-looking youngsters might be having a little game with him, though not for a moment did he suspect the full facts.

"Can you tell us where Sid is?" asked Tom Merry, anxious only to get out of the school, so that there would be a chance of making a cut for the gate.

"Yes; he's playing fives now, I believe. Come along!"

They followed Frank Monk down the passage. Lane was in the common-room, looking in Monk's desk for a letter, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 168.

which was what had brought the two juniors into the room at that unlucky moment.

Tom Merry and Kerr drew a deep breath of relief as they came out into the open air again. They were nearer to freedom now, at any rate.

"This way!" said Frank, turning off to the right.

"Hook it!" whispered Tom.

The Saints broke into a run. Frank Monk turned round in amazement.

"This is the way to the fives-court!" he bawled. "Where are you going?"

"It's all right!" squeaked Tom, turning his head. "I can see my cousin now."

"Oh, all right! Hallo, Lane! What's the matter?"

Lane came out of the house with his mouth wide open, and his eyes staring. He looked as if he had seen a ghost. He held a picture-frame in his hands. Tom Merry saw him, and knew that all was up.

"Run for your life!" he gasped.

The two St. Jim's juniors cut across the playground to the gate with a speed they had seldom shown, even on the football-field or the cinder-path.

"What's the matter Lane?"

"Look!" gasped Lane. "I've brought it for you to see."

He held up the frame which had contained the valued trophy of victory.

Frank Monk gave a jump.

"RATS!"

That word, in bold, black, aggressive letters stared him in the face.

"What—what does it mean?" he stammered.

"Can't you see? It was hanging in its usual place, and I just noticed it as I glanced up from your desk. The document's been taken, and they've left this in its place."

"Who—who—which—what—"

"The St. Jim's kids have been here!"

Light flashed upon the bewildered brain of Frank Monk.

"I know!" he fairly yelled. "Those Smith kids! I see it all now. They've just done it. After them!"

He broke into a run. Lane followed him, though only half comprehending. But all was clear to Monk now.

"Stop them!"

He yelled out the words as he ran. Tom Merry and Kerr had just reached the gate. There was a group of Grammarians standing there. They looked round at the sound of Monk's frantic shout, and, seeing two strangers running, and their own leader in pursuit, they closed up to bar the gateway.

Tom Merry set his teeth.

"Shoulder to shoulder, Kerr!"

"Right-ho!" said Kerr.

And shoulder to shoulder they charged.

The Grammarians were not quite prepared for that. They had no time to brace themselves against such a charge as that. The two sturdy juniors, going at full speed, smote them like a steam-hammer, and they were hurled to right and left.

Right through went Kerr and Tom Merry.

They staggered a moment from the shock. Three Grammarians were sprawling on the ground, the others staggering drunkenly. But some of them were reaching out for the fugitives. Monk and Lane put on a spurt and reached the gate.

"Come on!" panted Tom Merry. "It's neck or nothing now!"

They ran on down the lane for St. Jim's.

Out of the gate came Monk and Lane at full pelt. After them came half a dozen Grammar juniors.

Tom Merry glanced back over his shoulder.

"They're gaining!" He gasped out the words.

Kerr's eyes swept anxiously along the road. He expected to see the Co. somewhere on the road to St. Jim's; but they had been instructed not to come too near the Grammar School, for fear of exciting suspicion in the Grammarian minds that something was "on." The two comrades would have been very glad to see them now.

"Gaining! Run for your giddy life!" gasped Tom Merry.

Kerr glanced back. Monk, Lane, and two others were certainly gaining; they were overhauling the St. Jim's juniors foot by foot. Kerr's eyes gleamed.

"Keep it up!" he muttered.

The chase swept on. One of the Grammarians dropped behind, but Monk, Lane, and Gordon Gay were coming on like racers. Tom Merry uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Carboy, by all that's rotten!"

Carboy it was, coming up the lane in all unconsciousness of what was going on, coming directly towards the fugitives, directly in their path.

Monk sighted his chum almost at the same moment. He gave a yell.

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"Carboy! Look out! Stop 'em!"

Carboy gave a start, and looked out. He took in the situation at a glance.

Tom Merry set his teeth hard.

"Knock him over, Kerr! One chap can't stop two of us!"

"No," gasped Kerr; "don't! You've got the paper. You get clear. I'll collar this chap, and hold on to him! The trophy of victory must be saved!"

"Kerr, you're a trump! I'll do it!"

They dashed on. Right at Carboy went the Scottish partner in the Co., and he tackled him like a Rugby back collaring a charging three-quarter. The two rolled in the lane together, and Tom Merry passed them, and ran on like the wind. A few seconds later the Grammarians were tumbling over the two struggling forms.

"Has he got the document?" gasped Monk, picking himself up. "They've been in the school and collared it! Has he got it?"

Kerr was fighting like a demon, to waste time and delay the pursuit of Tom Merry. Anything to save the trophy! But Monk was as keen as Kerr, and he guessed the truth.

"Search him, while we get the other boulder!"

And, leaving Kerr wriggling in the hands of a couple of Grammarians, Monk, Lane, and Carboy darted off on the track of Tom Merry.

Tom Merry had gained ground, and he was running hard. St. Jim's was in sight, and at any moment the Co. might appear. Monk knew it, too, and he put on a desperate spurt. His outstretched hand touched the shoulder of Tom Merry, but the touch acted as a spur to the hero of the Shell. He shook it off and ran harder.

"It's Tom Mewwy!"

Tom Merry gave a gasp of delight.

"Rescue," he shouted—"rescue, St. Jim's!"

Arthur Augustus was standing in the middle of the road, waving his hand wildly to the Co., who were coming on. The swell of St. Jim's had been strolling on ahead. The Co. heard and understood, and came on with a run.

None too soon. Frank Monk had clutched at Tom Merry again, and this time his grip closed on the junior's shoulder and fastened there.

Tom was almost too spent for a struggle. Monk, Lane, and Carboy were scrambling over him, eager to regain the document. But D'Arcy had reached the spot now, running hard, his eyeglass trailing behind him at the end of the cord. He hurled himself upon the Grammarians without an instant's hesitation.

"Rescue!" bawled Tom Merry.

"Here we are!" said Figgins, the first to reach them. The rest of the Co. were only a moment behind. They simply piled themselves on Monk, Lane, and Carboy. The three Grammarians were yanked off Tom Merry in no time, and rolled in the road. Monty Lowther and Manners helped Tom to his feet.

"Good old Tommy! Got it?"

"Yes. Go and help Kerr!"

Figgins & Co. were already racing up the lane. Frank Monk gave a gasp.

"Merry! Kerr! My only hat! How we've been done!"

Done, the Grammarians certainly had been—completely done. The trophy of victory was safely in Tom Merry's possession, and he was safe in the midst of the Co. Monk, Lane, and Carboy wriggled out of the grip of the juniors, and fled through the hedge, cutting across country to escape. The Saints were content to let them go without pursuit. They turned back towards St. Jim's. Tom Merry drew the trophy from his breast, and they feasted their eyes upon it.

"Hurrah!"

Tom Merry and Kerr, rumpled and dusty, but triumphant, were hoisted upon the shoulders of the Co., and borne in state through the gates of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 15.

Another Victory for the Saints.

SIR ROBERT DIGBY stepped from the station hack and shook hands with his hopeful son on the steps of the School House, and then with the rest of Tom Merry & Co. It was Saturday midday—the day of the final match with the Grammar School.

Morning lessons were over, and glad enough had the juniors of St. Jim's been to be dismissed that morning. They were thinking of the afternoon, and the visit to the Grammar School.

Besides the eleven—of which Tom Merry was the captain—nearly every junior at St. Jim's had made up his mind to go in order to see the match, and some of them started walking over immediately after dinner.

It was "pax" between the two schools for the day, and the Saints were given a cordial welcome on the Grammar School ground.

"A fine afternoon for your match!" said Sir Robert, as he shook hands with Tom Merry. "I hope I shall see you beat the enemy."

"We're going to try, sir!" said the hero of the Shell cheerfully.

The baronet smiled, and passed in. Dr. Holmes and some of the masters were going over to see the match, and Sir Robert was going in the doctor's carriage.

Tom Merry & Co. were in high spirits.

The afternoon was fine and clear, with a hint of spring in the air, and the late mists had quite cleared away. The sky was of steely blue, the weather quite dry. Never had Tom Merry's eleven been in better form for a match.

The brake rolled up to the Grammar School ground. A couple of dressing-tents stood there, and Frank Monk and his friends came to welcome the Saints and show them to their quarters.

Tom Merry shook hands cordially with Frank.

"You did us brown that time, Merry," grinned the Grammar School leader. "It was a ripping wheeze, and we didn't catch on till too late. But we'll give you the kybosh this time to make up for it, my pippin!"

"We'll take all the kyboshing you can give us," said Tom Merry cheerfully.

A cheer greeted the appearance of the teams in the field. The ropes round the football-ground were lined with eager faces. Grammarians and Saints seemed to be there in almost equal forces. The two captains tossed, and Monk won the choice of goals, and St. Jim's were given the kick-off against a stiff breeze.

The ball rolled from the foot of Tom Merry. The play was hard and fast from the start.

Presently the Saints seemed to get more into their stride, and a fine run up the field by Marmaduke resulted in a goal from the foot of Figgins, the first scored in the match. But just before half-time the Grammarians responded with a goal, taken by Frank Monk, and the first half closed with the score equal.

After the brief interval, the sides renewed the contest with undiminished energy. Play was hard and fast, and furious. The spectators continually cheered fine work, but on each side the defence was sound, and the best efforts of the forwards—good as they were—seemed to fail.

But the change of ends had given the Saints the advantage, of which they slowly but surely made full use, gaining the upper hand by degrees. By luck and pluck Carboy sent in a shot that baffled Fatty Wynn, and the Grammar School stood two to one, with twenty minutes more to play.

But it was the last score for the Grammar School. St. Jim's bore all before them now. With a fine, combined rush up the field, they forced the home backs to concede a corner, which materialised in a goal from Tom Merry.

Two to two! And fifteen minutes more to time.

Five minutes later St. Jim's were yelling themselves hoarse over another goal, the result of a splendid dribble right up the field by Figgins, who kicked the ball at the end of the run, with two backs almost upon him, and beat the goalie all the way.

But St. Jim's triumph was not ended yet.

The Grammarians played up splendidly, but the Saints were too much for them. The Co. and Tom Merry worked like clockwork. Another rush besieged the home goal, and from a press of players the ball suddenly popped out like the pip from an orange, and took the home goalie quite by surprise. It was in the net before he knew that it was coming.

It was Digby's goal. Sir Robert shouted himself hoarse. The Co. slapped Dig on the back as they walked back to the centre of the field.

"Four to two!" grinned Tom Merry. "Give 'em another one for luck!"

And the Co. played up for another goal. And they captured it, too, Tom Merry sending the ball into the net with a terrific shot almost on the stroke of time.

Then the whistle went.

St. Jim's had beaten the Grammar School by five to two! It was a glorious victory, and the cheers of the St. Jim's partisans round the ropes awoke the echoes.

The Grammarians had put up a good fight, but Tom Merry & Co. had surpassed themselves, and were on the top of their opponents all the time. Tom Merry's position as leader of the juniors of St. Jim's was more firmly established than before. He had led his Co. to victory on the football-field and off it, and nothing now remained for Frank Monk & Co. but to hide their diminished heads, and acknowledge defeat in the latest struggle of Saints versus Grammarians.

THE END.

(Another splendid long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. next week, entitled: "The Schoolmaster's Rescue," by Martin Clifford. Order your copy of the "GEM" LIBRARY in advance. Price one penny.)

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NEXT WEEK: "THE SCHOOLMASTER'S RESCUE." Another Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

[Our Readers are informed that the characters in the following Serial Story are purely imaginary, and no reference or allusion is made to any living person. Actual names may be unintentionally mentioned, but the Editor wishes it to be distinctly understood that no adverse personal reflection is intended.]

A Thrilling Tale of Modern Adventure.



By ROBERT W. COMRADE.

INTRODUCTION.

Frank Kingston, a young Englishman, is engaged on a secret campaign against a criminal society called the Brotherhood of Iron, his aim being to break up the society by ruining the members of the Inner Council. He has the assistance of Miss O'Brien, an accomplished young lady, Professor Graham Polgrave, a clever scientist and inventor, Carson Gray, a detective, Fraser, his man, and a lad named Tim.

Kingston has brought eight prominent members to book, and is proceeding to ruin the ninth—a certain Dr. Julius Zeetman, who is in charge of the Grange Private Lunatic Asylum. He learns that many of its inmates are not lunatics, but perfectly sane people. Under the pretence of being a lunatic, Kingston, and Miss O'Brien as his nurse, obtain rooms in the asylum under the names of Mr. Meredith Hall and Miss Thurston. The first two nights he is there, Kingston manages to get two of the sane people out of the asylum. Zeetman is astounded at his loss, and arranges for ten common-members of the Brotherhood to come and guard the building on the third night. Kingston learns Zeetman's intentions, and, having determined to rescue six of the sane inmates, he wires to Carson Gray to prevent Zeetman's men from reaching the asylum. Carson Gray manages this, and Kingston's scheme is successfully brought off. He despatches the six rescued men to London in his motor-car, with a few final instructions as to how to disperse without arousing suspicion.

(Now go on with the story.)

A Shock for Dr. Zeetman.

"This is all so remarkable—" stammered one of the rescued men.

"Quite so!" agreed Kingston. "But let us negotiate the wall."

Try as they would, the half-dozen elated men could get no further word from their strange "old" rescuer. Everything they asked him he passed off with an inconsequent remark, and before many minutes had passed they found themselves face to face with Fraser and Tim. Kingston drew the former aside for a moment.

"You've got 'em all out, sir?" exclaimed Fraser admiringly.

"Yes, Fraser, and in the easiest manner imaginable. All you have to do now is to take them to London, and set them down at different points on the road once you get into the

metropolis. Drive slowly, so as to arrive after six. It will be a tight squeeze to get them all into the car, but you must manage somehow."

"Right, sir!" replied Fraser.

Kingston turned and looked at the group gathered together in excited conversation.

"Good-bye," he exclaimed, "and a pleasant journey!"

Before they could reply he was up the ladder, had reached the top, and thrown the ladder to the ground.

"Tim," he said, "this article will not be needed further, and there will be no necessity for you to come to-morrow. I shall see you in the afternoon."

He did not waste a second, but turned and jumped to the ground below, leaving Fraser to manage his charges to the best of his ability. The rescue had been brought off with complete satisfaction, and now Kingston only had to get back to his apartments.

Before doing so, however, he descended once more into the corridor. The keepers were still silent and motionless on the floor. To all appearances they were stone dead; but Kingston knew very well that at the end of twenty-four hours they would be as full of life as himself, and, if anything, the better for their enforced inactivity.

He still had the key of the wards, and now proceeded to unlock five of the empty ones, those which had been lately occupied by the departed patients. Then, with a little delay as possible, he lifted the keepers up one by one and placed them in the now empty beds, relocking the doors as he left each cell.

"I imagine the doctor will receive something of a start when he finds the passage empty," chuckled Kingston to himself. "But what he will do when he gains admittance to the wards, however, is rather a question."

He glanced up and down the now deserted corridor, and assured himself that there was absolutely no clue for Zeetman to discover. The rope was still hanging from the skylight, so he hauled himself up until once more he stood in the pouring rain. One little thing more and he was ready for bed. That little thing was to descend into one of the cells and refasten the key to the belt of the keeper it had originally hung from.

"There will be quite a mystery in the morning," Kingston told himself, "for it certainly will be puzzling to find the men locked in the wards, their real occupants gone, and the keepers apparently dead. Moreover, the key will be found inside one of the locked cells."

Five minutes later Frank Kingston was seated before the cosy fire in the end sitting-room relating to Dolores everything that had occurred. The end was within sight, and Kingston was just a little sorry, for this episode had been particularly interesting.

Dolores' help had been invaluable, for, after all, without her he could never have even entered the asylum—at least, not under the present favourable conditions.

For the rest of the night everything was profoundly quiet, the whole household, in fact, being asleep. Zeetman had retired, fully convinced that another escape was out of the question. Considering all the precautions that had been taken, he had good reason to feel confident.

His usual hour for rising was seven o'clock, but at half-past six he was aroused by a loud knocking on his bed-room door. The doctor sat up and rubbed his eyes.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed sharply. "Who is there?"

"Me, sir," said the voice of a nurse.

"Well, what do you want?"

"Will you please come as soon as you can, sir?" exclaimed the nurse from the other side of the door. "We can't find nothing of the keepers, sir."

"Can't find the keepers?" cried Zeetman. "What on earth do you mean, woman?"

"It's right, sir. Mrs. Manning told me that they was to keep watch all night, but they've all gone somewhere, sir."

"I will come as soon as possible," cried the doctor, as he leapt out of bed. "Good heavens!" he muttered to himself. "What can she mean? Surely nothing can have happened—surely—"

He broke off with a curse, and hurried into his clothes as fast as he had ever done in his life. All sorts of wild thoughts entered his mind, for it was indeed a startling piece of information which the nurse had just given him. He did not stop to wash, but rushed down, with no collar on and his hair like a mop. In the hall he paused for a moment to look out into the grounds.

It was not a pleasant spectacle, for the untidy garden was sodden and dripping with the night's rain. The downpour had ceased now, and there were indications that before noon the sun would burst forth from the dark-looking clouds which moved slowly across the heavens.

There was no sign of life, and Zeetman hurried on to the newer part of the building. The long corridor was bare but for a nurse, who was approaching from the opposite direction. The lamps, although it was broad daylight, were still burning, which showed that something out of the usual had occurred.

"This is inexplicable!" exclaimed the doctor quickly. "The men were to have turned in at dawn, with the exception of one, who had, of course, to keep watch as usual. Has there been no sign of him?"

"None whatever, sir. And the men's sleeping quarters are deserted. They're not in the house, sir."

Zeetman stamped his foot excitedly.

"They must be!" he cried. "Where could they have gone to? There was no earthly reason why they should leave the house!"

He stood for a moment thinking, a very worried expression on his face. Then, with a sudden movement, he produced a key from his pocket. It was a duplicate of the one which had assisted Kingston during the night.

"You think some of the prisoners might have escaped?" questioned the nurse a little anxiously.

"I mean to ascertain," replied the doctor grimly. "I do not think it possible, but my mind will be made easy if I make sure. The thing that is troubling me, however, is the disappearance of the keepers. I can find no explanation for their absence."

He inserted the key into the lock of Ward No. 19, opened the door, and strode in. One glance round was sufficient to show him that everything was in order, for the occupant was lying in bed fast asleep.

"We will try the other side," he exclaimed.

This time the sight which was revealed to Zeetman was of a very different nature. He flung the door open and stuck his head into the ward. At first sight everything seemed to be in order; then a cry of consternation escaped the Inner Councilor's lips.

"Stevenson!" he shouted, in his amazement.

He stood there for a second, utterly taken aback, for the rightful occupant of the ward had disappeared, and on the bed lay the inert form of Stevenson, the head-keeper.

"Good heavens! What can it mean—what can it mean? No. 4 is not here—there is no sign of him! Stevenson, wake up, and explain this—"

The rest of Zeetman's sentence ended in a cry of horror and startled surprise. He bent down for a moment over Stevenson's form, and felt his pulse. Then he looked up at the nurse with a pale face and dilated eyes.

"He is dead!" he whispered hoarsely. "Stevenson is dead! Great powers! What can this mean? I—I am bewildered! I—"

Dr. Zeetman was stunned by this discovery—for he really thought Stevenson to be dead—and for a moment stood perfectly still staring at the nurse, who was equally as horrified.

"Dead, sir?" she muttered. "Who could have done it, and where is No. 4? Do you think, sir—do you think—"

"You mean," exclaimed Zeetman, in a tense voice—"you mean the other keepers? Do I think they are locked in the other cells? It cannot be possible that they are all dead, and that more of the prisoners have got free! It is incredible—"

Zeetman broke off as he braced himself up, and placed the key in the door of No. 5. He was almost prepared for the sight which met his gaze, but could not repress another cry as he saw the counterpart of that in the other ward.

The first stunning force of the shock was over now, and Zeetman only thought of his escaped prisoners. The deaths of his keepers, as he thought, was nothing to his callous nature. He let fly a string of oaths as he rushed from the ward to the next one. This contained a real lunatic, and Zeetman's eyes blazed as he saw him.

"It is only the sane ones who are gone!" he rasped out. "The others are left. The thing is absolutely uncanny, for there must have been a whole army here to cause these deaths. By the look of it the whole five have been murdered."

Zeetman soon found that such apparently was the case. The shock of having all his keepers wiped out was a terrible one, for he knew that everything would have to come out to the police—that there would be an inquest, and that a thousand-and-one inquiries would be made. He did not care now one jot how many prisoners were gone, for he knew that the game was up.

"I must go and see Mount-Fannell immediately!" he told himself, as he frenziedly finished his toilet. "Six men gone, and the five keepers dead! It is terrible—terrible! Thank goodness, the asylum stands by itself! I can see the Chief, gain his advice, and be back here before noon to collect my private papers. The police need know nothing about it until the day is well on, and by that time I shall be clear away. But I must see Mount-Fannell at once!"

In ten minutes he was ready to depart, and called the head-nurse to him before hurrying round to the stables to prepare his own trap.

"Remain here until I return!" he said sharply. "You need have no fear, for I shall set matters all right. I am going for the police now, but shall put the matter before them in such a way that none of the truth is brought to light with regard to the patients' sanity. Do nothing until I return, which will be at about noon. I shall, in all probability, bring an inspector of police to investigate."

And with that final lie Zeetman hurried from the room. He thought it wisest to say this to the nurses as otherwise they might get into a panic and run away. He knew they had confidence in him, and felt sure that they would obey his instructions.

Five minutes later Dr. Zeetman was on his way to London.

Nearing the End.

London streets were in an extremely muddy state when the doctor arrived at the metropolis. This was due to the night's rain, but now there was every prospect of the weather breaking out fine.

Zeetman, however, had no thought for the atmospheric conditions, but hastened with all speed to the West End. His impatience was almost uncontrollable, and he had difficulty in concealing the agitation in his eyes, face, and manner.

His one fear was that Lord Mount-Fannell would not be at home, but his mind was set at rest when he arrived at the house in Grosvenor Square, for he was shown straight to the library. The Chief was sitting at his desk, busily writing.

"Why, doctor, this is a surprise!" he exclaimed, as he shook hands. "Perhaps not, though, when I think—"

"I am ruined, and must make myself scarce immediately!" interjected Zeetman, in hoarse tones. "Good gracious, Chief, you cannot realise the extent of the calamity!"

The doctor sat down in a chair, trembling and unstrung. Now that he had reached his destination all the vitality seemed to have left him, and he was pale and haggard; a haunting look of terror making itself apparent in his eyes.

"What has happened?" demanded Lord Mount-Fannell. "Come, Zeetman, pull yourself together and tell me the reason of this visit. A drop of whisky, perhaps—"

"Whisky be hanged!" snarled the doctor, rising to his feet with a burst of activity. "I'm all right! Listen here!"

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Eight patients have escaped, Chief—first two, and then six more of them have been spirited away!"

"Good heavens!"

"But that is not the worst. Every one of my keepers, five in all, are lying dead at the asylum! They have been murdered by this accursed unknown rescuer. I cannot tell how they met their end, but this morning, when I made my tour round the wards, I found their bodies stiff and cold!"

Dr. Zeetman, his voice getting hoarser than ever, related everything in detail, the Chief meanwhile listening with agitated concern. He quite realised that his companion's career as an asylum-keeper was at an end. The death of the keepers would have to be accounted for, without taking into consideration the tale the escaped prisoners would tell.

"It's a serious business, Zeetman," said the Chief finally, his voice ringing hard and stern, "and once this secret enemy gets into my power, he will be made to pay dearly for what he has done!"

"That is quite apart from the present matter!" exclaimed the Inner Councillor. "I want your advice. What shall I do—where can I go? My whole mind is in a whirl! It seems utterly inconceivable to me how one man could have performed all this. There must be more than one—there must be a gang!"

"Perhaps you are right, Zeetman, but there's one thing you are unaware of. The ten men who were to keep watch outside in the grounds never reached the asylum!"

Zeetman gave the Chief a quick glance.

"Never reached the asylum?" he echoed, in surprise.

"But they did—I know they did, for I spoke to some of them myself just before midnight!"

"I tell you, Zeetman, that the men you spoke to were members of this rescue gang. The car containing the ten common-members started from Lambeth Road all right, but had not travelled more than ten miles when it was stopped by the police, and the whole batch detained on some ridiculous charge."

"Then they are under arrest?"

"Not at all. They were released this morning when it was too late for them to be of any use. It seems that the police were informed by telephone message, which purported to come from Scotland Yard, but which was, in reality, a fake. On finding it out the local inspector released our men with apologies. But the mischief was done; they had been prevented from reaching your establishment."

"It must have been the work of this mysterious enemy!" cried the doctor furiously. "And I had no suspicion! But there's not a moment to waste, Chief—before the day is out the police will be at the Grange!"

"There is no immediate danger of their getting to know what has occurred—I mean, of course, the keepers?"

"They can get to know nothing at present, for, as you know, the asylum stands quite by itself. The nurses will not say anything, for they are all liable to arrest should the true facts come to light."

"And your papers?"

"They are all there, locked in the safe. There are several private ones connected with the Brotherhood which must be procured at any cost. It will necessitate another visit to the Grange."

"Since the police know nothing so far, you can go down without fear of discovery," said the Chief thoughtfully.

"But you did wrong, Zeetman, in not clearing everything up immediately. It is quite useless your coming to me for advice, for now that matters have gone so far there is nothing for you to do but make yourself scarce. The whole facts will be out, so the very best thing you can do is to get those papers, hand them over to me, then make for Southampton. There you can book a passage to France, or Spain, and lie low for a month or two. You will be disguised, of course, and must not return to London for at least three months."

Zeetman sat in his chair silent and agitated. He tapped the floor with his foot restlessly, then looked up at the calm face of Lord Mount-Fannell.

"You do not seem to be troubling much about this awful matter!" he muttered resentfully. "To you, I suppose, it is a mere trifle!"

The Chief smiled.

"To be candid, Zeetman," he replied, "it is! After all, it only means the disestablishment of the asylum. You yourself are unharmed, and will be ready for work again very soon. The nurses know nothing of any importance, so the Brotherhood is quite secure. As for the keepers, their death is a mere detail—"

"But this mysterious band of enemies—"

"Ah!" The Chief's face changed suddenly, and that relentlessly hard look entered his eyes. "That is another matter, Zeetman. I mean to devote a great part of my time in future to discovering this enemy. I mean to find him, and crush him out of existence!"

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And by the tone of Mount-Fannell's voice; and the look in his eyes, it was quite possible to believe that had the enemy been any other man than Frank Kingston, his words would have eventually come true.

"But that is apart from the present matter!" exclaimed Dr. Zeetman. "How can I let you have those papers? Must I come to London again?"

"No. That would be risky," replied his lordship. "I will accompany you to the local station in disguise, and you can hand me the papers then. After that you can proceed to Southampton without delay. I will supply you with plenty of ready money to keep you for three months."

Zeetman breathed a little more freely. After all, the matter wasn't so calamitous as he had first imagined. He needed a holiday, and a few months on the Continent would be rather welcome.

"There must be no delay," went on the Chief, "so if you will be ready in five minutes we will take a taxi to Waterloo. There is no telling what is taking place at the asylum in your absence."

"Things cannot get worse than they already are," replied Zeetman. "The police as yet know nothing, but I shall, just before leaving, advise the nurses to make themselves scarce. The other patients, both sane and insane, must look after themselves to the best of their ability."

Zeetman pulled himself together with a return of his old confidence. His path was clear before him, and he knew exactly what to do—or, rather, thought he knew. Had he been aware of what was in store for him at the asylum he would have shunned the place as though it were Scotland Yard itself.

For while he and Mount-Fannell had been talking and planning confidently, events were happening at the Grange which Zeetman never dreamed of. Soon after he had departed Dolores and Kingston sat at their breakfast. They did not know what had occurred that morning, although Kingston guessed that Zeetman would rush off to London without delay.

The nurse, Mrs. Manning, had brought the breakfast in, wearing a scared look on her face, and when she came to clear the things away, in answer to Dolores' ring, the expression was still present in her eyes.

"The doctor won't come round this morning, madam," she said, almost in a whisper. "He's been called away to London very suddenly, so can't attend the patients until this afternoon."

"That will be all right," replied Dolores, glancing at Kingston across the room. "Mr. Hall is in excellent health at present, so this afternoon will do equally as well."

"He would have come and told you himself, madam, only there was a hurry to catch the train."

The nurse took her departure as soon as possible, for she found it difficult to conceal her agitation. Kingston smiled as he heard the heavy door closed and bolted.

"As I thought!" he exclaimed calmly. "Zeetman has rushed off to the Chief, probably well-nigh off his head with fright. I do not suppose he will be long gone, so I shall have to set to work."

"But he may not come back, Mr. Kingston."

"There is no danger of that, I think. Had he meant to go for good he would not have taken his departure so hurriedly. He knows, of course, that the police must be called in to see the 'dead' men, but as the nearest police-station is miles away, and as nobody is leaving the asylum—at least, Zeetman is under that impression—the news cannot get abroad."

"You speak as though somebody will leave the asylum!" exclaimed Dolores. "I know, of course, that the other prisoners will be released, but who else will leave?"

"The nurses. They are scared out of their wits already, and if they do not elect to go of their own accord, I shall send them off myself; but with regard to Zeetman, I'm absolutely convinced that he will return before noon. By that time the preliminary work will be over and I shall be ready for him—ready to strike the last blow in this particular adventure!"

"And I have done practically nothing," declared Dolores. "Nevertheless, I ought not to grumble, for the very fact of my helping, even in a small degree, to exterminate the Brotherhood, is very gratifying to me. I have enjoyed this episode immensely, but only wish that I could have given more material help."

"You could not have done that, Dolores!" smiled her companion. "The work that I have been doing was of such a nature that you could not have lent me your personal aid in the actual rescues. Here, however, as Miss Thurston, you have played your part in a manner quite worthy of you."

"I should like to have done more," smiled Dolores. "But tell me, what is your next move?"

"The next move will be to escape from this room by the

usual means, and descend to the ground. There I shall proceed to release the remainder of the prisoners. There is nobody to stop me now, for the nurses will be too frightened to offer resistance."

Dolores made a slightly wry face, looking strangely out of keeping with her old-fashioned make-up.

"And do I have to remain in here again?" she inquired smilingly.

"I'm afraid so, Dolores. There is some unpleasant work to follow—the encounter with Zeetman, I mean—and I think you would prefer to be out of the way. If you will, I should like you to prepare a couple of disguises, so that after everything is done we can don them and be off without delay."

"That will occupy but little of my time. Could I not help you to rescue the patients? There are three ladies, I understand?"

"By Jove, yes! I will make my escape by means of the skylight; then, when I get through the building, will unlock the dividing door and let you out. Although the ladies are up and have had their breakfasts, they would feel much more comforted by you telling them of their rescue than if I were to do so."

A few moments later the furniture was piled up in the usual manner, although now there was no necessity for extreme quiet. Kingston still retained his disguise as Mr. Hall, for he meant nobody to know, or even suspect, his real personality.

He clambered out on to the leads, and noted that the sky was clearing. Then he took a look round over the surrounding heath. It was deserted and drear. Not a soul could be seen, the only living objects in view being a dozen or so sparrows chirping from the top of the high wall. All else was silent—But no. Several other objects had just appeared from the obscurity of the yew-trees.

"By Jove!" murmured Kingston, with a laugh, "I had an idea it would be so. The nurses evidently mean to take no chances, so are taking themselves off now they have the opportunity!"

Yes, it was indeed the nurses, and they were hurrying away with all speed. In spite of Zeetman's injunctions, the presence of the five supposedly dead bodies had proved too much for their nerves, and they had decided to leave before Zeetman returned—before the police arrived.

For Kingston this was decidedly favourable, for his work was now straightforward. In the whole of that large and straggling building there was only himself and Dolores at liberty. Everybody else was a prisoner, and these latter were not aware in the slightest degree of the startling events which had been happening around them. They had no suspicion that their last hour of misery had arrived, and that they were all to be given their freedom.

With the keepers helpless, the nurses away, and Zeetman on a visit to London, there was nobody else to contend with, and Kingston walked round the garden to the side-door with a slightly jaunty step. He had good reason to feel satisfied, for his plans had been carried out in the most satisfactory manner. Everything had gone right, and now the last day had arrived with the conditions exactly as he had imagined they would be.

He found the side-door wide open, and his steps echoed hollow and loud as he walked along the deserted passage. On the table in the consulting-room he found several keys affixed to chains, and these, he concluded, were those which had belonged to the nurses. He took them and made his way to the wards. The long passage was bare and empty, but numerous sounds could be heard proceeding from the wards on either side.

"Now," Kingston murmured to himself, "there are still eight prisoners to rescue, one on the left-hand side and seven on the right. The last three of all, at the far end, contain the ladies, so I will release Dolores before settling to work."

He walked along the passage with rapid strides, and found that the key of the end door was hanging on a nail close by. In one moment the door was unbolted and unlocked, and in another Kingston was standing before Dolores in the sitting-room.

"You have been quick!" she exclaimed, starting from her seat.

"There was nothing whatever to stop me," he replied coolly. "I found everything in the most favourable condition. The doors were wide open, the keys of the wards ready to my hand. By Jove, Dolores, the ease with which this work has been carried out is almost funny!"

"Funny?" repeated Dolores, with a smile. "I do not think any other man would look upon it in that way, Mr. Kingston. But you say you found the place deserted. Did you see nothing of the nurses, then?"

"Oh, yes, I forgot! I had scarcely gained the roof when I saw those gentle creatures scurrying away as fast as their legs would carry them across the heath. Like sensible persons, they do not mean to be left until it is too late."

"Then we have the place to ourselves?"

"Absolutely! There is nobody about, or, in fact, nobody likely to appear until Zeetman returns. Our work is straightforward, and by the end of half an hour the remaining prisoners will be gone. But, come! While you attend to the ladies I will give the gentlemen their surprise."

So saying, Kingston turned on his heel and returned to the long corridor. The next twenty minutes were busy ones, and Kingston had to explain again and again to the amazed patients that their freedom had come at last. None of them could quite realise it, but at length they were ready to depart.

There was no getting ready, no packing of luggage, for there was none to pack, and they stood out in the corridor in groups, many of them seeing one another for the first time. They all gazed at Kingston with something like awe, for it seemed utterly incredible that that decrepit old man had planned the rescue alone. The ladies, too, were almost weeping with joy. Miss Thorne was the most composed of the three. She, incidentally, had been the main cause of Kingston taking up the case, for she had only been lately incarcerated in the asylum. Her uncle's plot would now come to nothing, and her fiancé, who had asked Carson Gray to discover her whereabouts, would be made a happy man once again.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," cried Kingston, when everything was ready, "please ask no questions whatever, for I am afraid I can give no satisfactory answer. You have your freedom, and are at liberty to go where you please. I cannot tell you why I have done this, or who I am, so please let your curiosity remain unsatisfied."

"But we must know," exclaimed one of the gentlemen. "We shall never be satisfied until we find out who you are, and why you have been so good to us. The whole thing to me is inexplicable, as well as being startlingly unexpected."

Kingston smiled.

"Then I am afraid, my dear sir," he replied, "you will never be satisfied. Try as you will, you will never discover my identity, and I ask you all now to let everything remain as it is. I made up my mind to rescue you, but for reasons I cannot state here I have to act absolutely incognito, so you will oblige me by looking no further into the matter."

Kingston turned without another word and made his way out into the stable-yard the other side, the five men following, talking animatedly among themselves.

"Now, gentlemen, if you will lend me your assistance, we will soon have the wagonette out and the horse harnessed. Dr. Zeetman is away, so can raise no objection to the liberty I am taking. I want you to drive to the second station on the line from here—not the nearest, but the one further on."

"Why?" asked one of the men.

"Because there's a chance Zeetman may return, and I do not want him to know anything of what has happened until he reaches home. There is plenty of room in this wagonette to contain yourselves and the three ladies, and I trust to you to escort them to London in safety."

"I hardly like to mention it," hesitated an elderly gentleman, "but none of us have—"

Kingston smiled, and guessed what was coming.

"You mean," he said, "that all your money was taken from you when you arrived at this wretched place. Well, we will soon set that right. Here is enough to see you through a week at least."

And he handed them the same amount as the others had received. This totalled up altogether to one hundred and sixty pounds. As the money was taken from the Brotherhood's own secret hoard, which Kingston had charge of—having possessed himself of it when leaving the Iron Island—the amount was quite immaterial to him.

The patients, however, did not understand this, and naturally thought that it was out of the "old gentleman's" pocket. At last they were all seated in the wagonette ready

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NEXT WEEK: "THE SCHOOLMASTER'S RESCUE."

to depart. Several of the men knew how to drive, so there was no difficulty on that point.

"Good-bye!" exclaimed Kingston, as he stood with Dolores by his side. "I am convinced you will never hear another word of Dr. Zeetman. His villainous career is at an end, and you may rest confidently in the knowledge that he will be justly punished for his many crimes."

Five minutes later all sounds of the wagonette had died away in the distance. The Grange Private Asylum stood silent and deserted in the pale sunlight which now burst from between two dark and heavy clouds.

Face to Face with the Avenger.

"I am glad they have gone, Dolores, for now there's nothing to do but await Dr. Zeetman's return."

Frank Kingston entered the building with his companion and stood for a moment at the end of the long corridor, with its now many-open doors. Suddenly the sound of someone shouting reached their ears.

"That is one of the insane patients," exclaimed Dolores. "What do you mean to do with them?"

"Nothing. My business was only connected with the sane ones. By this afternoon the police will be in possession, and these half-dozen unfortunate people will probably be removed to a respectable establishment. The keepers, too, will be recovered by to-night, and will be merely arrested on the charge of having been accessories to Zeetman's villainy."

"When do you think the doctor will return?"

"At any moment," replied Kingston; "so if you will return to the sitting-room and prepare those disguises, I will get ready to receive the scoundrel when he turns up. It is almost certain he will come alone, but even if somebody accompanies him I think I am equal to the two."

"I know it," smiled Dolores. "I will go and do as you say, but I tell you frankly, Mr. Kingston, I shall be very anxious until I see you back again. I do not trust Dr. Zeetman, and he is capable of any dastardly action."

"I am well aware of that, Dolores, and shall be strictly on my guard. I shall treat him in the way I outlined at first. Have no fear whatever. I am quite capable of dealing with a cowardly brute such as Zeetman."

He smiled, and they parted—she to return to their old quarters, and he to make for Dr. Zeetman's library, which would, in all probability, be the first place the latter would visit.

Kingston had glanced at the keepers, and they still looked as though life were extinct, but he knew very well that before night they would recover full consciousness. The dose of the professor's drug he had administered on the little darts had been of just sufficient strength to act for a little over twenty hours.

The time was now getting on to noon, and Kingston entered the Inner Councillor's library and seated himself in the armchair in front of the desk. He was facing the door, so that he would be seen immediately the doctor entered.

His patience was not tried for long, for he had not been there twenty minutes, calmly reading a review, when he heard the sound of horses' hoofs. He did not stop reading, but continued his article with the most perfect calmness.

He heard the horse stop, and Zeetman's voice, now harsh and angry, calling for one of the nurses to appear, for since the keepers were all incapable, their work had to be performed as far as possible by the nurses.

As nobody responded to his summons, Zeetman uttered an audible curse, and tethered his horse to a large hook in the wall. He was obviously in a hurry, or he would not have been so impatient. He did not enter the library, but made his way to the other entrance, calling for Mrs. Manning.

"The doctor will receive a little surprise in a moment," Kingston told himself with a smile, as he heard what was going on. "When he sees the cell-doors wide open he will lose what remaining control he has over himself."

And he was not far wrong, for when the doctor hurried into the long corridor, and saw the ward doors standing wide open, he started back and stared before him with wide-open eyes. Then he dashed forward, glanced into each, and uttered a string of oaths.

After a moment, however, he pulled himself up, and burst into a bitter and cynical laugh. What did it matter to him, after all? Every one of his sane patients were gone now, and it made no difference whatever. Nevertheless, it was galling to know that this mysterious enemy had been at work even in the broad daylight.

It was useless denying to himself that he had been beaten at every point—that he had been treated as though he were a child, and his plans foiled at each and every turn. Compared to Frank Kingston, he was indeed a child.

"It is useless remaining here," he muttered savagely. "The nurses seem to have gone, and the police may appear at any moment. I had better obtain those papers and get back to Mount-Fannell with all speed."

He gave a last look round, then stamped out into the garden, making for his library door. He found this open, and walked in, in the full belief that the room was empty and deserted. Indeed, he was right in the room before he saw the form of "Mr. Meredith Hall." The latter was still sitting in the chair reading, and he did not look up. Zeetman opened his mouth in utter amazement, then started forward a pace.

"Mr. Hall!" he exclaimed. "What does this mean? How did you get here—?"

Frank Kingston closed the review up.

"How I got here, Zeetman, is quite immaterial," he exclaimed calmly, looking straight into the doctor's eyes. "I am here, and that is quite enough."

"But," gasped the other, "you are—you are— This is amazing! I thought you were insane!"

"On the contrary, Dr. Zeetman, I am very much the opposite! You have been deceived in a most excellent manner, and when you took me into your asylum you made the greatest mistake of your whole career."

Zeetman's eyes bulged from his head.

"Then you are the man," he whispered hoarsely—"the man who—"

"Precisely," smiled Kingston, tapping his hand gently on the desk before him. "I am the secret enemy who has baffled the Brotherhood for so long, and who has succeeded in stripping your building of its innocent and unfortunate inhabitants. But your time has come now, Zeetman, and I warn you to prepare yourself."

"What do you mean," asked the other—"what do you mean?"

"I mean," replied Kingston grimly, "that it is useless your thinking of escaping punishment!"

Zeetman's amazement and fright had died down a little now, and his old, hard expression had returned. He thought Kingston to be an old man; he thought it would be quite an easy matter to overcome him.

"You fool!" he cried. "What do you take me for? Do you think I will submit to anything? You speak as though you had the upper hand, when, as a matter of fact, we are man to man."

"That is where you are wrong, Zeetman," replied Kingston quietly. "We are not man to man. Under no stretch of imagination could you be called a man, and I now mean to tell you what I think of you—what I am going to do with you!"

(Another splendid instalment of this thrilling story next Thursday, showing how Frank Kingston effectually prevents Dr. Zeetman from committing any further villainy.)

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