

Next
Thursday:

"THE HERO OF ST. JIM'S!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.
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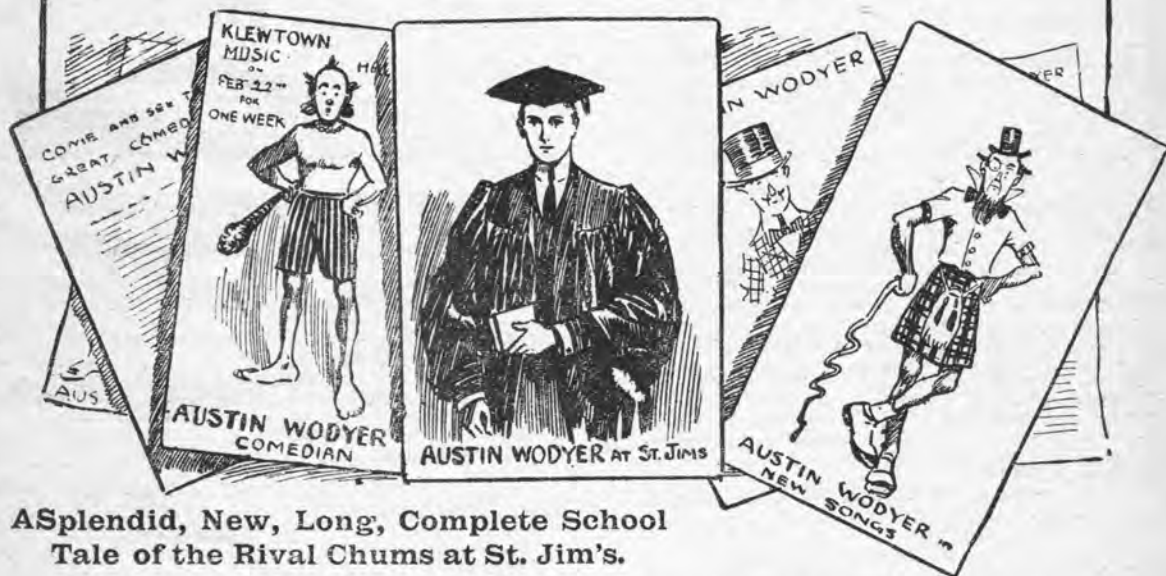
Thursday.



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CHAPTER 1. Trouble Ahead.

"THERE will be ructions!"

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

As a rule, when D'Arcy, of the Fourth, expressed an opinion, there was unanimous dissent. Fellows who agreed about nothing else would agree cheerfully that D'Arcy was an ass. But on this occasion the opinion expressed by Arthur Augustus was endorsed by all the Fourth Form. Blake, of the School House, and Figgins, of the New House, cordially agreed with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy that there would be "ructions." Redfern & Co., the new boys in the New House, were of the same opinion. So were Tom Merry & Co., though, as Tom Merry & Co. belonged to the Shell, it really had nothing to do with them. But they were sympathetic.

It was, as Figgins declared, rotten!

D'Arcy said it was an insult to the dignity of the Fourth Form. Blake said he wouldn't have minded if it had been a chap like Kildare or Darrel. Redfern went further, and said that it would have been all right with anybody but Knox. But everybody agreed that they barred Knox.

And so the Fourth-Formers unanimously endorsed the opinion of the swell of St. Jim's that there would be ructions.

It was only natural that there should be. There had been a considerable amount of ructions lately at St. Jim's, and perhaps the juniors had not quite settled down yet.

The case was simple. Mr. Ratcliff, the master of the New House, and Form-master of the Fifth, had left quite suddenly on a holiday, for the benefit of his health. There had been trouble in Mr. Ratcliff's House, and the Head had thought of that holiday for him, and it was known that he would be away some weeks at least. There would be a temporary new Housemaster, who might become a permanent one if Mr. Ratcliff did not return, as the fellows sincerely hoped.

The demand for a new master was sudden. New masters did not grow on every bush, as Figgins, of the Fourth, remarked. The sudden departure of Mr. Ratcliff left the Fifth without a Form-master and the New House without a Housemaster—Mr. Ratcliff having fulfilled both those functions.

What would be done until the new master, hastily summoned, arrived at St. Jim's, was a matter of conjecture to the juniors, but it was settled very much to their dissatisfaction.

Mr. Latham, the master of the Fourth, was put in charge of the Fifth Form temporarily.

The Fourth Form was put under the charge of a prefect till the new master should arrive.

When the new master came, he was to keep charge of the

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"THE HERO OF ST. JIM'S!" AND "WINGS OF GOLD!"

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Fourth, so the juniors understood, and to act as House-master in the New House till Mr. Ratcliff came back.

Meanwhile, there was no Housemaster, and the Fourth Form was to be in the hands of a prefect.

And that prefect was Knox!

Knox was the most unpopular prefect in the School House—or in the whole school, for that matter. He was a bully, and he used his powers as a prefect to make himself generally unpleasant to fellows he disliked.

It was not a cheering prospect for the Fourth Form to be placed in Knox's charge, though it might be only for one afternoon.

There were many fellows in the Fourth whom Knox disliked bitterly—Blake and Figgins and Lumley-Lumley, and others—and he was certain to come down as heavily upon them as he could.

Hence Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's statement that there would be ructions.

The juniors were standing in a group in the old quad, waiting for the bell that was to summon them to afternoon classes.

The heroes of the Fourth were looking gloomy and dissatisfied.

"It's wotten!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, polishing his eyeglass thoughtfully. "I wegard it as weally wotten!"

"I should say so!" said Figgins. "It's beastly!"

"Not nice," agreed Jack Blake.

"There will be a row!" Herries remarked.

"I guess I could see that in Knox's face when he told us," remarked Jerrold Lumley-Lumley. "He means mischief."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He thinks he's got us down nicely," remarked Kerr. "Well, if there's any rot, we shall have to show him that we can back up against a rotten prefect as well as a rotten Housemaster."

"Hear, hear!"

"School House and New House together, shoulder to shoulder, if we have any bosh from him," said Redfern.

"Wight-ho, deah boy!"

Buz-z-z-z!

"There's the bell!"

The juniors crowded into the School House. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther—the Terrible Three of the Shell—came by on their way to their Form-room, and they could not help grinning at the sight of the Fourth-Formers.

"You chaps look as cheerful as if you were going to a funeral," Tom Merry remarked.

"Patience, my sons!" said Monty Lowther. "You've got a new master coming to-morrow."

"Or the next day," said Manners. "Cheer up!"

Blake grunted.

"That's all very well for you, you Shell bounders," he said. "Why couldn't they make Linton take the Fifth, and put the Shell under a prefect?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, we wouldn't have stood it, you know!" said Monty Lowther airily.

"Rats!"

"Yaas, wathah! Wats!"

The Terrible Three laughed.

"It is rather rotten to be put under Knox," Tom Merry agreed. "You must handle him carefully, and—"

"If there's any rot, we'll handle him with our hands," said Blake truculently. "I'm not going to have any rot from Knox, for one!"

"Wathah not!"

"Get into your class-room, Fourth!"

It was a sharp, unpleasant voice.

It belonged to Knox, of the Sixth. The prefect came striding down the passage with a most unpleasant expression upon his thin, acid face.

"You will take fifty lines, Blake, for speaking insolently," he said.

"Oh!" said Blake, with a gleam in his eyes.

"Now get into your class-room!"

The Fourth Form went in.

Knox frowned at the Terrible Three. If they had been under his charge he would gladly have given them lines, too. Tom Merry was the junior he disliked most in all the crowd that belonged to the School House.

"You'd better go into your Form-room, too, you young sweeps!" he exclaimed.

"Thanks!" said Tom Merry airily. "No hurry. Won't you let us enjoy the delights of your conversation a little longer?"

"Besides, we want to look at you, Knox," said Monty Lowther. "It's a cheap amusement, you know; we have to pay to see anything like you at the Zoo."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Manners.

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"THE JAPE AGAINST THE FIFTH!"

Knox frowned at the Terrible Three, but he did not reply. He stamped into the Fourth Form-room, and slammed the door behind him. The chums of the Shell chuckled.

"I rather fancy Gussy was right," Tom Merry remarked. "They've been having ructions in the New House lately, and now they'll have ructions in the Fourth Form-room."

"I fancy so. It would have been better to put Kildare or Darrel in charge of the Fourth," Manners remarked.

"Yes; the Head doesn't know how Knox gets on with us," said Tom Merry. "I dare say he'll learn, though, before the afternoon's out."

"Ha, ha, ha! Very likely!"

And the Terrible Three went into the Shell Form-room. As a matter of fact, if it had been possible, they would willingly have shared in the expected "ructions" in the Fourth Form-room. Their sympathies were entirely with the Fourth. But the Fourth Form of St. Jim's were quite able to take care of themselves.

CHAPTER 2.

Knox Looks for Trouble.

KNOX, the prefect, looked over the Fourth-Formers as they sat in their places, with a keen, suspicious eye.

The prefect, like the juniors, had some suspicion that there would be ructions before the afternoon was over, but that suspicion did not make him careful to avoid them. He was quite ready for trouble. He had the upper hand, and he meant to use it.

The Fourth-Formers sat very quietly.

Under the mild sway of little Mr. Lathom, the kind-hearted master of the Fourth Form, the juniors sometimes took it very easy. Mr. Lathom was kind and considerate to a fault, and the juniors allowed themselves some little relaxations in consequence, but they were always respectful and obedient to the little Form-master. He was too popular for them to want to give him any trouble. It was extremely annoying to them to have their own Form-master moved into the Fifth Form-room and for a prefect to take his place. It was like "cheek" on the part of the authorities to fancy that the Fourth could be managed by a prefect at all. And Knox, of all fellows! It was really too bad! But the Fourth were very circumspect at first. They would give Knox no excuse to find fault with them. If there was trouble, it should clearly be the fault of the bully of the Sixth.

So Knox's keen and suspicious eye failed to detect anything to pounce upon as he surveyed the juniors sitting quietly in their places.

If Knox could have let well alone, matters might have gone smoothly. But that was one of the peculiar gifts of Knox; he never could let well alone.

"You young rotters have got to behave yourselves this afternoon," he said unpleasantly, by way of a preliminary to the first lesson. "You can't play the fool with me as you do with old Lathom."

Silence.

"If there's any slacking or rotting, I shall come down heavy," said Knox.

Silence.

"Do you hear me, Blake?"

"Yes, Knox."

"Well, remember what I say, then. The first fellow who kicks over the traces will get my pointer on his knuckles! I'm going to have no rot!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Take fifty lines for talking in class, D'Arcy!"

"Weally, Knox—"

"A hundred lines!"

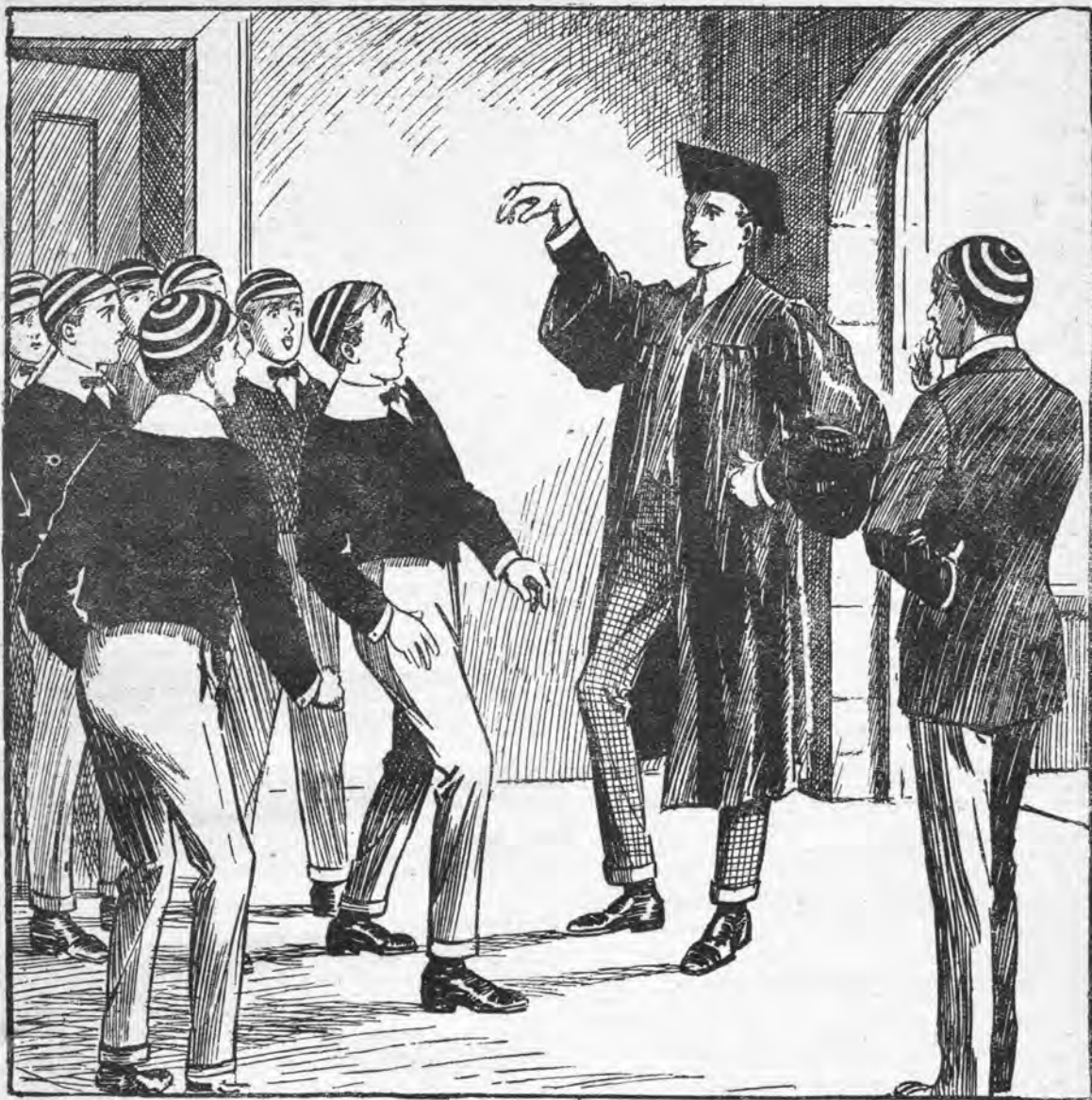
"Gweat Scott!"

"Two hundred lines, and if you say another word I'll double it!" said Knox.

Arthur Augustus did not say the other word. He sat staring blankly at the prefect. He had foretold that there would be ructions, but he had never anticipated that even Knox would begin in this high-handed way. It seemed as though Knox was looking for trouble.

And so lessons began.

Most of the prefects of the Sixth were quite "up" to taking charge of the junior Form, if necessary; and Knox, who was supposed to have a mastership in view, should have been the most capable of all. But, as a matter of fact, Knox was very much wanting on some points, and, Sixth-Former as he was, there were fellows in the Fourth—one fellow, at least—who could pick him up in Latin. Kerr, of the Fourth, was a youth of deep research; indeed, his stories of erudition were a constant wonder to his chums. It was not only that he was a keen footballer, a reliable bowler, a good oar, a clever amateur actor, and a skilled player of the violin, but in class work he had no equal. It was commonly said in the Fourth that when the Sixth-



The new master waved his hand majestically. "Thanks, and thanks again, my faithful retainers!" he exclaimed. "But hence, I am hungered. Let us to dinner!" (See Chapter 6.)

Formers did their annual Greek play, it was only politeness that kept Kerr from smiling. In the tongue of Horace and Virgil he was miles ahead of many seniors. He could recite the *Aeneid* by the yard, as Figgins expressed it, and the *Satires* and *Odes* by the foot. Kerr was a dangerous customer for Knox to find fault with when classics were the order of the day; but, as the old proverb has it, "fools rush in where angels fear to tread."

Arthur Augustus was called upon to construe, and he acquitted himself to his own satisfaction, but not to Knox's. "Do you call that construing?" the prefect asked unpleasantly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, you will write out a hundred lines from Livy, and perhaps you will be able to do better next time."

"Weally, Knox—"

"Silence! Kerr—"

"Pway show me where I am w'ong, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I am quite willin' to learn, you know."

"Silence!"

"But weally—"

"Take a hundred lines, and sit down!" shouted Knox.

"Oh, vewy well!"

Arthur Augustus sat down, and confided to Blake in a stage whisper that he believed his construing was all right, and that what Knox didn't know about Latin would fill whole grammars—a remark that was greeted with a chuckle by the juniors near at hand. Knox glared round, and the chuckle died away. The prefect was evidently getting into a dangerous state of mind.

"Kerr, I am waiting for you."

Kerr rose to his feet and began to construe.

The prefect watched him like a hawk, keen to catch him tripping. But Kerr was not likely to be caught tripping. He was more at home with the Carthaginian War than Knox was.

In a rash moment Knox found fault, and in that moment he was at the mercy of the Scottish junior. Knox had put his foot in it; and Kerr, with a honeyed softness of manner, a respectful affectation of a desire for information, dragged him up and down, as it were, and made him perspire before he had done with him. In five minutes Knox had made a complete display of his ignorance of the subject, and made the juniors wonder how he had ever scraped into the Sixth.

Kerr sat down, feeling that he had deserved well of his Form; and Knox was in a dangerous temper. He knew that the juniors were laughing in their sleeves, and he watched

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for a chance of catching one of them laughing aloud. But they were too careful for that.

But Knox's chance came at last. As in the old story of the wolf and the lamb, a fellow who is determined to take offence can never be long at a loss for an excuse. He rapped out Figgins's name.

"Figgins!"

"Yes, sir?" said Figgins. "I mean—yes, Knox?"

"You were whispering to Kerr."

"I wasn't!"

Knox snapped his teeth.

"Don't tell lies, Figgins!"

"I'm not telling lies," said Figgins, his eyes flashing—"and nobody but a rotten cad would accuse a chap of telling lies!"

There was a buzz in the class. Figgins's reply was straight from the shoulder, at all events.

Knox's eyes gleamed. He had the junior at last.

"You—you call me a cad, Figgins?" he thundered.

"Yes, if you call me a liar!" said Figgins sturdily.

"Bwavo, Figgay, deah boy!"

"Silence, D'Arcy!"

"I wegard—"

"Take a hundred lines, Figgins, come out before the class at once! I shall cane you for your insolence."

Figgins came slowly out before the class. Knox picked up Mr. Lathom's cane from the Form-master's desk.

"Hold out your hand, Figgins!"

"Don't do it, Figgay!" shouted somebody at the back of the class.

Knox glared round furiously.

"Who said that?" he shouted.

No reply.

"I order the boy who spoke to stand out!"

Nobody stood out.

"Very well! I will find out who it is, if the rascal is too cowardly to own up his name," said Knox between his teeth.

Jack Blake jumped up.

"It was I," he said. "I'm not afraid to own up."

"Bwavo, Blake!"

"Stand out here, Blake. And D'Arcy, too!"

"Bai Jove!"

The two juniors joined Figgins. Knox surveyed them with a grim smile.

"I am going to cane all three of you," he said. "I'll keep order in this Form, or I'll know the reason why."

"Weally, Knox—"

"Hold out your hand, Figgins!"

Figgins hesitated a moment, and obeyed. He received a heavy cut. Blake received the next; and then it came to D'Arcy's turn. The swell of St. Jim's was bidden to hold out his hand, but he seemed more disposed to argue the point.

"You see, Knox, deah boy—" he began.

"Hold out your hand, D'Arcy!" shouted Knox.

"Undah the cires—"

"If you don't hold out your hand at once I'll lay the cane across your shoulders, you impudent young rascal!"

"I decline to be chawacterised as an impudent young wascal—"

"For the last time," roared Knox—"hold out your hand!"

"Oh, all right! Don't get watty!"

And the swell of St. Jim's held out his hand. Knox took a tight grip on the cane, and made a terrific swipe downwards at D'Arcy's hand. It would have been a terrible blow if it had struck upon D'Arcy's palm. But it did not.

Perhaps the swell of St. Jim's thought that it was a little too severe; perhaps he acted merely upon instinct. At all events, he drew his hand suddenly back as the cane swept downwards, and the cane, meeting with no resistance, swept on, and crashed against the leg of the wielder.

Thwack!

It was a terrific blow, and it rang like a pistol-shot through the Form-room. Knox gave a yell of agony and dropped the cane and clasped his damaged leg in both hands, squeezing it frantically and dancing wildly upon the other.

"Bai Jove!" muttered Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

There was a roar from the Fourth:

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 3. And Finds It!

"YOW-OW! Oooop!"

Thus Knox!

The prefect was dancing upon one leg and claspings the other in both hands; and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had jammed his eyeglass into his eye and was regarding him in astonishment.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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The whole Form roared.

"Ow! Ow! Ow!" gasped Knox. "You—you young villain! You did that on purpose! You young rascal! Ow!"

"Weally, Knox—"

Knox let his damaged leg slide down again at last. He limped to where the cane lay and caught it up and fairly hurled himself upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The swell of St. Jim's gave a startled howl, and his eyeglass dropped to the end of its cord.

"Oh, weally, Knox—yawwooh!"

Slash! Slash! Slash!

Knox had grasped the swell of the Fourth by the collar with his left hand, and was slashing away with his right with the cane.

Arthur Augustus yelled and struggled. He was doing the dancing now, instead of Knox, and he was enjoying it no more than the prefect had.

"Yawwoh! Wescue, deah boys! Ow!" yelled D'Arcy.

Blake clenched his fists, and his eyes blazed. Prefect or no prefect, he was not going to see his chum thrashed in that merciless manner.

"Stop that, Knox!" he shouted.

"Stand back!" snarled the prefect.

"Will you stop it?"

"I'll give you some of the same when I'm finished with him!" panted Knox.

Slash! Slash! Slash!

"Back up!" yelled Blake.

He rushed right at Knox, hitting out.

His fist caught the prefect on the side of the jaw and sent him spinning sideways. The cane fell to the floor a second time as Knox threw out his hands wildly to save himself.

The Fourth were all upon their feet now, shouting with excitement.

"Bravo, Blake!"

"Hurray!"

"Down with the bully!"

"Bai Jove, I'm feahfully hurt!" gasped Arthur Augustus, staggering against the master's desk, his face white and drawn with pain. "Bai Jove! Look out, Blake!"

Knox, with his fists clenched, and his face furious, was rushing like a madman at Blake.

If Jack Blake had been left to face that charge of the big Sixth-Former alone it would have gone very hard with him.

But Figgins was by his side, and the whole Form were now pouring out of their places to his aid.

Figgins and Blake tackled Knox together; but the powerful Sixth-Former knocked them both flying, and then made a grasp for the cane.

But there was a yell from Redfern:

"Pile on him!"

The juniors hardly needed bidding.

They piled on Knox. Redfern was the first, and his chums Owen and Lawrence were close behind. Kerr and Fatty Wynn, Digby and Herries, Lumley-Lumley and Reilly, rushed upon the prefect, and, in the grasp of many hands, he was borne heavily to the floor.

Bump!

They bumped him down, they rolled him over, they rolled upon him, they sat on his chest and his legs and his head.

The infuriated prefect struggled in vain under the inundation of juniors.

"Got the cad?" yelled Fatty Wynn.

"Sit on his head, Fatty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Got the awful wottah!"

"Lemme gerrup!" gasped Knox. "I'll have you all flogged for this! I'll have you all expelled! I'll have—"

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"You'll have a licking, the same as you've given Gussy!" said Blake grimly.

"Hurrah!"

There was a yell of approval at the idea.

"Lemme alone!" roared Knox.

"Rats!"

"I'll—I'll—I'll——"

"Shut up!"

"Yaas, wathah! Shut up, you wottah!"

The juniors meant business. D'Arcy's prediction that there would be ructions had come only too true; but the Fourth Form felt that they were not to blame. Knox had looked for trouble, and he had found it—that was all.

The prefect was rolled over, and, helpless, in the grasp of a dozen pairs of hands, he was dragged face downwards across a desk.

Then Jack Blake took the cane in hand.

"How many did he give you, Gussy?"

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of countin', deah boy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll make it a round dozen," said Blake. "Are you ready, Knox?"

"You young scoundrel——"

Whack!

There was a terrific yell from Knox. The dust rose in a little cloud from his jacket as the cane descended.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Yarooow-ow-ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Go it!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Whack! Whack! Whack! Whack!

Knox roared and wriggled and kicked, but he roared and wriggled and kicked in vain. He was held too tightly for escape. He had to go through his punishment, and he went through it; he bore it, but he did not grin. He made a terrific noise, and in their excitement the juniors did not reflect upon the fact that it was audible through the whole School House, if not across the quadrangle as well.

There was a step in the passage as Knox received the last cut of the cane, and the Form-room door was thrown open.

An awe-inspiring figure in cap and gown was visible in the doorway.

There was a general gasp.

"The Head!"

The Head of St. Jim's seemed petrified at what he saw. There had been some troublous times at St. Jim's, but that was in the absence of the Head. Dr. Holmes had never dreamed of seeing such a sight as that of a Sixth-Form prefect being held down over a desk in a junior Form-room, and caned by a Fourth-Former.

"Good heavens!" gasped the Head.

Blake's hand, with the cane in it, dropped to his side. He stared in dismay at the Head. Silence fell upon the juniors, but not upon Knox. He rolled off the desk, and picked himself up, gasping and snorting.

"Dr. Holmes!" he yelled.

"Knox! What does this mean?" exclaimed the Head.

"What is the meaning of this disgraceful scene?"

"It means that those young scoundrels——"

"Moderate your language, Knox, please," said the Head, with asperity.

"They have revolted, and set upon me, sir."

"Blake! Figgins! Redfern! What does this mean?"

"If you please, sir——"

"You see, sir——"

"We—we—we had to do it, sir," said Redfern meekly. "You see, sir, Knox was laying into poor old Gussy, and we had to stop him."

"Yaas, wathah! I have been tweeked with the gwossett diswesspect, sir, and subjected to what I can only chawawetwise as weckless bwutality, sir," said the swell of St. Jim's, with a great deal of dignity.

"Bless my soul!" said the Head.

"We're sorry if there's been a row, sir," said Blake meekly.

"If!" ejaculated the Head. "This is—is extraordinary! Knox, you do not seem to be able to manage the class, at all events. You had better go back to the Sixth."

"Are those young villains not to be punished, sir?" bellowed Knox.

"I shall inquire into the matter, Knox, and I shall be glad if you will not use such expressions as that in my presence," said the Head, frowning.

"I—I'm sorry, sir, only——"

"Very well; you may go."

And Knox went, with a black scowl upon his face.

"This scene is simply disgraceful," said the Head, with a frowning glance at the abashed Fourth-Formers. "It appears that I cannot trust you to the charge of a prefect. I shall wire for your new master to come immediately, and mean-

while, you can go into the Fifth Form-room, and remain there until lessons are over."

"Ye-es, sir."

"I hope," said the Head, "that Mr. Wodyer will be able to arrive here this evening. For the present Mr. Lathom will take charge of you again."

"If you please, sir——" began Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"That will do, D'Arcy."

"But I should weally like to explain, sir——"

"Enough!"

"Undah the peculiah cires. of the case, sir——"

"Silence! Go into the Fifth Form-room at once!" said the Head, frowning.

And the Fourth-Formers went.

"I wegard this as wathah wotten!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as they went down the passage. "I have been tweeked with the gwossett diswesspect, and I wanted to explain, but the Head wouldn't let me finish what I was goin' to say."

"Life's too short!" murmured Redfern.

"Weally, Wedfern——"

"I think we've got off pretty well; and we've downed that cad Knox, anyway," said Blake, with a chuckle. "He won't be put in charge of the Fourth Form again, in a hurry."

"Wathah not!"

And the juniors filed into the Fifth Form-room, and spent the remainder of the afternoon under the mild eye of their old Form-master. And they were specially good that afternoon, too, just to show what they could be when they liked.

CHAPTER 4.

The Only Way.

ARTHUR WODYER, M.A., snorted. He was annoyed.

He was sitting in bed, propped up by pillows, in a small room, with a small window, which commanded an extensive view of the roofs and chimneys of Bloomsbury.

He had a telegram in his hand, and a frown upon his face. It was a handsome face, though pale from recent illness.

"Oh, hang!" said Mr. Wodyer. "Hang! Hang! Blow!"

These ejaculations seemed to afford him some solace.

He looked at the telegram again, and again snorted. Then he glanced at the cheap American clock that ticked irregularly on the shabby mantelpiece. It indicated the hour of nine, though, as it was an American clock, that was no proof that it was nine o'clock.

"Nine, or thereabouts!" muttered the invalid. "Austin will be hours yet; they're only just finishing the first house. Oh, hang! Blow! Still, he can't do anything if he comes in. I suppose I shall have to let the billet slide. Oh, blow!"

He looked round as the door opened.

A young man of almost his own age, and very like himself in form and feature, came in, and nodded cheerfully to him.

There were traces—very thick traces, too—of grease-paint upon the face of the new-comer, and his eyebrows were pencilled darkly. It was very clear that Austin Wodyer had just come from his "turn" in some place of entertainment.

"Hallo!" said Arthur Wodyer, in surprise. "You!"

"Me!" said Austin coolly.

"But the second house——"

"Second houses are off," said Austin, seating himself astride of a chair, with his face to the back of it, looking at his brother. "The manager was pleased to pass some comments on my style of rendering 'Jackson's Check Kicks.'"

"You don't mean——"

"I replied with some personal remarks concerning his features, manners, and customs," said Austin.

"You don't mean you've got——"

"The push!" said Austin. "Precisely!"

"My hat!"

"Yes, it's rotten, isn't it," said the comedian, without looking very downhearted, however. "I'm out of a shop again, and the Boss Empire tour doesn't begin for three weeks. Lucky you've just hooked a new billet."

"That's the worst of it" said Arthur moodily.

Austin looked at him quickly.

"Nothing wrong there, is there?" he asked.

"I've just had a telegram."

"All off?"

"No—all on," said Arthur ruefully. "They want me to go down to the school this evening, if possible, and if not, by the first train in the morning. It seems that I'm taking the place of a master who's left in a hurry. It's only temporary; I'm to stop the gap till he comes back. But the pay will be good, and it's an opening—a splendid opening. I may jump right into something good, after having a berth at a school like St. Jim's."

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A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT THURSDAY: "THE HERO OF ST. JIM'S!"

"It's a ripping chance, and you ought to be grateful to the guy who has cleared out all of a sudden," said Austin.

"Yes, only—"

"Well?"

"Only I'm chained down here by this rotten influenza, and can't move," said the youthful Master of Arts moodily. "You know what sawbones said."

"You mustn't think of getting out under four days, at least."

"Yes."

"It's rotten! They can't wait four days?"

"Well, I had just concocted a letter to Dr. Holmes, explaining that I was laid up, and begging him to keep the place for me for a few days, if he could and would be so kind," said Arthur Wodyer ruefully. "But I can't send a letter like that when I've just had this rotten wire. They're put to it for a master; they want a man to take a class at once. I can't in reason expect them to leave a class without a master for four days while I get over the flue."

The comedian grinned.

"Well, it would be rather cool," he said.

"I'm to wire back if I can come at once," resumed Arthur. "I suppose I'd better blue some of our last shillings in explaining."

"That will mean that you won't get the shop."

"I'm afraid so."

"It's beastly!"

"Oh, rotten!"

There was silence.

It was really a serious situation.

The brothers were very much attached to one another, and ill-luck to one was ill-luck to both. They had always shared alike, since they were left alone in the world by the death of their parents, with no near relations.

Since their college days, their friendship had never been shaken, though their paths had diverged widely.

Arthur Wodyer had stuck to the old ways, hoping still to make something of his University education, and to fulfil his ambition of being a master at a public school. Austin had thrown up all ambition of the sort; he had never been really keen on such a prospect. At college he had had a gift for mimicry, which had sometimes caused him trouble with the college authorities, and he had found, when he was thrown on the wide world of London, that it was a more marketable commodity than the degree he had taken at Oxford. He had drifted into the music-halls, and done more or less well, and would have done better if he had not been by nature happy-go-lucky and careless.

He had done better than Arthur. Arthur had achieved only a post as tutor, and had lost it at last, and had gone from one thing to another—always with his name down on the books of the agencies—always hoping for something that never turned up.

But Arthur's chance had come at last.

Partly by good luck, and partly by the influence of an old Oxford acquaintance, he had obtained the offer of a temporary post at St. Jim's.

It was only for a time; he was to have charge of the Fourth Form for a few weeks.

But it made Arthur's heart beat.

It was a beginning. After having held even a temporary mastership at a big public school like St. Jim's, he would be able to look higher than he had ever looked before; he would come into contact with chances he never came upon now.

He had accepted eagerly.

But by cruel luck he was laid up with influenza at the time—partly caused by want of regular food and good clothes, for of late money had been very "tight" in the shabby lodgings the brothers shared together.

Arthur was laid up.

He had still hoped—till the telegram came to inform him that he was wanted instantly at St. Jim's.

That seemed to settle it.

The two brothers sat and looked at one another.

"It's simply rotten," Austin remarked. "I'm out of a shop for the next three weeks, and you're going to lose the chance of your lifetime. These things always come together."

Arthur nodded gloomily.

"I suppose nothing can be done," he said. "They want their man at once, and of course they're entitled to have him. I can't expect them to do without for a few days while I get well, as they're in a hurry. I didn't know there was such a hurry at first. Of course, there are a hundred fellows as good as I am, with their names down at the agencies, as keen as mustard for such a chance. Oxford and Cambridge turn 'em out in droves every year."

Austin grinned.

"And they can't all get on at the music-halls," he remarked.

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"THE JAPE AGAINST THE FIFTH!"

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"No," said Arthur, laughing. "Well, I suppose there's nothing to be done."

Austin wrinkled his brows.

"I don't know," he said slowly.

"What are you thinking of?"

"It's only for a few days," the comedian remarked very thoughtfully. "We're very like one another, Arty, old boy."

"What the dickens—"

"I've forgotten most that I learnt up there, but I could fake up enough to keep up appearances for a few days."

"What!"

"Why shouldn't I take the berth and keep it open for you?"

"Eh?"

The comedian grinned, his eyes twinkling as he thought over his startling scheme.

"I could do it," he said. "I know the ropes well enough for that. I've still got a nodding acquaintance with the classics, and it isn't as if I had to teach the Sixth. I should be able to manage the Fourth, I dare say."

"Austin!"

"I'll run down to St. Jim's, take the place, and keep it for you. When you've mended, you'll change places with me—we're alike enough to make it all serene, I think—and you'd only have to drop into my place when I stepped out. My own berth doesn't begin for three weeks. I've got the time."

Arthur laughed.

"But—but you were always such a giddy duffer," he said. "You'd have to dodge every kid in the class who knew anything beyond Eutropius."

"Well, I could dodge."

"It's jolly good of you, Austin, old man. It seems the only way."

"The only way to save the situation?" grinned Austin.

"That's a pun—a gag worth something on the boards, I can tell you; and I'm wasting it on you. Look here, I'm going to do it. After a life on the music-halls for five years, my son, it will do me good to get back into the scholastic shades for a bit."

"You'll have forgotten everything."

"I'll get it rubbed up again. I haven't forgotten the use of a crib."

"If you could do it, Austin—"

"I can do it."

"And if you will—"

"Like a shot!"

"Done, then!"

"Hurrah! I'll send off the wire at once!" grinned Austin. "I'll sign it—A. Wodyer. That's my initials, you know, as well as yours. Good. It's done."

And Austin Wodyer hurried out to send the telegram.

CHAPTER 5.

Mr. Wodyer Arrives.

"WONDAH what we're goin' to do this mornin'?"

Arthur Augustus expressed his wonder on that subject, as he stood sunning himself on the steps of the School House after breakfast.

"The new mastah hasn't awvived yet," he remarked. "I hear that he is comin' early this mornin'. But he hasn't come."

"I suppose we shall be shoved under a prefect again!" grunted Blake.

"They might put a Shell chap in charge of you," Tom Merry suggested thoughtfully.

The Fourth-Formers glared at Tom Merry.

The idea of the Fourth Form being put under the charge of a fellow in the Shell was, of course, absurd.

"You ass!" said Blake.

"You uttah ass!" said D'Arcy.

"Oh, we could keep you in order, you know!" said Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowtah—"

"And I'm sure we could teach you things," said Manners.

"I wegard you as an ass, Mannahs. I—"

"Oh, bump the silly asses!" exclaimed Blake.

A bell rang, and the threatened row was stopped. The Terrible Three went into their class-room for morning lessons, and the Fourth-Formers remained on the steps of the School House. But not for long. Figgins, of the New House, came over with a grin on his face.

ANSWERS

"Time to go in," he remarked.

"Who's taking us this morning?" asked Herries.

"Monteith."

"Another blessed prefect!" growled Blake.

Figgins nodded.

"Well, it's a New House prefect this time, so it will be all right," he said.

"You ass!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard you as a silly ass, Figgins."

"Better get into the Form-room. Monteith isn't very sweet-tempered this morning!" grinned Figgins. "By the way, have you chaps done the lines Knox gave you yesterday afternoon?"

"No fear!"

"I don't suppose he'll mention them again. Better be a bit more careful with Monteith, though."

"Oh, rats! I'm not going to kow-tow to any rotten New House prefect!" growled Blake.

The Fourth Form went into their Form-room.

Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, was already there.

Monteith was not very popular. He had a very sharp temper, and a very sharp tongue. But perhaps the experience of Knox on the previous day had been a warning to him. At all events, he was very tactful with the Fourth Form, and the first and second lessons passed off without trouble.

The Fourth Form, as a whole, were upon their best behaviour. They wanted to show the Head that they could behave themselves in spite of the recent trouble with Mr. Ratcliff, and the still more recent trouble with Knox, the prefect.

And as Monteith gave them a chance, they were able to carry out their good resolutions.

Morning school passed off quite peacefully, and the Fourth Form streamed out at last feeling very pleased with themselves.

"Monteith isn't such a wottah, aftah all," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, as they left the class-room. "He seemed wathah tactful."

"He doesn't want trouble!" grinned Levison.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We might get up a rag in the Form-room this afternoon, if the new master doesn't come," Levison remarked. "You can see that Monteith is afraid of a row."

Blake glared at the cad of the Fourth.

"You won't do anything of the sort!" he exclaimed. "If Monteith likes to play the game, we'll play the game on our side. It would be rotten cadish to rag him simply because he wants to keep the peace."

Levison sneered, but made no rejoinder.

"Hallo, my children!" exclaimed three voices in unison, as the Terrible Three of the Shell came down the passage with linked arms. "How have you been getting on this morning?"

"All serene!" said Figgins.

"No naughty rows in the Form-room?"

"No, ass!"

"Good. The Fourth Form are learning to behave themselves," remarked Monty Lowther. "Oh, day worthy to be marked with a white stone!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you silly ass—" began Redfern.

"Yaas, wathah! If you mean to imply, Lowthah, that there is anything wantin' as a general wule in the mannahs of the Fourth Form, I hurl back the insinuation in your teeth, you know!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy indignantly.

"My dear chap, I don't find fault with your manners," said Lowther in surprise. "How could I?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"When you haven't any!" concluded Lowther.

"Bai Jove!"

And the Terrible Three walked on chuckling.

Blake made a sign to Figgins and Redfern. The three of them rushed after the Shell fellows, and bumped into them, and the Terrible Three rolled over under the sudden impact.

"Oh!" roared Tom Merry.

"Ow!"

"Yaroo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"You—you silly ass!" gasped Tom Merry, scrambling to his feet. "I—I'll—"

"Bai Jove, I wegard that as wathah funnay, you know."

"Bump them for their cheek!" said Kerr.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Monty Lowther reached out, and jerked out D'Arcy's necktie, and then the chums of the Shell ran down the steps into the quadrangle. Arthur Augustus gave a wrathful gasp, and rushed after them with his necktie streaming.

"Bai Jove, you uttah wottah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus dashed down the steps two at a time, and

dashed right into a young man who had just descended from the station cab of Rylcombe, and was ascending the steps of the School House.

The sudden impact sent the stranger staggering back. He threw out his hands in a wild effort to save himself, but in vain, and he sat down in the quadrangle with a considerable shock.

"Oh!" he gasped. "My only respected Uncle Bob—ow! Ah!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy dropped into a sitting posture upon the steps, and stared down at the young man, and the young man stared up at him.

"Oh!"

"Ah!"

"You ass, Gussy!" gasped Blake, looking out at the doorway. "You've done it now!"

"Weally, Blake!"

Tom Merry ran to help the stranger up. He could guess whom he was. He gave his hand to the young man, who staggered to his feet, looking very much shaken.

"Dear me!" ejaculated the stranger. "Is it a custom in this school to greet a new master in this way?"

"Gweat Scott!" D'Arcy jumped up as if moved by a spring. "Are you Mr. Wodyer, sir?"

"That is my name."

"Bai Jove, I'm awfl'y sowwy, sir!"

The young man smiled good-humouredly.

"Never mind," he said. "It was an accident."

"Yaas, wathah, sir. I should wegard it as fwightfully bad form to play such a twick on a mastah on purpose, sir."

"Very well, say no more about it."

"You're awfl'y good, sir."

"You may show me in to the Head," said Mr. Wodyer, dusting his trousers with a handkerchief, and he followed the swell of St. Jim's into the School House.

"By George," said Blake, "he looks a decent chap!"

"What-ho!" said Figgins, with emphasis. "We shall get on with him, I think."

"He seems jolly good-tempered," laughed Tom Merry. "Imagine old Ratty being biffed over like that!"

"Phew!"

The impression made by the new master upon the juniors was undoubtedly a good one.

CHAPTER 6.

The New Master of the New House.

Figgins & Co. had an expectant look.

They were waiting in the doorway of the New House for their new master.

Mr. Wodyer had come to St. Jim's as Form-master to the Fourth, and Housemaster of the New House, during the absence of Mr. Ratcliff. It was a question of great interest to the New House fellows what their new Housemaster would be like. A good Housemaster and a bad Housemaster meant all the difference between comfort and discomfort. Mr. Ratcliff had succeeded in making the New House fellows, seniors as well as juniors, decidedly uncomfortable at times. They hoped for better luck under the new ruler.

Figgins had caught a glimpse of the new Housemaster as he went in to see the Head, after the collision with D'Arcy, of the Fourth.

Figgins liked his looks.

"He's quite a young chap," Figgins said to the other fellows, as they waited in the doorway of the New House. "I like his chivvy. I think we shall get on with him."

"I wonder if he knows about our trouble with Ratty?" Redfern remarked.

"Most likely."

"Yes, the Head will tell him," said Kerr. "It's unfortunate, as it may start him with a prejudice against us."

"That would be rotten."

"Where is he now?" asked Lawrence.

"With the Head."

"Getting the story of the barring-out, I suppose," growled Owen. "He will very likely have his back up against us at the start."

"That's why I've brought you chaps here," said Figgins. "We'll give him a cheer when he comes in, just to show that there's no ill-feeling."

"Good egg!"

"What about inviting him to tea?" suggested Fatty Wynn thoughtfully. "Housemasters have tea with the seniors sometimes. Why not with the juniors? There's nothing like a good feed to make a man feel nice towards you."

"He wouldn't come!" said Pratt.

"Well, we could try," said Fatty Wynn, evidently much taken up with his idea. "Two or three of us could go to his study and ask him."

"Here he comes!" called out Kerr from the doorway.

There was a general movement of interest.

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A somewhat slim young man, with handsome features, was walking across the quadrangle, in company with Monteith, the head prefect of the New House.

The juniors, crowded in the doorway, gazed out at him with great interest.

"Looks very young to take charge of a House like this!" said Kerr.

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, if we get on with him, we'll overlook that," said Lawrence magnanimously. "He looks good-tempered, that's something."

"Monteith's jawing very seriously to him."

"And he's standing it patiently."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Give him a cheer as he comes in," said Figgins impressively. "We want to show him that there's no ill-feeling, and that we are glad to welcome a new master."

"Hear, hear!"

"Let it go when I raise my hand," said Figgins.

"Right-ho!"

"We ought to have had an address of welcome, or something of the sort," said Redfern. "We want to show him there's no ill-feeling, especially if he's just had the story of the trouble with Ratty from the Head."

"Yes, but—here he is!"

Mr. Wodyer ascended the steps in the porch of the New House. His face was very calm and cheerful. Monteith was looking a little perplexed, as if he could not quite make out the new Housemaster.

Mr. Wodyer stepped into the hall, and gazed in some surprise at the crowd of juniors.

Figgins raised his hands.

"Hurrah!" roared the juniors.

"Dear me!" said the new master.

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Go it!" roared Figgins.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

The New House rang with it.

Monteith frowned.

"Shut up, you young asses!" he exclaimed.

"Hurrah!"

"Will you shut up?"

"Hurrah!"

Mr. Wodyer burst into a laugh.

"I suppose this is something in the way of a welcome," he said. "Gentlemen—"

"Hurrah!"

"Ladies and gentlemen, I beg to thank you for this most enthusiastic reception," said Mr. Wodyer, unconsciously dropping into the manner of the footlights. "Our visit to your town, though necessarily brief, will ever remain a cherished memory. Ahem!" Mr. Wodyer came back to the fact that he was a Housemaster. "My dear boys, I thank you for this kind reception."

"Hurrah!"

"Speech, Figgys!"

"Go it, Figgins!"

Figgins, colouring very much, stepped out before the crowd of juniors.

"If you please, Mr. Wodyer, sir—"

"Certainly!" said Mr. Wodyer cheerfully. "Pile in!"

Figgins gasped. He had hoped for a cordial reception from the new Housemaster, but he had never expected to be told to pile in. That was hardly an expression he would have expected to hear from the lips of a Housemaster.

"Ahem!" said Figgins. "I—I want to say a few words, sir."

"As many as you like," said Mr. Wodyer genially, "only buck up."

"Ahem! In the name of the juniors of this House, sir, we want to—I mean, I want to welcome you to St. Jim's, sir."

"Oh, good!"

"We had some trouble with our late Housemaster, sir—"

"Yes, I've heard all about your giddy racket, you young boonders."

Figgins stopped. His breath was taken away for a moment. The crowd looked amazed, and Monteith stared perplexedly at the Housemaster. What language was this?

"I—I—I—" stammered Figgins, quite taken aback.

"We—we—we want to assure you, sir, that nothing of the kind is likely to occur again, and that we are going to put in a record of really good behaviour, sir."

"Oh, ripping!"

"Ahem!"

"Stick to that, and we shall pull together all right," said Mr. Wodyer. "You will find that I'm not the man to pick faults in my company—I mean my class."

"Oh!"

"You must look upon me as a conductor, and you are to

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keep in tune," said Mr. Wodyer affably. "Keep to that, and we shall simply bring down the house. What?"

The juniors gasped.

"My only hat!" murmured Kerr. "Where does he come from?"

"Bedlam!" grinned Redfern.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Wodyer waved his hand majestically.

"Thanks, and thanks again, my faithful retainers!" he exclaimed. "But hence; I am hungered. Let us to dinner."

And he walked on with the amazed Monteith.

"Off his giddy rocker!" said Redfern, in blank astonishment.

"Blessed if I can make him out!" said Figgins, rubbing his nose thoughtfully. "But he seems a good-natured sort of jossler."

"Yes, rather!"

"I think we shall get on with him, and that's the chief thing. But he certainly does seem to have a peculiar flow of language."

"Where does he come from?" asked Pratt.

"M.A. Oxon.," said Kerr.

"Shouldn't have thought so!"

"Well, give him a chance," said Redfern generously. "Anyway, he's a big improvement upon Ratty; you must admit that."

"Oh, yes, rather!"

Monteith showed Mr. Wodyer into his study, lately occupied by Mr. Horace Ratcliff. Mr. Wodyer looked round the comfortable room with keen appreciation. There was a large fire burning in the grate, and the room looked very cosy and comfortable. Mr. Wodyer thought of the bleak pariet in the wilds of Bloomsbury, and rubbed his hands over the fire with keen appreciation.

"This will be ripping for Arty!" he remarked.

Monteith stared.

"What did you say, sir?"

Mr. Wodyer coloured guiltily.

"Oh, nothing! This is a very comfortable room. I hear that you did not get on very amicably with your late Housemaster, Monteith."

"The juniors did not, sir."

"We shall try to do better," said Mr. Wodyer, with much gravity. "Good temper and kindness will be my method. Let me see, you are a—a—a—"

"Prefect, sir."

"Exactly, a prefect," assented Mr. Wodyer. "And are there any more at home like you—ahem!—I mean, are there any more prefects in the New House?"

"Four in all, sir. I am the head prefect of this House."

"Very good. I hope we shall rub along all serene—I mean, I am sure we shall get on very well," said Mr. Wodyer. "What time is tiffin?"

"Eh?"

"I—I mean, when do you have dinner?"

"At one o'clock, sir."

"Good egg! I'm as hungry as a pro. that's been resting for six months," said Mr. Wodyer. "I'll be on hand."

Monteith left the study feeling very much puzzled. He confided to Baker, of the Sixth, that the new Housemaster was a queer beggar, an opinion in which Baker fully concurred as soon as he had made the acquaintance of Mr. Wodyer.

CHAPTER 7.

A Man Without a Past.

Figgins & Co. were specially well behaved when they went in to dinner that day.

After the recent trouble with their Housemaster, the respected Mr. Ratcliff, Figgins & Co. had a pardonable desire to show to the new Housemaster, and to St. Jim's generally, that they were not a rough old lot, as Figgins described it, and that they had manners and customs which possessed the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

They wanted very particularly to make a good impression upon Mr. Wodyer. Thus they would be able to justify their revolt against Mr. Ratcliff's autocratic rule.

When Mr. Wodyer entered the dining-room of the New House, therefore, nothing could have exceeded the decorum of the Fourth Form as they sat at their table.

Mr. Wodyer looked round for his place, and found it at the head of the Sixth Form table, Monteith kindly pointing it out to him.

It was the custom of the Housemaster to have his meals at the head of the Sixth table, and the junior tables were taken by prefects.

The seniors of the New House were all exceedingly serious and sedate at dinner, setting a good example to the juniors.

Mr. Wodyer entered into conversation with Monteith, who sat next to him. It had not been Mr. Ratcliff's custom to talk much at meal times, or indeed at any times; but Mr. Wodyer was evidently a chatty gentleman.

Monteith was more than a little puzzled by his conversation.

Mr. Wodyer's mind did not seem to run upon matters scholastic, and he introduced the theatre as a topic, much to the prefect's surprise. He seemed to be continually catching himself up, as it were, and keeping back things he wanted to say; but when he succeeded in becoming prim and sedate, his conversation fell off woefully, and he would drop into silence.

Altogether he was, as Monteith had told Baker, a very queer beggar indeed.

Mr. Wodyer drew a deep breath of relief as he left the dining-room after dinner. Figgins & Co. walked out with stately sedateness, as if anything like horseplay of any sort had never entered their boyish imaginations.

They kept it up until they reached the quadrangle; and there it gave way, and they burst into a whoop as they punted about an old footer.

Mr. Wodyer stood in the doorway of the New House, looking out.

"Grand old place!" he murmured, as he surveyed the quadrangle of St. Jim's, the ancient buildings, and the venerable trees. "Splendid! Imposing! But—but how on earth does anybody manage to live here?"

And Austin Wodyer had to give that up as an unanswerable puzzle. To him the bustle and roar of London streets, the rattle of cab-wheels, the buzz of an audience, the glare of the footlights, were as the breath of life.

And the sham Housemaster wondered whether he would be able to stand it until his brother was well enough to take his place at the head of the New House of St. Jim's.

"I must stick it out for Arthur's sake," he muttered, half aloud.

"Excuse me, did you speak, sir?" said Monteith, pausing in the doorway.

Mr. Wodyer turned crimson.

"Yes—no—yes," he replied, not very lucidly. "I—I was thinking aloud, Baker."

"Monteith, sir," said the prefect.

"Ah, yes, Monteith, certainly," said the Housemaster.

"It's a habit I have, thinking aloud. A man picks it up through going over his lines aloud, you know."

Monteith looked puzzled.

"Lines?" he repeated. "Do you mean the lines you had when you were a boy at school, sir?"

Mr. Wodyer realised that he had put his foot in it again.

"No—yes!" he replied. "Exactly!"

"You used to repeat the lines aloud when you had an imposition?" asked the prefect in astonishment.

"No—yes! You—you see, that's the way you realise the real beauties of these splendid lines of—of Homer," said Mr. Wodyer.

Monteith laughed.

"I've never bothered my head to realise the beauties of Homer," he said. "But I suppose a man who trains to become a master in a school has to swot a great deal, sir? I suppose you were a reading man at Oxford."

"No fear!" said Mr. Wodyer, again forgetting himself. "I was one of the boys, you bet! I knew everybody in Oshkosh!"

"Oshkosh?" repeated the amazed prefect. Oshkosh was a land beyond the limits of geography as taught at St. Jim's.

"Yes—er—I—I mean, you see—a—a little joke!" explained Mr. Wodyer lamely. "A fellow gets in the habit of talking slang. Ahem!"

Monteith wondered why a Form-master should get into the habit of talking slang, but he did not say so. He walked on, more and more puzzled by the peculiar ways of the new Housemaster.

Mr. Wodyer drew a deep, deep breath.

"My only respected Uncle Bob!" he murmured pathetically. "I shall give the whole blessed show away, I know that! I can impersonate on the stage, but impersonating in real life is a bit different. I only hope I sha'n't queer the pitch for old Arthur!"

Mr. Wodyer, mentally determining to keep a tighter rein upon his elusive tongue, walked into the quadrangle. A group of Shell fellows belonging to the School House were standing talking there, and they all glanced towards the new master. They raised their caps, and Mr. Wodyer nodded very genially. He was feeling in a high good-humour. As a matter of fact, the London comedian was a young man with irrepressible animal spirits, and was always in a good temper, and generally as ripe for a "lark" as any junior in the school he had come to as a master.

There was curiosity in the glances the Shell fellows cast at him, and Mr. Wodyer wondered why. He tried to walk

with a stately stride, and to drop all traces of the easy saunter with which he was in the habit of propelling himself along the Strand and the Charing Cross Road.

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther, Manners and Kangaroo, Clifton Dane and Gore, all of the Shell Form and the School House, formed the group of juniors who were so specially interested in the new master. Bernard Glyn especially was staring at him with a keenness that was almost outside the bounds of politeness.

"My hat!" Glyn exclaimed at last. "It's the same chap! I'm sure of it!"

Mr. Wodyer halted.

"Are you referring to me, my boy?" he asked, with a great deal of dignity. "You must not speak of a House-master as a chap."

"Sorry, sir!" stammered Glyn. "But——"

Mr. Wodyer waved his hand.

"All serene!" he said.

"My hat!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Glyn thinks he knows you, sir," said Tom Merry.

Mr. Wodyer started.

"Knows me?" he repeated.

"Yes, sir," said Glyn. "I hope you don't mind my speaking, sir, but it struck me at once that I knew your name, and I thought it might be the same ch—gentleman. You are Mr. Arthur Wodyer, sir?"

"And what is your name?" asked Mr. Wodyer, deftly parrying the question.

"Bernard Glyn, sir."

The Shell fellow uttered the name with the evident expectation that Mr. Wodyer would recognise it immediately. Mr. Wodyer, meanwhile, was racking his brains to try to remember whether his brother had ever mentioned that name to him, and wishing from the bottom of his heart that Bernard Glyn of the Shell was at the bottom of the sea.

"Glyn?" repeated Mr. Wodyer, to gain time. "Glyn or Wynn did you say?"

"Glyn, sir."

"Ah, Glyn!" repeated Mr. Wodyer.

"Yes, sir; Bernard Glyn, of Liverpool."

"Liverpool?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Wodyer was hopelessly mazed. He knew, of course, that his brother Arthur must be known to Bernard Glyn, of Liverpool, since Bernard Glyn, of Liverpool, spoke so confidently on the subject. But Arthur had certainly never mentioned the fellow to him, or anything in connection with him, and he did not even know whether Arthur had ever been to Liverpool or not.

It was most decidedly an awkward question.

If Mr. Wodyer failed to recognise Glyn the whole business might come out, since Glyn evidently knew the real Arthur Wodyer.

On the other hand, if he affected to recognise and remember him, that might lead to even worse entanglements—he would be treading in very perilous paths.

The unhappy Mr. Wodyer wished heartily that that ripping idea had never entered his head that evening in the lodging-house in Bloomsbury. But it was too late to wish that now.

"Oh, Liverpool!" exclaimed Mr. Wodyer.

"Yes, sir."

"Not—not Manchester?" murmured Mr. Wodyer, to gain time.

Glyn of the Shell looked surprised.

"No, sir—Liverpool."

"Yes, I—I seem to remember the name," murmured Mr. Wodyer awkwardly. "I have heard of Liverpool before—"

"I—I mean I have heard the name of Glyn before. Certainly."

"The pater will be glad to see you, sir."

"Will he really—I—I mean that's very kind of him."

"And so will Edith, sir."

"Oh, yes!" muttered the unhappy Mr. Wodyer, wondering whom on earth Edith might be.

"They are coming over to-morrow afternoon to see me, sir," said Glyn. "They will be delighted to see you."

"Oh, my hat!"

Mr. Wodyer strode away.

It was a most injudicious thing to do; the juniors could not but think it strange. But it seemed to be the only resource under the circumstances. Mr. Wodyer, with burning cheeks, walked away, and found refuge in the Head's garden. There he paused to breathe.

"My only respected aunt!" he muttered. "Who is Bernard Glyn, of Manchester—I mean Liverpool? Who is his pater? And who the dickens is Edith? What has that boulder Arthur been getting up to? My only hat! The silly ass couldn't have known that he was booked to run into old acquaintances here! My hat!"

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NEXT THURSDAY: "THE HERO OF ST. JIM'S!"

A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD

CHAPTER 8.

A Case of Spoons.

"HA, HA, HA!"

"It's true, then?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Figgins, as he came upon the chuckling group of Shell fellows under the elms in the quad.

"What's the little jokelet?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Where does the grin come in?" asked Kerr.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Somebody standing a feed?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"Ha, ha, ha! It's your new giddy Housemaster, that's all!" roared Tom Merry. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins glared a little.

"None of your blessed School House cheek!" he exclaimed warmly. "You're jolly well not going to snigger at our Housemaster!"

"Not much!" said Kerr emphatically.

"You'll snigger when you know the history of the mystery," grinned Monty Lowther. "It's too rich to keep! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, get it off your chest, then!" said Figgins suspiciously.

The Shell fellows chuckled in chorus.

"It's about Wodyer—" began Tom Merry.

"You've told us that!" grunted Figgins.

"He's in love!"

Figgins jumped.

"What?"

"Fact!"

"Solid fact!" roared Kangaroo. "Oh, my little summer bonnet! He, he, he!"

"Ho, ho, ho!" roared Glyn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co. were eager for information at once. A Housemaster in love was a most interesting specimen in natural history. The juniors had once had the spectacle of Mr. Ratcliff in love, and it had amused them greatly. The object of Mr. Ratcliff's adoration had been Glyn's sister Edith, a very charming young lady who lived near St. Jim's, but she had not smiled upon Mr. Ratcliff. Miss Glyn had suitors galore in the country-side, and she was not likely to smile upon the suit of a gentleman like Mr. Horace Ratcliff. Glyn and his chums had chuckled over it very much, Glyn often describing with great relish how he had seen "Ratty" making what he called "sheep's eyes" at Edie, and how Edie had tried not to yawn when Ratty was talking to her. Glyn, it is to be feared, had a youthful way of regarding affairs of the heart wholly in a comic light.

"Wodyer in love!" said Figgins. "Why, he hasn't been here two hours!"

"Oh, it isn't one of the housemaids here, or one of us!" Monty Lowther explained.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who is it, then?" demanded Figgins, mystified.

"Glyn's sister."

"My hat!"

"Do you know him, then?" asked Figgins, looking at Glyn of the Shell in surprise.

Bernard Glyn nodded.

"Yes, I met him once, but I know his name jolly well," he said. "It was before we left Liverpool, you know. Mr. Wodyer was tutor to a travelling chap—a chap my pater knew—who fell seedy in Liverpool, and came to stay in our house. Mr. Wodyer was with him, and he and my sister were a great deal together. I was at school, but I went home one day, and saw him there, and I could see it was an awful mash. I heard her call him— Ha, ha, ha!"

"My hat! That was a queer name to call anybody."

"Ass! I mean— Ha, ha, ha!"

"What on earth do you mean, fathead?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Glyn.

"Thump him in the back, somebody," said Tom Merry; "he's going to have a fit."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Glyn. "She called him— He, he, he!—Ow! Leave off, you ass; you'll dislocate my spinal column! Ow!"

"Well, what did she call him?" demanded Manners.

"She called him— Ha, ha, ha!"

"You frabjous ass—"

"She called him 'Owney-owney!'" shrieked Glyn.

"What?"

"Owney-owney?" repeated Tom Merry, perplexed. "What does that mean? Is it a foreign word?"

"Ha, ha! No!"

"It sounds like Chinese, or—or Hindustanee," said Tom Merry. "It's not English."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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"THE JAPE AGAINST THE FIFTH!"

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"What does it mean, then, you ass?"

"Ha, ha, ha! It means 'own,' only it's affectionate, you see. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, I see!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Owney-owney!" chuckled Lowther. "My hat! That's rich! D'Arcy of the Fourth has been in love lots of times—he always falls in love when he meets a girl named Ethel—but he's never got so far as Owney-owney! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Serious case!" said Figgins, with a shake of the head.

"Of course, you fellows must keep it frightfully dark," said Glyn. "I don't know much about this man, Wodyer, but Edie thinks a lot of him, you know, and I believe he's a very decent sort. He seems to have changed a bit since I saw him—seems to be younger, somehow, and doesn't speak quite the same. But he's the right Wodyer, right enough. I wondered if it was the same directly I heard that an Arthur Wodyer was coming here; and it's all serene—it's the same."

"Jolly lucky for him to drop into a berth here, with your people living near at hand now," Figgins remarked. "But I say, it's funny! Owney-owney! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Keep it dark."

"Oh, of course!"

"He's frightfully self-conscious about it," grinned Monty Lowther. "He wasn't going to let on at first that he knew Glyn, even."

"My hat! As bad as that!"

"Yes. And when Glyn put it to him straight, and he couldn't get out of it, he turned as red as anything, and fairly bolted."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly well wish it was my sister!" said Figgins. "Chap gets a jolly easy time if his Form-master is mashed on his sister. I knew a case once, and the chap used to get passes out every day, and his Form-master used to go over his work for him; he was no end civil. It would have been a stroke of luck for you, Glyn, if Wodyer had been master of your Form, instead of master of the Fourth."

"Yes, but it's all right as it is," said Glyn. "The pater and Edie will be surprised to see him to-morrow. As he's practically a relation, I don't see why we shouldn't have him to tea in the study."

"Here, you let our giddy Housemaster alone," said Figgins indignantly. "If anybody has him to tea in the study, I'm the chap."

"Rats! He's not your giddy brother-in-law."

"Well, he's not yours yet," said Figgins. "He's our Housemaster, and we're going to have him. You let our giddy Housemaster alone."

"Now, look here, Figg—"

"Rats! You look here!"

Clang-ang-ang!

"Hallo! There goes the bell," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"You Fourth-Form kids had better get into your Form-room, or Glyn's giddy brother-in-law will be on your track."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Shell fellows and Fourth-Formers hurried away towards the School House. In the few minutes that elapsed before afternoon school, however, there was time for the secret to get out. By the time the new master of the Fourth faced his Form, there was hardly a fellow in the Fourth who did not know that Mr. Wodyer was "spoons" on Glyn's sister, as the juniors elegantly expressed it. And that was the cause of the general smile which the Fourth bestowed upon Mr. Wodyer when he came in, and which puzzled that gentleman very much.

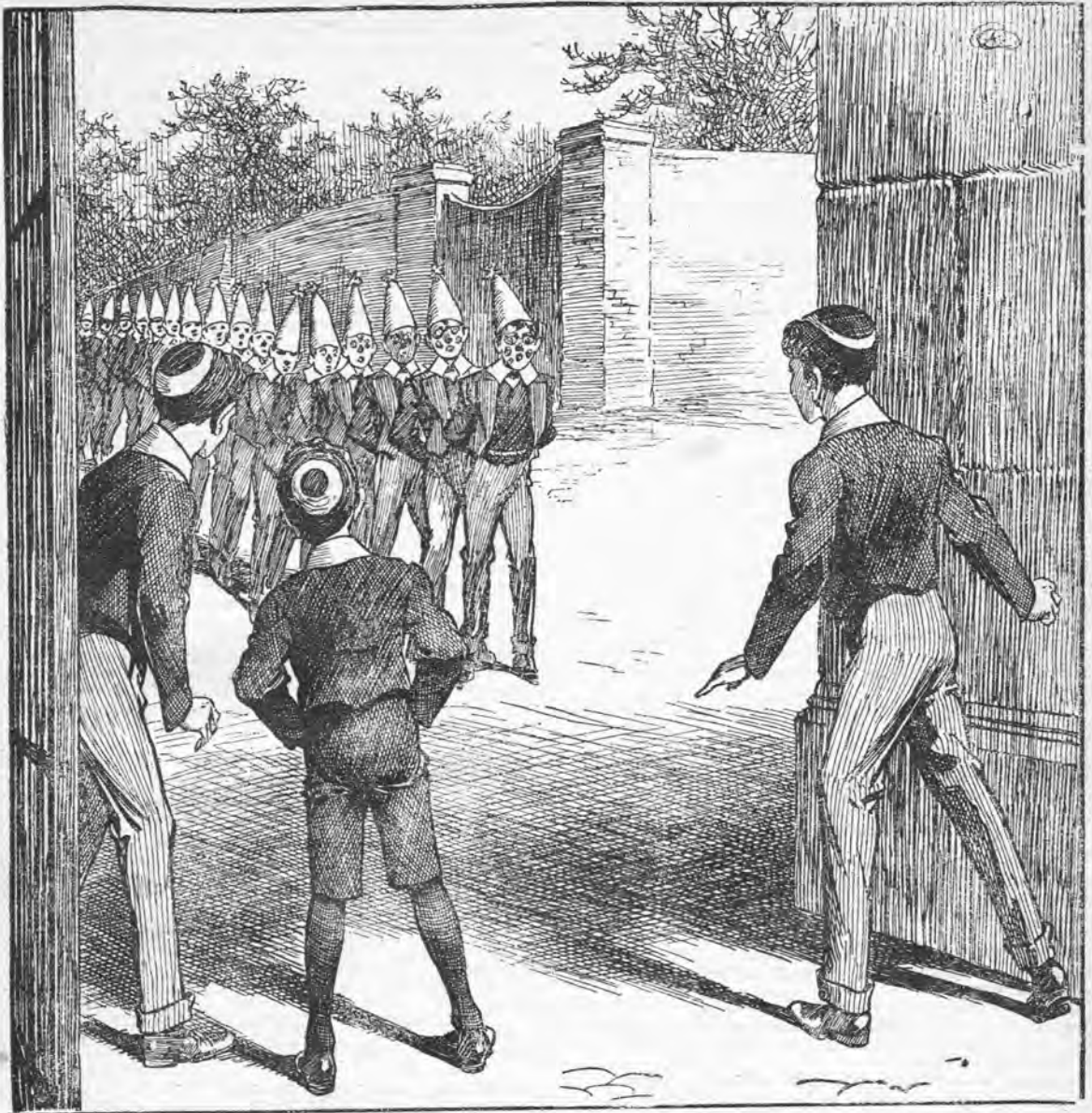
CHAPTER 9.

Very Surprising.

MR. WODYER cast a quick, keen glance over the Fourth Form as he came in. He was wondering whether Bernard Glyn of Liverpool was in that Form. Glyn belonged to the Shell, and so, of course, was not likely to be in the Fourth-Form room; but Mr. Wodyer did not know his Form yet. The smile upon the face of nearly every Fourth-Former there puzzled the new master; but after a moment or two of reflection, he attributed it to his hurried departure from the group of juniors in the quadrangle. Not knowing the explanation that the juniors had found for his curious behaviour, he wondered what they thought of it, and he knew that it must appear very peculiar.

The Fourth Form—especially the New House portion of it—were on their best behaviour. They did not intend that there should be the slightest sign of unrest or insubordination in the class. They wanted to show the Head that all previous trouble was the fault of Mr. Ratcliff and of Knox, the prefect.

Mr. Wodyer assumed possession of Mr. Lathom's desk, and coughed.



The Remove Form are sent back to Greyfriars by their Rivals.

(An exciting incident from "The Japs Against the Fifth," the splendid, long, complete school tale of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars, contained in this week's issue of The "MAGNET" Library. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.

As a matter of fact, Austin Wodyer, who suffered from stage fright in the most crowded theatre or music-hall, was suffering just then from a very severe attack of it. He had never been a "swot" in his college days, and since leaving college he had spent his time chiefly in unlearning all that he had ever learnt. He had never dreamed of becoming a teacher, and certainly he was very unfitted for the task. He had a strong doubt whether his Latin would pass muster in the First Form, let alone in the Fourth, and he wondered how long it would be before he was found out.

"Ahem!" he remarked.

The class waited respectfully.

"As a stranger in this town," began Mr. Wodyer—"I—I mean, as a new master here, I shall have to depend on you kids for some tips—I—I should say, that I shall be gratified if you will afford me some insight into the usual procedure of the class."

"Yaas, wathah, sir," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, taking it upon himself to reply. "We shall be vewy pleased.

"Let me see," said Mr. Wodyer thoughtfully, "there should be some—er—books."

"Mr. Lathom's books are in the desk there, sir," said Blake.

"Ah, thank you!"

Mr. Wodyer fumbled in the desk, and brought some books to light. As it happened, Mr. Lathom was in the habit of keeping a good many books in the desk, as well as those he used in instructing the Fourth Form. The first book that Mr. Wodyer drew out was a volume of Homer, which was kept there for Mr. Lathom's private delectation. Mr. Wodyer opened it, and gave a sort of shudder. Like many college men, who have had Greek driven into their heads by sheer force, against all their inclinations, he had forgotten everything he had learned of the tongue of Homer. The mere sight of Greek type, as he had often declared, was enough to give him a headache. The thought of having to drive Greek into the heads of the St. Jim's juniors, when he had forgotten the little that had been successfully driven into his own, made him shiver. But he felt that he was in for it.

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"Ahem!" he said. "Ahem! Yes."

He glanced over the first page of the volume, trying to familiarise himself with the characters, which danced before his eyes.

"We will take the first book of the Iliad," he remarked. "Now, we shall commence at Menin acide, Thea—"

The Fourth Form stared.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Figgins.

"My hat!" murmured Redfern.

"Is that by order of the Head, sir?" asked Kerr, in amazement. Kerr was great in Greek. He was one of those youths who take it up for pleasure, and he was by no means averse from having it in class; but he was astonished.

Mr. Wodyer frowned.

"What!" he exclaimed. "Of course. I am placed in charge of this class by order of the Head. What is your name, boy?"

"Kerr, sir."

"Then what do you mean, Kerr?"

"We—we haven't heard of it before, sir," stammered Kerr.

"I—I thought there must be some mistake, sir."

"You have not heard of Homer's Iliad before, Kerr!" exclaimed Mr. Wodyer, in astonishment.

Kerr grinned.

"Yes, sir; but I mean, having Greek in class, sir. I haven't heard anything about that, sir. It would be rather thick—ahem! I mean difficult—to begin with Homer, wouldn't it sir, if we're going to take up Greek as a subject?"

Mr. Wodyer stared at him.

"Greek is an extra at St. Jim's, sir," Jack Blake explained. "They have Greek in the Sixth, sir, but we don't have it in the Fourth."

Mr. Wodyer's jaw dropped a little.

"Oh!" he said.

"It's Livy, this afternoon, sir," said Lawrence kindly.

Mr. Wodyer bent over the Form-master's desk to hide his blushes. He replaced the unlucky Homer where he had found it, and felt inclined to kick himself.

"Can any of you lend me a Livy?" he asked.

"Certainly, sir."

Digby handed over a Livy.

Mr. Wodyer thanked him, and accepted it, and opened it. Latin came a little easier than Greek naturally, but Mr. Wodyer's heart sank as he looked into it.

"Let me see. Where are you?" he asked.

"Book 21, sir," said Kerr. "We begin there this afternoon."

"Thank you!"

Mr. Wodyer opened the volume at the twenty-second book, where commences that stirring account of the war: "Quod Hannibale duce Carthaginieniensis cum populo Romano gessere."

But Mr. Wodyer was no more able to construe Livy than he was able to construe the teachings of Confucius from the original Chinese.

He mentally deplored the many days of slacking he had spent, when he might have been improving his knowledge of the noble tongue of Cicero and Cæsar. But it was rather late in the day for such regrets.

However, it was fortunately not for him to construe, but for his class, and so long as he assumed an air of sufficient wisdom, he might get through very well.

"Ah, you will construe, Kerr!" he said.

"Yes, sir."

Kerr stood up and construed.

Kerr could have gone on for ever. Latin was to him as easy as French or German or English. He had the gift of tongues. He would have been surprised, if he had known that the Form-master was following him with envious wonder, and wishing that he could do it so well.

Mr. Wodyer seemed quite content to let Kerr go on all the afternoon. Kerr went on for about ten minutes, and then he paused in sheer wonder. Mr. Wodyer recollected himself.

"Ah, next boy!" he said.

Fatty Wynn construed.

Fatty Wynn's work was not quite up to the level of Kerr's, and he proceeded to make a series of mistakes which would have brought down upon him the vials of Mr. Lathom's wrath if the Fourth had been under their old master.

But the new master said nothing.

Either he did not notice the blunders, or he was excessively kind, for Fatty Wynn was allowed to read the most extraordinary meanings into his old friend, T. Livius.

The Form stared, wondered, and finally chuckled.

"Blessed if I catch on to this," muttered Blake to Figgins.

"Why doesn't he drop on Fatty for those giddy howlers?"

Figgins shook his head.

"He doesn't seem to notice them," he said.

"But I suppose he can construe himself."

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"THE JAPE AGAINST THE FIFTH!"

"Doesn't look like it."

"He's a jolly queer beggar."

"My word, he is!"

Levison of the Fourth was watching Mr. Wodyer keenly. He was the next fellow called upon to construe, and there was a peculiar twinkle in his eyes as he rose to the work. He took up the tale where Fatty Wynn had left off, and went on from "In Hasdrubalis locum," etc.

If Fatty Wynn had made the Fourth stare, Levison made them gasp.

"In Hasdrubalis locum haud dubia res fuit," Levison coolly turned into "Hasdrubal had a bad headache."

The Fourth Form gasped.

But Mr. Wodyer gave no sign.

Levison went on in the same strain, and the juniors looked at one another, and looked at him, and finally, unable to contain their merriment, they burst into a roar of laughter.

Mr. Wodyer looked at them sharply.

"Boys!" he rapped out.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How dare you laugh in class!" exclaimed Mr. Wodyer angrily. "Silence at once!"

The laughter died away. The Fourth Form remembered their good resolutions—rather late.

"Go on, my boy," said Mr. Wodyer, with a severe glance at the Fourth. "If you are interrupted again, I shall be compelled to use the cane."

"My word!" murmured Digby.

"Oh, dear!"

"Bai Jove!"

Levison went on, his statements growing wilder as he proceeded, and at intervals a suffocated chuckle escaped from some overwrought junior. The Fourth Form were nearly in hysterics by the time Levison finished.

The curious part of it was that Mr. Wodyer had not the faintest idea of the joke.

In the other lessons he did not figure well, but not nearly so badly as with the unfortunate Livy, and he was very much relieved when the time came to dismiss the Fourth. The Fourth Form were relieved, too. They wanted to laugh, and respect for their new master forbade them to laugh in the Form-room.

But once in the passage they roared, and they marched out into the quadrangle almost shrieking.

CHAPTER 10.

An Invitation in Style.

TOM MERRY & CO. came out of the Shell-room a few minutes later, and they found a crowd of the Fourth Form in a state bordering on hysterics in the quadrangle.

Even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had forgotten his aristocratic repose of manner, and was leaning against the School House wall, gasping with laughter.

The Shell fellows surveyed the Fourth-Formers in amazement.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Where's the joke?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry seized Blake by the shoulder, and shook him.

"Now, you ass, explain!" he exclaimed warmly.

Blake wiped his eyes, and almost sobbed.

"Oh, it's too funny!" he gasped. "I don't know what kind of a queer fish we've got for a Form-master. But—Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah! He's a vewy decent chap, but—Ha, ha, ha!"

"But what has he done?" asked Glyn.

"He doesn't know a giddy word of Latin," yelled Figgins. "He took us in Livy, and he didn't know a word."

"What!"

"Not a giddy syllable," gasped Redfern. "Levison was rotting him. He translated 'locum' as 'headache,' and Wodyer let it pass."

"Impossible!"

"He did! He did! Ha, ha, ha!"

"And 'Romana arma' as a 'Roman armchair,'" shrieked Herries. "He did! He did! Ha, ha, ha!"

The Shell fellows looked astounded. Most astounded of all was Bernard Glyn.

"There's something jolly queer about that," said Glyn.

"Mr. Wodyer was tutor to a chap after leaving Oxford, and he was well-known to be awfully well up in the classics. I heard from Edie that he was part editor of a new edition of Livy."

"Ha, ha, ha! I should like to see that edition!" yelled Blake.

And the juniors roared again.

"Well, I'm blessed if I understand it," said Bernard Glyn.

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"I don't catch on to it at all. I suppose it's impossible that a Form-master could be rotting in the Latin lesson."

"Bai Jove! Wathah!"

"Then I don't understand it."

"We don't, either!" gasped Blake. "But it's funny. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Fourth-Formers laughed till they had no laughter left in them. Knox, the prefect, came out, and looked at them very suspiciously as he passed.

"What's all that cackling about?" he demanded.

"About finished!" said Kerr.

"Don't be funny, you young sweep! What is it?"

"I always laugh when I see anything funny," said Blake, staring hard at Knox's countenance.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The prefect walked away.

"Well, your new master seems a queer customer, and no mistake," Tom Merry remarked. "But I like him. He seems a jolly chap. As he's practically Glyn's brother-in-law we're going to have him to tea in the study."

"Rot!" said Blake. "He's a Fourth-Form chap—I mean a Fourth Form-master, and we're going to have him to tea in No. 6, if anybody has him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That you're jolly well not," said Figgins warmly. "He's the New Housemaster, and it's up to the New House to entertain him."

"Rats!"

"Look here, Blake——"

"I tell you——"

"Rot!"

"If you're looking specially for a thick ear——"

Tom Merry waved his hand pacifically.

"Peace, my children!" he said. "Peace! Suppose we combine resources, and have an extra big feed in the Hobby Club-room, and ask him all together!"

"Bai Jove, that's a wippin' ideah!"

Figgins nodded.

"Well, that's not a bad wheeze," he said. "I'm agree-able."

"Change for you!" suggested Monty Lowther.

"Eh?"

"I mean you're disagreeable as a rule!"

"Look here, you ass!"

"Shut up, Monty! Don't be funny!" implored Tom Merry. "Let's get along to the tuckshop, and Fatty Wynn can do the shopping for us."

"Now you're talking," said Fatty Wynn emphatically. "I'll do that with pleasure. It's a specially favourable opportunity now, too, because Mrs. Taggles has a fresh lot of steak-and-kidney pies in to-day."

"Pewwaps I had bettah go and wequest the pleasure of Mr. Wodyer's company," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy thoughtfully. "You see, it will wequire to be put delicately. It needs a fellow of tact and judgment for a thing of this sort."

"Oh, I'll go!" said Blake. "You see——"

"Weally, Blake——"

"I think I'd better go," Tom Merry remarked. "Under the circumstances——"

"Bosh!" said Redfern. "Why not write him an invitation in good style, and send it by a fag or the School House page?"

"Bai Jove, that's a good ideah!"

"Ripping!" said Blake.

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "Let's get up to the study and write it out. Some of you chaps can help Wynn with the grub. Better leave all your cash with Wynn, you chaps. He can lay it out to the best advantage."

"What-ho!" said Fatty Wynn emphatically. "You can rely on me to get the best value for money, where shopping for tommy is concerned."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn was soon busy. Tom Merry and half a dozen of the fellows repaired to Study No. 6 to draw up the invitation to Mr. Wodyer.

It was not an uncommon thing for a junior to be asked to tea in a master's study when he was very, very good. But it was rather uncommon for a master, especially a House-master, to have tea with the juniors.

But Mr. Wodyer was so kind and good-natured, and evidently so different in many respects from other masters, that the juniors felt that they could ask him.

After all, as Glyn said, he could only refuse.

"But he can't very well refuse when he's practically my giddy brother-in-law," said Glyn. "If he does, I'll call him Owney-owney."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How shall we begin it?" asked Tom Merry, taking up

a pen, and thoughtfully dipping it into the ink, and then gnawing the handle.

"Wespected sir!" said D'Arcy.

"Too formal!"

"Dear sir!" said Blake.

"Too businesslike."

"Dear Owney-owney!" suggested Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Put it to him in a chummy way," said Redfern.

"Bettah twy the third person," suggested Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, we don't want any third person present!" said Lowther, with a shake of the head. "Ourselves and one master at a time will be enough."

"You misundahstand me, you ass! I mean the third person——"

"But two's company, and three's none!" said Lowther.

"Pway don't be an ass! I weally considah that the lettah will sound much bettah in the third person, Tom Mewwy! 'The juniors of St. Jim's wequest the pleasuah of Mr. Wodyah's company to tea at six o'clock.'"

"Put in something about the grub being first chop," said Herries.

"Wats!"

"Well, he ought to know that," said Herries. "When there's anything special on, you shove it in a corner of the card, like 'Music,' you know. You could put 'Steak-and-kidney pies' in the corner of the card."

"Wubbish!"

"Look here, Gussy, you ass——"

"I wepeat, Hewwies, that I wegard your suggestion as uttah wubbish and fwightfully bad form!"

"Ass!"

"Weally, Hewwies!"

"I don't think Herries' idea is a bad one at all," Tom Merry remarked, very thoughtfully. "I suppose Wodyer knows something of schools, and he must know that feeds in junior studies are very often jolly skinny. Suppose he thought that we were going to stand him stale buns and whiffy sardines, like the kids in the Third?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Of course, he wouldn't come. You couldn't expect him to. A Form-master is a blessed Form-master, after all, and one must consider him," said Tom Merry. "We don't want to get a polite refusal, especially as the chap is almost our brother-in-law. He ought to be told that the feed is something rather special in his honour."

"Certainly!" said Figgins.

"Quite so!" agreed Redfern.

"Yaas, wathah! I agree to that. But I think it must be wegarded as bad form to shove it on the card, as if it were 'Music' or 'Bwidge,'" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with an obstinate shake of the head.

"That's all very well; but if we don't put it on the card, how are we to let him know?" demanded Tom Merry. "We can't tell Toby to shout out to him that we're having steak-and-kidney pies when he hands him the invitation."

"Ha, ha! No!"

"Wathah not! But——"

"It's got to go on the card, or he won't know," said Tom Merry decidedly. "And if he refuses our invitation because he thinks the feed will be skinny, it's a slight to the whole of the Lower School, and we shall have to rag him to keep our end up."

"Quite so!"

"Yaas, but——"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy! You're in a giddy minority."

"Yaas, but——"

"Order! Gimme a card, Manners; one of those giddy gilt-edged cards."

"Here you are!" said Manners.

"Pewwaps I had bettah w'ite it, Tom Mewwy! It ought to be w'ritten vewy nicely, you know."

"Rats!"

"Weally, Tom Merry——"

"Don't talk, Gussy; it jolts the table!"

"You uttah ass!"

"Now, quiet, while I write!"

Tom Merry wrote on the card with great care.

"The juniors of St. Jim's request the honour of Mr. Wodyer's company to tea, at six o'clock, in the Hobby Club-room."

"N.B.—Steak-and-kidney pies."

"There you are!" exclaimed Tom Merry, surveying his handiwork with great pride. "I rather think that looks all right!"

"Ripping!"

"Yaas; but——"

"Now we'll shove it into an envelope, and get Toby to take it," said Tom Merry.

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"Good!"

And in a few minutes the School House page was despatched with the invitation-card, and the juniors waited anxiously for the reply.

CHAPTER 11.

Great Preparations.

MR. WODYER sat in Mr. Ratcliff's study in the New House. He stirred the fire, for the weather was cold, and he frowned thoughtfully into the dancing, ruddy flames.

"It's getting too thick!" Thus ran Mr. Wodyer's reflections. "I've made an unholy muck of the lessons this afternoon, and I'm blessed if I quite know where I was run out—but I was run out! If I made a show like that on the stage, I should get the bird, and no error! I wonder if they tumbled?"

There was really no room for wonder on that subject. The Fourth Form had certainly "tumbled" to the fact that Mr. Wodyer was not designed by Nature or by training to give them instruction.

Mr. Wodyer was thinking the matter out, with the help of a briar pipe, when there came a tap at the door.

"Come in!" said the new Housemaster.

Toby, the page of the School House, entered, with a letter in his hand.

"Please I'm to wait for an answer, sir," he said.

"Thank you!"

Mr. Wodyer took the note in some uneasiness. He inwardly wondered whether it might be from the Head, to inform him that he had not given satisfaction as a Form-master.

He opened the envelope with nervous fingers. He started as he saw the card inside, and stared at it blankly.

"The juniors of St. Jim's request the honour of Mr. Wodyer's company to tea, at six o'clock, in the Hobby Club-room."

"N.B.—Steak-and-kidney pies."

"My only Aunt Matilda!" ejaculated Mr. Wodyer, in surprise, and much to the surprise of Toby, who had never heard a Housemaster invoke his Aunt Matilda before. "Well, this is— Ha, ha, ha! You want an answer, young shaver?"

"Yes, sir," gasped Toby.

"Tell 'em I'll be on hand."

"Ye-es, sir."

Toby departed. Mr. Wodyer read the note over again, and grinned, and slipped it into his pocket.

"Jolly good!" he murmured. "I never did like having meals alone, in solitary state— Ugh! I don't know whether it's infra dig. for a housemaster to accept an invitation to tea from juniors, but—but I'm jolly well going!"

And he did.

Toby returned to the School House, still gasping with astonishment. He was grasped by Tom Merry and Blake as he presented himself at Study No. 6, and jerked into the study.

"Well?" demanded the juniors, in a breath.

"He's coming!" gasped Toby.

"Oh, good! What did he say?"

"He said 'Tell 'em I'll be on 'and!'" gasped Toby.

"And I never 'eard a master speak in such a way before!"

"Bai Jove!"

And Toby departed, still astonished.

"Well, our giddy Form-master has a flow of language quite his own, I must admit!"

Blake grinned. "But he's coming—that's the main point!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Now to prepare the giddy spread!" said Tom Merry.

And the juniors were soon very busy.

Their scheme of making a good impression upon the new master seemed to be working well. And they were not insensible to the honour of having a Housemaster to tea.

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They meant to "do" Mr. Wodyer well—very well indeed.

The Hobby Club-room—a rather large apartment on the ground floor—was soon the scene of busy preparations. The table was covered with a succession of spotless table-cloths, borrowed from the various studies, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy even borrowed a large jug for flowers, to give the tea-table a tone, as he explained to his friends.

Fatty Wynn & Co. came in laden with good things, and the steak-and-kidney pies figured prominently among them. Dame Taggles was certainly an artiste when it came to making steak-and-kidney pies, and these triumphs of her culinary skill graced the festive board in great profusion. It was, as Figgins said, a feast fit for the gods.

By the time six o'clock rang out from the old clock-tower of St. Jim's, all was ready. Chairs were ranged along the table, and knives and forks and spoons were almost as numerous as the guests, having been begged and borrowed on all sides. Monty Lowther tapped D'Arcy on the shoulder, as the swell of St. Jim's surveyed the table through his eyeglass with an air of satisfaction.

"There's one thing been overlooked," Lowther remarked.

"Bai Jove! What's that, dear boy?"

"To have a really successful feed—and, of course, that's what we want, isn't it?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We shall require a waiter."

"A waitah! Bai Jove!"

"Gussy is willing to do anything to make the thing go," Lowther remarked, looking round. "And he looks exactly like a waiter when he's in evening clothes—"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"So I vote that Gussy is appointed head waiter," said Monty Lowther.

Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle into his eye, and stared at Monty Lowther. He stared at Lowther's boots, and his gaze ascended to Lowther's face as far as the curl on his forehead, and then descended again to Lowther's boots. That sweeping gaze ought really to have withered the humorist of the Shell upon the spot, and reduced him to silence, if not to ashes. But Lowther did not seem to be in the least withered.

"What do you say, Gussy?" he asked, affably.

"I wegard you as an uttah ass, Lowthah!"

"Don't you think it's a jolly good idea?" asked Lowther, in astonishment. "We really want a head waiter, you know, and what is required for a head waiter is a fellow of tact and judgment; and you look exactly the part when—"

"I shall be sowwy to intewwupt the pwocceedin's by givin' you a feahful thwashin', Lowthah—"

"You're not going to refuse, of course?" said Lowther.

"You're not going to spoil the show? You could pass so easily for a waiter—"

Arthur Augustus pushed back his cuffs.

"Will you kindly put up your wotten hands, you wottah?" he said.

"But—"

"I am goin' to thwash you—"

Tap!

Mr. Wodyer looked in at the door, with a smiling countenance. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy dropped his hands and blushed.

"May I come in?" said Mr. Wodyer.

"Please walk in, sir."

"All ready, sir."

"So kind of you to come, Mr. Wodyer!"

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

Mr. Wodyer walked in cheerfully. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave Lowther a look, and that was all. It was not possible to give him anything more in the presence of the guest of honour.

"Here's your chair, sir, please!" said Tom Merry.

"Thank you!" said Mr. Wodyer, as he sat down.

"Glyn's next to you, sir. You like having an old friend next to you, sir?"

Mr. Wodyer breathed hard through his nose for a moment.

"Ye-es, certainly!" he said.

"How do you do, Glyn, my

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The new master looked at Miss Glyn's charming face with a startled gaze, and their eyes met. The next moment Edith gave a start, and Mr. Wodyer turned pale. For one instant he stood staring blankly at the girl, and then, with a sudden bound, he fled. (See Chapter 15.)

boy? I—I hope all your people are well in—in Manchester?"

"Liverpool, sir," said Glyn.

"Yes; I—I mean Liverpool."

"My people don't live in Liverpool now, sir," said Bernard Glyn. "My father moved down South when I came to St. Jim's, sir, and he has a house not far from the school."

"Indeed! I'm glad to hear it! I hope your father is quite well, Glyn?"

"Quite well, thank you, sir!"

Glyn winked at his chums with the eye that was away from Mr. Wodyer. He expected the next query to be about his sister. But Mr. Wodyer had apparently forgotten that Bernard Glyn, of Liverpool, had a sister. He did not mention her, and the juniors attributed it to the shyness natural to a man who was in the lamentable state of "spoons."

"All ready," said Monty Lowther. "Pass the rosy wine."

Mr. Wodyer started a little.

"My hat!" he ejaculated. "You don't mean to say that you fellows give wine-parties here, do you?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Figure of speech, sir!"

"Oh, I see!"

"The ass means make the tea, sir," Tom Merry explained. "Do you prefer tea or coffee, sir?"

"All one to me, kid!"

Figgins made a terrific face at Tom Merry across the table. It was meant to imply that the hero of the Shell must be careful, as there was no coffee among the supplies. Tom Merry did not understand, however, and he looked at Figgins in some alarm.

"Anything wrong, Figgy?" he asked.

"N-n-no!" muttered Figgins, turning the colour of a beet-root.

"Your face went quite queer."

"You ass—I mean—never mind! Hurry up and make the tea!"

"All serene."

And the tea was made, and the juniors took their places round the hospitable board. And Monty Lowther whispered to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy that it was not yet too late to slip into his evening clothes and take the place of head waiter if he liked. To which the swell of St. Jim's replied only with a stony stare.

CHAPTER 12.

The Honoured Guest.

TOM MERRY poured out Mr. Wodyer's tea very carefully. Figgins passed him a liberal helping of steak-and-kidney pie. Redfern handed up the bread-and-butter. Kerr passed the salt, and Fatty Wynn the pepper, and Lawrence the mustard. Manners looked round for some-

thing to pass up, and handed up the jam-tarts. Mr. Wodyer smiled, and started operations on the pie. The pie was really good, and the master was hungry; and in his mind he could not help contrasting the scene of plenty with the bare room in the Bloomsbury garret where he had left Arthur Wodyer, M.A., recovering from his attack of influenza.

"It was awfully jolly of you to come, sir!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, by way of starting the ball of conversation rolling.

"Not at all!" said Mr. Wodyer, with his mouth full.

"You like St. Jim's, sir?" said Bernard Glyn.

"Oh, top-notch!" said the master.

The juniors grinned; but they were getting used to Mr. Wodyer's peculiar vocabulary by now. Mr. Ratcliff or Mr. Railton would not have said that anything was top-notch; but the fellows were learning to expect remarks of that sort from the new master of the New House.

"It was quite a surprise to see you here, sir," said Bernard Glyn. "I had no idea that you were an old acquaintance, sir, till I heard your name. You didn't know that I was at St. Jim's, sir, did you?"

"Not a bit of it."

"It will be a surprise for Edith to see you, sir."

"It's bound to be!" agreed Mr. Wodyer.

"You haven't forgotten meeting me in Liverpool, have you, sir?"

"I never forget meeting people," said Mr. Wodyer. "Lemme see—you were quite a little fellow then, weren't you?"

Glyn stared.

"It was only a year ago!" he said.

Mr. Wodyer coughed.

"Yes; that's what I meant to say," he remarked. "It's wonderful how time passes, isn't it? You haven't changed a bit!"

"He doesn't remember Glyn at all, only he's too polite to say so!" Manners murmured to Tom Merry.

And Tom Merry nodded assent.

"You've been living in London since, sir?" Glyn went on. He was somewhat puzzled by Mr. Wodyer, and rather curious about him.

"London and the provinces," said Mr. Wodyer absently. "Of course, a man would rather play in London all the time, but needs must, you know, when the old gentleman drives, and on the whole it's pretty good luck to get bookings for a tour of the provs. I—"

The amazement in the faces of the juniors stopped him.

"Oh, I see! Travelling tutor, I suppose, sir?" said Glyn, in bewilderment.

"Travelling grandmother!" said Mr. Wodyer. "I mean—yes, exactly! You are a sharp kid; you've guessed it first shot. Pass the pickles."

"Here you are, sir."

"Jolly good spread, if I may say so," remarked Mr. Wodyer. "I've seldom sat down to a better, even when the ghost was walking."

"The—the ghost, sir?"

"Yes," explained Mr. Wodyer. "When they pay up on a tour, you know, we say the ghost walks. One of our expressions in the profession, you know."

"Oh!"

"Ghost didn't always walk," said Mr. Wodyer reminiscently. "I remember being down to my last waistcoat! Ahem! Pass the—the mustard."

"It's at your elbow, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Oh, yes, of course! Indeed? Thank you!"

Mr. Wodyer had turned quite red.

The juniors were all politeness, but some of them could not help exchanging queer glances, and Kangaroo tapped his forehead significantly, as if to imply that Mr. Wodyer was not quite right in that region. He did not intend Mr. Wodyer to see him, but the new master happened to turn his head at an unlucky moment, and he caught the Cornstalk junior fairly in the act.

Kangaroo went scarlet, but with wonderful presence of mind he proceeded to scratch his forehead, as if he had found a fly there.

Mr. Wodyer coughed.

Tom Merry kicked Kangaroo's foot under the table, as a warning to be more careful—only unfortunately it turned out not to be Kangaroo's foot, but the august ankle of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and the startled swell of St. Jim's gave a sharp yelp.

"Ow!"

"Dear me! What is that?" said Mr. Wodyer.

"Gwooh! Somebody kicked my foot!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "You clumsy ass, Figgins!"

"I didn't kick your silly foot!" said Figgins.

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Pass the pickles," said Mr. Wodyer. He seemed to regard

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it as a resource in all difficulties to ask the juniors to pass something.

In spite of Mr. Wodyer's peculiar little slips of the tongue, which caused the juniors constantly renewed surprise, the tea was a great success.

Mr. Wodyer was in high good-humour, and he talked almost incessantly, and he allowed views on life to escape him which surprised the juniors very much. It was pretty evident from his talk that he knew the theatre inside and out, and Tom Merry ventured the remark that he seemed to be a great theatre-goer.

"What-ho!" said Mr. Wodyer. "I've done the legit. many a time, of course, though the halls are where the money comes from."

"The legit.?" repeated Tom Merry in wonder.

"The legitimate stage," explained Mr. Wodyer. "The halls are knocking it right and left now, and for a jolly good reason—the theatre charges a high price for poor stuff, and the halls give you good stuff at a low price."

"Bai Jove!"

"You should have seen me at the Friv! I tell you, I was a shriek!" said Mr. Wodyer impressively.

"A—a—what?"

"A shriek," said Mr. Wodyer. "You should have heard the house—I was simply a scream! I—I—I mean—P-p-pass the walnuts!"

And Mr. Wodyer changed the subject hurriedly.

After tea was over, Mr. Wodyer drew out a briar pipe, and proceeded to cram it with a very thick and strong tobacco. He glanced at the juniors, who were watching this proceeding with great interest. Masters at St. Jim's smoked, as a rule, but it was severely and very properly forbidden for growing boys.

"I hope you young fellows don't smoke cigarettes," said Mr. Wodyer.

"Bai Jove! Wathah not!"

"Certainly not, sir."

"Never do!" said Mr. Wodyer. "When you smoke, smoke a pipe, as I do—it's better in every way, and isn't so rough on the voice. Chap who smokes cigarettes can never expect to sing, but a pipe goes easier on the vocal chords."

Tom Merry laughed.

"We don't smoke pipes, either, sir," he said.

"Ha, ha! No—I suppose you don't," said Mr. Wodyer, laughing. "I suppose you've no objection to my lighting up, eh?"

"Oh, no, sir; please do."

And Mr. Wodyer did.

He lighted his pipe, and was soon blowing out thick clouds of tobacco smoke, that floated in the air and drenched every corner of the room with the smell of strong tobacco.

All the juniors coughed, but they restrained it as much as possible, out of courtesy to their guest.

Mr. Wodyer filled and refilled his pipe several times, and the smoke floated in a blue haze in the room. He had smoked his third pipe by the time he rose to go, and the juniors felt almost suffocated. The new master knocked out his ashes absently into a plate of figs.

"Well, I will be getting along," he said. "Thank you very much—it's been simply a ripping time! If you come up to London, and find yourselves near the Friv at any time—ahem!—I—I mean—Good-bye!"

And Mr. Wodyer departed rather hastily.

CHAPTER 13.

Knox Knows.

TOM MERRY & CO. looked at one another.

Figgins stepped to the window and opened it, to allow some of the smoke to escape. He had been too polite to do so while the honoured guest was present.

"My hat!" said Blake.

"My word!" ejaculated Digby.

"Bai Jove!"

"Well, I like him," said Tom Merry; "he's a jolly pleasant chap, but he's the queerest customer for a Form-master at a school that I ever heard of!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He doesn't know anything about Form subjects, and he talks like a giddy music-hall pro!" said Kerr thoughtfully. "Looks to me as if he's had hard times, and has been doing turns in a music-hall to keep the wolf from the door."

"Quite poss., bai Jove! I like him."

"Yes, I think we all like him," said Blake. "Of course, we must keep it dark, as much as we can, about his rotting in Form. He can't teach, but it's no bizney of ours to give him away."

"Quite wight, deah boy!"

"We shall have an easy time with him, anyway," grinned Fatty Wynn. "He doesn't know Latin or Greek when he

maths, but he knows a good steak-and-kidney pie when he sees it, and that's enough to show that his heart is in the right place."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Smokes like a giddy furnace, doesn't he?" Monty Lowther remarked. "If some giddy prefect shoved his nose into here now he would get the idea that we'd been smoking."

"Bai Jove, that would be wotten!"

"Wave some of the serviettes about, and clear it off," said Manners.

"Good egg!"

The door of the Hobby Club-room opened, and an unpleasant face looked in. The unpleasant face belonged to an unpleasant person—Knox, of the Sixth. The prefect was sniffing suspiciously. The whiff of strong tobacco had reached him in the passage as he passed, and as he knew that the room was used by the juniors for their meetings, he had looked in—perhaps merely to do his duty as a prefect, and perhaps in the secret hope of catching Tom Merry and his friends breaking the rules. Knox had just been in his study smoking himself, as a matter of fact, and he knew nothing about Mr. Wodyer having had tea with the juniors in the Hobby Club-room.

The prefect started in surprise as he saw the clouds of smoke still curling in the air, and the efforts of the juniors ceased at once. They stood transfixed, as it were, with the table-napkins in their hands, with the basilisk eyes of the prefect upon them.

Knox's eyes gleamed with a malicious triumph.

"You young scoundrels! So I've caught you!"

"Weally, Knox—"

"Caught in the act, you disreputable young rascals!"

"I refuse to be chawactewised as a wascal, Knox. I considah—"

Knox advanced into the room.

"I always knew that your goody-goody show was all humbug," he said in biting accents. "I knew that you young scoundrels were the worst fellows in the school, with all the appearances you were cunning enough to keep up. I've found you out at last, quite by accident, and I'll make you smart for it!"

"Ha ha ha!" roared Tom Merry.

It struck him as funny. Knowing nothing about the visit of Mr. Wodyer, the prefect had jumped to the conclusion that the juniors had been smoking, and certainly a great number of cigarettes would have been required to make such an amount of smoke. It really looked as if he had happened upon a regular orgie.

If Knox had not been so suspicious, he might have paused to reflect, and he might have saved himself from a blunder. But he was too satisfied with the correctness of his suspicions to have a moment's doubt.

"I've caught you!"

"Weally, Knox—"

"Caught in the very act, you disgraceful young rascals!" went on the prefect, with much satisfaction. "I don't think that even Mr. Railton can have any doubt on the subject now. But I shall take you to the Head. A flagrant case like this is only suitable for the Head to deal with."

"Look here, Knox—"

"Follow me to the Head."

"But—"

"Weally, Knox, you know—"

"Follow me!" thundered Knox.

The juniors looked at one another.

Knox's mistake was so utterly ludicrous that they could not help grinning, and there was not the slightest danger in following Knox to the Head, because it was quite easy to explain that Mr. Wodyer had been smoking his pipe in the room—an explanation that would, of course, be immediately borne out by Mr. Wodyer when he was appealed to.

The spirit of mischief entered into the juniors. Since Knox would not listen to reason, he could go ahead and report them to Dr. Holmes.

"You'd better let the matter drop, Knox," began Tom Merry.

The prefect sneered.

"Yes, I'm likely to do that. You might have kept up your rotten hypocrisy for any length of time if I hadn't caught you in the act."

"Knox, you uttah ass—"

"Follow me at once, or I will lock you in the room, and bring the Head here!" shouted Knox.

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, we'll follow you," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "I haven't any objection, for one."

"Wathah not!"

"Come instantly!"

"We're coming, old son!" said Figgins.

And the crowd of juniors marched out of the Hobby Club-room and followed Knox down the passage. The sight of the

crowd following on the heels of Knox brought spectators from all sides, and many were the inquiries.

"What on earth's the matter, Knox?" asked Kildare, looking out of his study in amazement. "Where are you taking all these fags to?"

"I'm taking them to the Head," snapped Knox.

"To the Head! What for?"

"Smoking."

"Nonsense!" said the captain of St. Jim's sharply. "These kids don't smoke; I know Tom Merry doesn't, for one—"

"That's all you know about it!" Knox sneered. "I've caught them in the act, with the room reeking with smoke—you can smell it about them now if you choose."

"There's some mistake—"

"There's no mistake. I suppose I can believe my own eyes," said the prefect tartly. "Come to the Head's study at once, you young blackguards!"

"I object to being called a blackguard—"

"Come on, Gussy!" grinned Blake. "We're going like giddy lambs to the slaughter. Are you fellows trembling?"

"What-ho!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Knox gritted his teeth. The juniors certainly did not look very much scared; but the bully of the Sixth set that down to sheer bravado. The crowd arrived outside Dr. Holmes's study, and Knox tapped at the door.

"Come in!" said the clear voice of Dr. Holmes.

Knox opened the door, and marched the delinquents in. The crowd of them seemed almost to fill the Head's study. Mr. Railton was in the room, talking to the Head, and he looked in surprise at the crowd of juniors. The Head sat bolt upright, and put on his glasses, and stared at his swarm of visitors.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "Dear me! What have you brought all these juniors to my study for, Knox?"

"It is my duty to report them, sir."

"Dear me! For what?"

"Smoking, sir."

"Smoking! You have caught them smoking."

"Yes, sir."

"This—this is very distressing!" said the Head. "I am very sorry to hear this, my boys! Surely you know better than to break an important rule of the school in this way!"

"Weally, Doctah Holmes—"

"Excuse me, sir," said Tom Merry, gently but firmly.

"We haven't been smoking, sir."

"What!"

"We don't smoke, sir," said Blake. "We think it's rotten, sir. We shouldn't think of doing such a thing."

"But—but—" The Head cast a puzzled glance from the juniors to the prefect, and back again to the juniors. "But—but Knox states—"

"It's a mistake, sir."

"Yaas, wathah, sir! Knox is labawin' undah a most wiculous ewwah, sir," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity.

Knox gritted his teeth.

"I have told you the exact facts, sir. I caught them smoking in the room which is used for the meetings of the Junior Hobby Club. I have often had my suspicions that the room was used for secret smoking, but I have never been able to catch them at it before."

"You state that you caught them smoking, Knox?"

"Certainly, sir."

"And you boys deny that you were smoking?"

"Yes, sir."

"Yaas, wathah, sir."

Dr. Holmes wrinkled his brows in amazed distress.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "This is very extraordinary!"

CHAPTER 14.

A Knock for Knox.

M R. RAILTON was watching the juniors with a keen gaze. He saw the suppressed grins and chuckles, and it dawned upon him that this was in some way a jape upon the unpopular prefect. He came a step nearer.

"May I speak, sir?" he asked.

"Certainly," said the Head.

"You state, Knox, that you caught these juniors smoking?" said Mr. Railton.

"Yes, sir, I do!" said Knox, with vicious emphasis.

"Did you actually see the cigars or cigarettes?"

"They had hidden them before I opened the door."

"Ah, then you did not see them?"

"The room was full of tobacco smoke, sir," said Knox savagely. "They had the window open, and were waving cloths about to disperse the smoke."

"That is true, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He admits it!" exclaimed Knox triumphantly.

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"Do you admit smoking, Tom Merry?"

"No, sir. Nothing of the sort."

"We should all weguard it as wotten bad form, sir."

Mr. Railton smiled.

"But you admit that the room was full of tobacco smoke, and that you were trying to clear it away when Knox came in?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then whence did the tobacco smoke proceed?"

"From a pipe, sir."

"Whose pipe?"

"Mr. Wodyer's, sir. You see, Mr. Wodyer had had tea with us in the Hobby Club-room, and he smoked a pipe after tea, sir," Tom Merry explained.

"Pwecisely, sir."

Knox started. He was taken by surprise; but he did not believe the explanation for a moment. Had he understood Tom Merry's nature better he would have known that the hero of the Shell was incapable of a lie. But Knox was capable of many lies himself, and he was not likely to believe that the junior was a better fellow than himself.

"He is lying, sir!" he exclaimed hotly.

"Mr. Wodyer was not in the room?" asked Mr. Railton.

"Certainly not."

"Will Mr. Wodyer bear out your statement, Merry?" asked the Head.

"I suppose so, sir. There is no reason why he shouldn't."

"It's a lie!" howled Knox. "If the smoke was made by a master smoking his pipe, why should they be trying to clear it out of the room? Let him answer that!"

"Answer that, Merry," said the Head quietly.

"Certainly, sir. We were afraid that some ass might come in, sir, and think that we had been smoking," said Tom Merry meekly.

There was a suppressed chuckle among the juniors. The Head smiled; he could not help it; and Mr. Railton turned his face away. Knox was crimson with rage.

"Mr. Wodyer must be referred to," said the Head. "As you did not actually see the boys smoking, Knox, it appears to me that you have jumped to a very hasty conclusion. But we shall see." The Head rang the bell, and Toby, when he appeared, was despatched to the New House to request Mr. Wodyer to step over for a few minutes.

The juniors waited patiently while he was gone.

"You are quite willing to leave it to Mr. Wodyer's evidence, Merry?" the School House master asked.

"Quite, sir."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Why did you not explain to Knox that the smoke was made by Mr. Wodyer smoking his pipe?" asked Mr. Railton.

"He wouldn't give us a chance to explain, sir. The moment he found there was tobacco smoke in the room he started calling us names and marched us off here."

"Yaas, wathah! I weguard Knox as havin' tweekt us with gwoss diswespct, sir."

"Well, we shall see in a few moments," said the Head pacifically.

Knox began to grow a little uneasy. The juniors were evidently brimming with confidence, and did not fear the test. That could only have one meaning; that they had stated the plain truth; for, of course, it was inconceivable that Mr. Wodyer would back up their story unless it was true.

There was a tap on the study door at last, and Mr. Wodyer entered.

He was looking very disquieted.

The new master of the New House had reasons of his own for being alarmed at a sudden summons to the presence of Dr. Holmes—reasons that the others there knew nothing of.

He glanced uneasily at the Head, then at Mr. Railton, and then at the prefect and the juniors. He betrayed a curious desire to keep near the door.

"You sent for me, sir," he said, a little huskily.

"Yes, Mr. Wodyer; thank you for coming. A somewhat peculiar matter has been laid before me, and I want you to give me the exact facts," said the Head.

Mr. Wodyer turned pale.

"The—the facts!" he faltered.

"Yes; a word from you will be sufficient."

"Oh crickey!" murmured the unhappy Mr. Wodyer, half aloud. His thoughts flew back to the influenza patient in the garret in Bloomsbury, and he mentally anathematised the ingenuity which had led him to assume the character of the new master at St. Jim's. For he had not the slightest doubt, from what Dr. Holmes said, that the truth was out, and that he had been called there to be questioned about it.

"I—I hardly know what to say, sir!" he stammered, before the Head could go on. "You will understand, first of all, of course, that no harm was intended."

"What!"

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"THE JAPE AGAINST THE FIFTH!"

is the Title of the Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. appearing in this week's "MAGNET" Library. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.

"If it had not been for that unfortunate attack of influenza—"

"Eh?"

"And the fact that I was out of a shop at the time—"

"What—eh?"

"The idea would never have entered my head. You see—"

"Will you kindly explain what you are talking about, Mr. Wodyer?" exclaimed the Head, in the greatest bewilderment. "I assure you that I have not the faintest idea. I sent for you in reference to an accusation that Knox of the Sixth has made against these juniors, concerning smoking in a room in the School House."

Mr. Wodyer almost jumped.

"Oh!" he murmured.

"If you will, however, kindly explain what you were referring to, Mr. Wodyer—"

But Mr. Wodyer had no intention of doing that, now that he realised that he had been too hasty, and that he was not suspected after all.

"Oh, I—I had—had a wrong impression of what you wanted, sir!" he said. "I—I—in short, I should be glad to know, sir, what this accusation is that you speak of?"

"But you were saying—"

"Nothing of any consequence, sir. Pray let me know what it is you really sent for me for," said Mr. Wodyer.

"Very well! Knox accuses these juniors of smoking, on the grounds that he found them in the room with the air thick with smoke."

Mr. Wodyer smiled.

"They declare that you had tea with them, Mr. Wodyer, and smoked your pipe afterwards," said the Head. "Do you substantiate the statement?"

"Most decidedly, sir; it is quite correct," said Mr. Wodyer.

"Thank you very much."

"Is that all, sir?"

"That is all."

Mr. Wodyer quitted the study. Dr. Holmes turned to the juniors.

"You are completely exonerated, my boys," he said.

"You may go."

"Thank you, sir!"

And Tom Merry & Co. marched out into the passage in triumph. Knox the prefect would have followed quickly, his cheeks burning; but the Head made a sign to him to stop. The prefect realised very clearly how egregious a fool he had made himself look, and he would have been glad to escape; but he was not to escape so soon.

"Knox!" rapped out the Head.

"Ye-es, sir!"

"You have done these boys wrong with your hasty suspicions," said the Head severely. "On the flimsiest possible evidence, you found them guilty of a breach of the college rules, and then stigmatised their explanation as falsehood. This points to a very strong prejudice on your part, Knox, against these boys, who have some of the best records, I think, of any boys at St. Jim's. I am no longer surprised that there was trouble when you were placed in charge of the Fourth Form if these are your tactics."

"I—I—sir—"

"I had been undecided how to apportion the blame for the disturbances in the Fourth-Form room, Knox," went on the Head severely. "But it seems to me much clearer now how it should be apportioned. You have been hasty and unjust, Knox. If anything of this sort occurs again I shall have to consider very seriously whether to deprive you of your post as a prefect. That is all. You may go."

And Knox went without a word. He could not trust himself to speak. If he had uttered the words that were upon his lips, he would not only have lost his post as a prefect, but would probably have been expelled from St. Jim's as well.

CHAPTER 15.

Astonishing Conduct of Mr. Wodyer.

WHEN Mr. Wodyer took the Fourth Form the next morning the Fourth-Formers were prepared for fun. They had it. The whole Form had agreed that Mr. Wodyer was not to be "given away," and that they would keep quiet when he made his "howlers." They liked the new master very much, and they wanted to stand by him. If this kind of thing continued, their education certainly was likely to suffer; but fellows in the Fourth do not, as a rule, look very far ahead.

How a man of such attainments had got the post of Form-master and Housemaster at St. Jim's they could not guess, and they felt that there must be a mistake somewhere. But there he was—and he was very kind to them—and they wouldn't have betrayed him for worlds. Even cads like Mellish and Levison entered into the spirit of the thing.

Levison had been warned that there was not to be any more "rotting," on pain of raggings after lessons; and Levison wisely forbore. The morning lessons went through without the new master being aware in the least that he had given himself away in the completest manner to the heroes of the Fourth.

It was a half-holiday that day, much to Mr. Wodyer's relief. He knew his deficiencies, of course, and he felt that he had thoroughly forgotten what he had never thoroughly learned. By the help of cribs he hoped to prepare himself for further ordeals, but it was a dismaying prospect to have to shut himself up in his study to labour on a fine spring afternoon, when it would have been so much pleasanter to take his pipe for a walk along the river.

He had intended to "swot" the previous evening, but somehow or other he had smoked instead, and dreamed of the time when London would be at his feet, and rival managers would be telegraphing him offers of salaries of two and three hundred pounds a week. And on this half-holiday after dinner, he looked round his study, looked at the various works of wisdom which contained the knowledge that was so necessary to him, and groaned.

He had never liked study—he had never been able to cram knowledge of that sort into his head, and it was too rough to have it to begin now.

"I'll chance it," he murmured. "I've been lucky, so far, and why shouldn't the luck hold out? Blessed if I don't chance it."

And he did.

Instead of settling down to an afternoon's grind, which would have fitted him much better for taking the Fourth on the next occasion, he strolled out into the quadrangle with his pipe in his mouth.

Masters at St. Jim's smoked pipes, as a rule, but it was not exactly the thing for a master to be seen in the quadrangle with a pipe between his teeth. Fellows who saw Mr. Wodyer grinned at the sight of it.

Mr. Wodyer was quite unconscious of breaking any unwritten laws. He strolled round the quadrangle, where the trees were putting on their spring green, and enjoyed himself. It was a soft day in early spring, and very pleasant round about the old college.

Tom Merry & Co. were not playing footer that afternoon. Now that the footer season was nearing its close, they seldom missed an opportunity of playing; but on this special afternoon they missed it. The Terrible Three and Bernard Glyn were seen proceeding from the School House dressed in their best, and they were joined in the quadrangle by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth. The swell of St. Jim's was looking his neatest. From the glitter of his boots to the gleam of his eyeglass, he was a picture of elegance. It was evident that there was something unusual "on."

Bernard Glyn looked at his watch.

"Edith will be here at three," he said. "Five minutes."

Arthur Augustus adjusted his glistening white cuffs. "I wish she'd come to tea in the study," said Glyn. "But she's going to have tea with Mrs. Holmes—only she's going to walk round the school first. She wants to see my study. But it won't be such a bother as I expected now Wodyer's here."

The Terrible Three grinned; but a severe expression came over the aristocratic features of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

He turned his glimmering eyeglass reprovingly upon the Liverpool lad.

"Weally, Glyn, I twust you would nevah wegard the visit of any lady as a bothah," he said.

"Well, it generally is a bother, isn't it?" asked Glyn, with a stare.

"Weally, Glyn—"

"The pater is coming later, I believe, and so I'm in for it," said Glyn. "It's jolly good of you fellows to stand by me in this way."

"Not at all," said Tom Merry. "You'd do the same for us, I'm sure."

"Oh, yes; what-ho!"

"But it will be fun, as Wodyer's here!" grinned the Liverpool junior. "Edith doesn't know anything about his being here, you know, and it will be fun to see them meet unexpectedly. I won't say a word till she sees him. I wonder what she will call him."

"Owney-owney!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It will be fun," said Tom Merry, "and it will be a pleasure to both of them, of course, so we're entitled to the fun."

"Yes, rather."

"Upon the whole, deah boys, I considah that you ought to treat this mattah sewiously. I wegard bein' in love as a vewy sewious mattah."

"Well, you ought to know," agreed Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Yes, the young ass was spoons on Edith once," said Glyn.

"But she never called you Owney-owney, I'll bet, Gussy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Glyn, I wegard your remarks as bein' in bad taste!"

"Here she comes!" exclaimed Glyn.

"Bai Jove!"

"You buzz off, and get Wodyer here somehow," said Glyn.

"I'll keep Edith talking till you fetch him up. We'll be under the elms."

"Right you are."

Monty Lowther hurried away towards the Head's garden, where Mr. Wodyer had been seen to stroll. Bernard Glyn and Tom Merry and Manners and D'Arcy hurried down to the gates to meet Miss Glyn. Edith Glyn was a very charming girl, a good many years older than her brother, the junior of St. Jim's.

Bernard gave her a careless brotherly kiss on the cheek, and Edith shook hands with the other juniors. All the fellows liked Miss Glyn very much, and they had a grateful remembrance of the way she looked after their comfort whenever Glyn took them home to tea.

"Friend of yours here, Edie," Bernard Glyn remarked, as they walked into the old quad. together.

"A friend of mine!" repeated Miss Glyn.

The juniors exchanged grins.

"Yes. Guess who it is?"

"Miss Cleveland."

"Oh, no, Cousin Ethel isn't here! It's a chap."

Edith Glyn looked puzzled.

"I really don't know whom you can be alluding to, Bernard," she said.

"Chap you knew in Liverpool," said Glyn.

The girl wrinkled her pretty brows in an effort to remember.

"Tutor chap," said Glyn.

Edith started.

"You don't mean—"

"Yes, I do!"

"Bernard!"

"He's here!" grinned Bernard Glyn, forgetting all about his intention to say nothing. "He's the New House master here!"

Edith's cheeks burned red for a moment.

"Is it possible, Bernard?"

"Yes, isn't it, Tommy?"

"Mr. Wodyer is the new master here, certainly," said Tom Merry.

"Arthur Wodyer?"

"Yes, rather."

"Oh!" said Edith.

Bernard Glyn looked round anxiously.

"I thought you'd like to meet him," he remarked. "Lowther's gone to fetch him, Edie. You'd like to see an old friend, wouldn't you?"

"Very much, Bernard," said the girl quietly.

"Buzz off and see where he is, Tom Merry!"

"Right-ho!"

Tom Merry ran off to the Head's garden. He had seen in Edith's face, quiet as it was, the pleasure she felt at the thought of meeting Arthur Wodyer. Tom Merry ran into the Head's garden, and found Monty Lowther talking to Mr. Wodyer. The latter gentleman was looking somewhat disturbed. He had his pipe in his hand, and he had allowed it to go out.

"An old friend of yours, sir," Lowther was saying.

"Ahem! Lowther!"

"I told Glyn I would tell you, sir."

"Ahem!"

"Miss Glyn has arrived," said Tom Merry.

Mr. Wodyer turned pale.

"Oh!" he said. "Ahem! Exactly."

Tom Merry looked perplexed. Even if Glyn were mistaken about the case of "spoons," it was only to be expected that Mr. Wodyer would be glad to see an old friend, and that friend so charming a girl as Edith Glyn. But he certainly did not look it. He looked anxious enough, but not anxious for the meeting.

The two juniors felt surprised. They looked at Mr. Wodyer, and they looked at one another. But the awkward situation was interrupted by the opening of the garden gate. As the mountain did not come to Mahomet, it was necessary for Mahomet to go to the mountain, so to speak; and Bernard Glyn and his friends had walked Miss Glyn to the Head's garden.

Miss Glyn's charming face came into view over the gate as Manners opened it. Mr. Wodyer looked at her with a startled gaze.

Their eyes met.

Miss Glyn looked startled—Mr. Wodyer turned quite pale.

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NEXT THURSDAY: "THE HERO OF ST. JIM'S!"

For one instant he remained staring blankly at the girl; then, with a sudden bound, he fled, and disappeared into the shrubberies.

CHAPTER 16.

Light at Last.

"Bai Jove!"
"My hat!"
"Great Scott!"

"Phew!"

The crash in the shrubbery died away, and the juniors were left looking at one another in blank amazement. Miss Glyn still looked startled, and she was holding the top bar of the gate somewhat tightly.

"He's dotty!" muttered Monty Lowther.

"Mad as a hatter, bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy.

"Was that—was that Mr. Wodyer?" asked Edith haltingly.

"Yes, Miss Glyn."

"He has changed, then, since I saw him last," said Miss Glyn. "Are you quite sure that it was Mr. Arthur Wodyer?"

"Oh, yes!" said Tom Merry. "Arthur Wodyer, M.A. There's no doubt about it, you see, as he's a master here."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It is very curious. He is very like Mr. Wodyer, as I knew him, yet—" The girl paused. "Do you know why he has acted in this extraordinary manner?"

"Haven't the faintest idea."

"Wathah not."

"It's extraordinary."

Miss Glyn nodded, and walked away towards the Head's house. There was a very thoughtful expression upon her face. Her brother went with her, looking blankly amazed; the meeting between his sister and Mr. Wodyer had been more surprising than he had anticipated.

The Terrible Three and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remained staring at one another.

They were too amazed to speak.

"Hallo, what's the trouble?" asked Figgins, as he strolled up with Kerr and Fatty Wynn. "Has Glyn's sister come?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Met Woddy?" asked Fatty Wynn, with a grin.

"Yes."

"Called him 'Owney-owney'?" grinned Kerr.

"Ha, ha! No! He bolted!"

"Eh?"

"He bolted the moment he saw her, as if he thought she was going to bite," said Tom Merry. "Blessed if I can understand it!"

"My hat!"

"There's something fishy about it somehow," said Monty Lowther. "Miss Glyn didn't seem to think that he was Arthur Wodyer at all. It's queer!"

"Jollay queeah!"

"Perhaps there's been some sweethearts' tiff, or something," Figgins suggested. "People are jolly queer when they're in love—not exactly what we should call sane, you know. It may be something of that sort."

"I don't see why he should bolt."

"I wegard him as bein' off his wockah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I considah that he is as mad as a hatter—not that hattahs are weally mad, as a mattah of fact," he added thoughtfully. "Hattahs are weally a most intelligent class of men. I presume that we owe the invention of the silk toppah to a hattah."

"Let's go and see him. He may be ill, or something," said Figgins. "Where is he?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"Gone into the House, very likely," said Kerr. "Let's look."

The conduct of the new master had been so very extraordinary that the juniors were really a little alarmed about him, and they could be pardoned for being curious, too. Mr. Wodyer had been very mysterious from the first; but it was now, as Monty Lowther said, growing a little too thick.

The juniors walked over to the New House, and they stopped outside Mr. Wodyer's study door.

There was a sound within, as of articles being dragged about, and it alarmed them still more.

"Quite dotty!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Better go in and see him."

Tom Merry knocked at the door, and opened it without waiting for a reply. Mr. Wodyer was in the study. He was looking very red and disturbed; but the sound of hurried movements in the room was explained by the fact that he was hastily packing a bag, cramming articles into it in the most reckless manner.

He started as the juniors came in.

"Oh, buzz off!" he exclaimed.

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"Really, sir—"

"Don't bother! Keep off the grass!" Mr. Wodyer exclaimed irritably.

"Are you leaving, sir?" asked Figgins, staring at the bag and the untidy articles scattered about the room.

"Yes."

"Leaving St. Jim's?" echoed the juniors.

"Yes, yes!"

"We're sowwy, sir," said D'Arcy.

"Thank you! Don't bother any more. Do you know when the next up train is?"

"Four-thirty, sir," said Tom Merry. "You've lots of time. If you start now you'll have to wait an hour at the station."

"Oh, crikey!"

The juniors gasped. Mr. Wodyer seemed in a state of uncontrollable excitement, but they never expected to hear him say "Oh, crikey!" The unhappy master of the New House bestowed a sudden kick upon the half-packed bag, which sent it flying across the study and scattered its contents on the floor. The juniors crowded back towards the door in alarm.

"Are you—are you ill, sir?" ejaculated Tom Merry.

Mr. Wodyer seemed to catch at the word.

"Ill? Ye-e-es, ill! Of course I am!" he exclaimed.

"Why on earth didn't I think of that before? I—I mean, yes, I'm ill! I can't see anybody! Will you explain to them that I can't see anybody, Figgins? You might ask the House-dame to make me some—some gruel. I'm frightfully ill!"

And Mr. Wodyer stretched himself upon the sofa.

"Bai Jove!"

"Run away!" said Mr. Wodyer faintly. "I'm very ill! I can't bear a noise. Tell everybody that I'm not to be bothered. Nobody is to come to my study—no message is to be delivered."

"Shall I buzz for a doctor, sir?" asked Figgins.

Mr. Wodyer started up.

"No!" he roared. "You young ass—I—I mean, no, I don't want a doctor; it is not so bad as that. All I want is complete quiet and rest. Get out! I mean, run away."

The juniors withdrew from the study and closed the door. They stood in the passage, staring blankly at one another.

"There's something jolly wrong about all this!" Tom Merry muttered.

"Yaas, wathah!"

There was the sound of a scratching match from the study. It was followed by a smell of tobacco.

Tom Merry grinned.

"He is not too ill to smoke," he remarked.

"He isn't ill at all," said Kerr. "Either he's a lunatic, or there's something very fishy going on. It can't be a case of an imposture surely. Miss Glyn didn't think he was Arthur Wodyer. But if he isn't, where is the real man?"

"That's rather thick, Kerr."

"But it is vewy extwaordinawy, deah boys."

Toby, the page of the School House, came down the passage.

"Mr. Wodyer here?" he asked.

"He's in his study."

"Dr. Holmes wants to see him at once."

"Phew!"

"What for, Toby?"

"I dunno, Master Tom. But I think it's somethin' the matter," said Toby. "Miss Glyn was with the 'Ead, and they was both looking very solemn. Miss Glyn 'ad been cryin', I think."

"Bai Jove!"

Toby tapped at the study door.

"Who's there?" roared a voice.

"Me, sir!" said Toby. "The 'Ead wants to see you in 'is study, sir."

"Tell the Head I'm sorry I can't come. I'm ill—confined to my room. I'm afraid it's going to turn to smallpox—I—I mean, influenza."

"Shall I say smallpox or influenza, sir?" asked the amazed Toby.

"Influenza, you idiot!"

"Yessir!" said Toby, very much astonished. "But the 'Ead says, sir—"

"Give my message to the Head, and hold your tongue!"

"Yessir!"

Toby departed. Bernard Glyn passed him in the passage and joined the juniors. The Liverpool junior was looking very much disturbed.

"Wodyer in there?" he asked.

"Yes. He says he's ill, and can't see anybody."

Bernard Glyn whistled softly.

"I fancy he'll have to see the Head," he remarked. "There was something queer about him from the start, and

it's come out now. My sister declares positively that he isn't Arthur Wodyer. He's like him; but he isn't the man. She's certain about it, she says; and she's very much upset. She thinks something must have happened to the real man, as there is an impostor here in his name."

"Gwreat Scott!"

The juniors looked very serious.

"Well, that would account for his queer conduct," said Tom Merry.

"It would account for his awful howlers as a Form-master," said Kerr. "But—but if Miss Glyn is right, and he isn't the man, how did he get here? He must have been awfully deep, to impose upon the Head. They don't take a master at a school like this without plenty of investigation. And—and he seemed such a decent chap."

"Yaas, wathah! I adhere to the opinion that he is a decent chap, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy firmly. "I wufuse to wegard him as a wottah."

"My sister thinks that something must have happened to the real man," said Glyn. "She's even afraid he may have been put out of the way somewhere in some way. If he was able to come forward, of course, this man wouldn't dare to use his name."

"My hat!"

"Look out! Here comes the Head!"

The stately figure of the Head was advancing. Dr. Holmes was looking very serious and stern. The new master had refused to go to him, and the Head had come to see the new master. His lips were set hard, and he looked more grim than the juniors had ever seen him look before.

The boys fell back as he came up, and Dr. Holmes knocked at the study door.

"Who's that?" howled Mr. Wodyer from within.

"It is I—Dr. Holmes."

"Oh!"

"Kindly open the door! It appears to be locked," said the Head, having turned the handle in vain.

"You can't come in!" said Mr. Wodyer hurriedly. "It's influenza, and it's catching. Please go away!"

"If you do not immediately open the door," said the Head, in his deep voice, "I shall have it broken in, Mr. Wodyer!"

"Sir!"

"I command you to unlock this door at once!"

The key was heard to turn in the lock. Dr. Holmes pushed the door open and entered the study. Mr. Wodyer, looking very crimson and confused, stood facing him, but he looked very uneasy beneath the grim, steady gaze of the Head of St. Jim's.

"I must have an explanation from you, Mr. Wodyer," said Dr. Holmes icily. "Miss Glyn, who knows Arthur Wodyer well, declares that you are not he. She is positive upon this point. In the light of this information, I cannot help recalling several peculiar circumstances in connection with you. What have you to say?"

"I—I—I—"

"I am waiting for your answer."

Mr. Wodyer sank upon the sofa.

"It's all serene!" he gasped. "The game's up, I suppose."

Dr. Holmes's brow grew sterner, harder.

"You confess that you are not Arthur Wodyer?"

"Not much good sticking it out any longer. And Arthur would be pretty rattly if he knew that charming young lady was being troubled about it, I suppose," said Mr. Wodyer philosophically.

"Your name is not Wodyer?"

"Oh, yes, it is!" said the comedian, with a grin. He

seemed relieved that it was all over now, and his confidence was returning. He relighted his pipe. "You see," he explained, looking at the Head through a growing cloud of smoke, "I happen to be Arthur Wodyer's brother."

"His brother!" ejaculated the Head.

"Exactly! Austin Wodyer, of the Frivolity Music-hall and the Boss Circuit," said the comedian, with a bow. "Please don't run away with the idea that there is any fraud in the case, sir. I came here to do poor Arthur a favour; though I suppose I've only messed the thing up for him, as a matter of fact. But the best laid schemes of mice and men— You know the rest."

"Will you kindly explain why you have played this extraordinary trick?" exclaimed the Head, his stern look changing to one of perplexity. "I cannot think that you are a common swindler and impostor."

"That would be rather rough on me," said Mr. Wodyer.

"I am nothing of the kind. I am an actor, and I happened to be out of a shop just now; and Arthur is laid up with influenza. He had accepted the offer of a post here, hoping to be well in time to come. Then you sent a telegram, requiring him to turn up at once. He couldn't; the doctor won't let him leave his bed yet. What was to be done? This shop—excuse me, this post—was the chance of a lifetime for Arthur, and he had to let it slide. I hit on the idea of coming here as Arthur, filling the place till he was well and keeping it open for him. See?"

"Oh!" said the Head.

"We are very much alike; and we thought he would be able to change into my place, and nothing said about the matter," said Austin Wodyer. "You see, there was no harm intended. But I suppose I've done for Arthur, instead of helping him. It's beastly rough!"

The Head's face softened. He smiled a little.

"It was a very reckless proceeding on your part," he said. "It has alarmed Miss Glyn very much. She is a great friend of your brother's; and, finding another man passing under his name, she was very much alarmed, fearing that some misfortune had happened to Arthur Wodyer. It was a very reckless thing. But I am glad to find that matters are no worse. You had better come with me and explain to Miss Glyn, and relieve her of her fears. As for your brother, I am sorry he is ill; and I shall certainly not allow this curious affair to interfere with his prospects here. You had certainly better leave St. Jim's. But the post is open for your brother as soon as he is able to take it."

"My only hat!" ejaculated Mr. Wodyer. "I must say you are a brick, sir!"

The Head smiled.

"Come with me to Miss Glyn," he said.

Tom Merry & Co. learned the curious facts a little later—in time to give Mr. Wodyer a cheer when he departed. The comedian-Form-master was gone, and Figgins & Co. were again without a Housemaster; but the kind old Head had taken a generous view of the matter, and the post was open, waiting for Arthur Wodyer to come and fill it.

"He was a jolly decent chap, whatever he was, and I'm sorry he's gone," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked. "I trust his wothah will be as decent as he is."

To which Figgins replied heartily:

"Hear, hear!"

And D'Arcy's wish was fulfilled—as all the juniors of St. Jim's admitted when they saw Figgins & Co.'s new master.

THE END.

NEXT THURSDAY.

"THE HERO OF ST. JIM'S!"

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"THE HERO OF ST. JIM'S!"

ward bound. The sun vanished, and the snow began to fall once more.

"What's that?" cried Lance quickly.

Morgan uttered a frenzied shout, but it was unheard. The ship heeled as if struck by a giant's hammer.

The snow blotted out everything.

The engineer flashed on the light, and increased the upward speed. Then he leaned forward, with his hand over his mouth, and bellowed:

"We're in for it now, sir! We're driving back slap into the peaks!"

The Great Glissade—A Hideous Ride—Morgan Fights with Death.

All roads lead to the North. Fordham set his teeth, and tried hard to peer out. One hope still was left. The ever-growing weight of snow would sink the aeronef, and overmaster the lifting power of her screws, unless she was dashed against the mountains beforehand. Perhaps she might find a refuge in the soft, spongy mass that covered the slopes.

Morgan knew that it was useless to attempt to rise above the storm. There was no time, and every second was weakening the vessel's power of flight. Where should she fall? That was the question he asked himself grimly. He hoped against hope that she would not drop into the heart of some tangled forest, and capsize or hurtle into a deep crevasse.

Nothing could be seen. They did not know what was below them, but they knew what was beyond—the iron, jagged rocks.

With the driving screws still flying to hold the aeronef up to the wind the descent began—the descent into the unknown. For a thousand feet the speed of the fall almost took their breath away. Clinging to a rail, blinded and buffeted, Lance let a lantern swing downwards. It shimmered and tossed like a yellow star. Tooter and Crooks, knee deep in snow, got the searchlight in position. Its white beam shot down perpendicularly, but revealed nothing. It darted ahead and around.

Nothing but the great woolly flakes dancing and tossing in the broad beam.

"We must have got clear over the ice," muttered Lance; "and it's three thousand feet down."

By the way the cord that sustained the lantern swayed aslant, it was plain that the aeronef was making a gallant fight. They could feel the wind strong upon their faces. The aeronef was, therefore, moving more slowly than the storm.

And where were the terrific cliffs? Something unaccountable and extraordinary was happening. The compass had dipped almost vertical, and it could not guide them. In what direction were they travelling? Morgan quickened the suspensory screws. With his hand to his mouth, Lance yelled his hardest.

"I can see ground, Teddy."

The steersman nodded curtly. He was perplexed. He stopped the driving screws.

"Gently—gently!" yelled Lance.

"Bring them all in!" roared Morgan.

Lance barely heard the order, but he could see the engineer plainly, and guessed what he was shouting. The cord snapped, and the lantern vanished. He floundered through the snow, holding by the columns, and warned Crooks and Tooter. The wheelhouse door was closed.

Then Wings of Gold touched the snow. Morgan had expected it to sink into it deck deep. She did nothing of the kind. For an instant her plates seemed to shiver, though the screws had ceased to spin. Then she larched, and as her nose bored deep the snow rushed over her like two white billows.

"By Jove, she's moving!" screamed Tooter. "She's slipping!"

"Lift her, Teddy! Lift her!" cried Fordham, in terror. "We'll be over!"

But the weight was too much. Twin surges of snow raced past the wheelhouse. The screw shrieked on the wind, but they could not raise her. Morgan shook his head. Her downward speed increased. Like a great sledge over snowy slopes, faster and faster she went, until brains began to swim. It could not last. With white faces and haggard eyes they waited for the crash, or for her to capsize, and to tear away her uprights like rotten sticks.

The screws, though unable to draw her clear, managed to keep her on a fairly even keel. Her velocity was that of an express train. Jackson and Tooter were almost paralysed with dread. The professor, his bristly hair erect, and his eyes round and glazed, clung to the chair. Lance and Maurice were calm, but ashen grey. With his one eye unnaturally bright and fixed, Crooks pulled at his pipe, un-

moved and immovable, and Morgan stuck to the levers, game to the last.

Where would the terrible ride end, and how would it end? They seemed to be careering headlong into some eternal and infinite space, into a bottomless pit. The snow, shouldered up on either hand, acted slightly as a brake as it went billowing and surging past.

Still the last, awful crash was delayed. Fear gave place to a sort of numb curiosity. They must be flying down one of the snow-clad slopes towards the ice. Then the professor blew his nose loudly. The action was so extraordinary and out of place that Mr. Crooks brought his eye from a long survey of nothing to bear upon Von Haegel. The others turned and looked at the professor.

Then the vessel staggered. The floor was no longer slanting forward. It became level with a jerk that almost threw Lance and Maurice from their feet, and Morgan bit his tongue. There was blood on the engineer's lips. He dashed it away with the back of his hand.

"We're dropping—plump!" he shouted.

"Yes," he said dazedly.

He did not understand, but Morgan did. The great glissade had ended. Wings of Gold had been flung over the edge of an abyss. Morgan blinked to clear his eyes, so that he could see the aeronef; and then flung open the valve throttles, to give the suspensory screws every ounce of their power.

She fell too fast, borne down by the weight of the snow.

"Look!" cried somebody. "There's the moon!"

Morgan's face hardened, and every muscle in his body tightened. At her present rate of descent, the aeronef would be shattered when it struck. If he could only shake her free of the burden that was dragging her down! He knew how to accomplish this, but the risk was appalling. The position was desperate. He felt sure the ice was below, and that the giant hummocks, hard as steel and spiked, were uncovered by the snow.

"Catch hold of her rails!" he said quickly and hoarsely.

"Lie down to it, and wedge yourself fast. It's touch and go with us. I'm going to up-end her, by thunder, and shake the snow out of her! If I can't do it, we're dead men!"

"No, no!" screamed Jackson.

"Hold him down, sir. He's about mad with fright. Pin him down, Crooks! You're as tough as the best of us."

"Why not?" growled Crooks, shooting out his arm, and seizing the struggling Jackson.

Fordham pushed back Von Haegel's chair, and pushed the professor into it. Their hearts almost ceased to beat. Morgan's actions were terribly slow and methodical. His set face and blood-stained mouth made him look strangely like a corpse.

They heard the roar of the fore screw. The engineer's hand was not quite steady. He shut off two of the aft suspensory screws, and then two more, little by little. The aeronef sagged back.

"Now!"

The dome of the wheelhouse dropped. It became a wall, to which men clung. There was a rushing, scraping sound, and a crash of falling furniture. Morgan seemed a kind of human fly, his feet where his head should have been. The great driving screw was powerful enough almost in itself to support the aeronef. Another pull set the tail screw going.

Beads of sweat trickled from Morgan's face over his ears and neck. She was going up—he felt that—and she was clear of the snow. Could he right her?

His nerves were wonderful, his head was clear, his hands were steady again. With one leg twisted round the wheel, he slowed down the fore screw and the two forward suspensory screws, setting the aft ones running once more. Then the staring, dumbfounded men noticed a change. Morgan no longer performed as a human fly. The aeronef felt the weight. The wheel became erect again, and they heard the engineer's voice, even and unruffled, but slightly strained.

"Crooks!" he said. "By thunder, I'd not say 'No' to a brandy-and-soda!"

"Why not?" answered Mr. Crooks. "Brandy was what you deserves, and, therefore, why not?"

Crooks opened the door and stalked out. Little Jackson began to cry like a baby. With another quick glance at the aeronef, Morgan followed Crooks out. The night was clear and mild. A bright moon swung above, circled by four wide golden rings. Stars of vivid magnitude burned in the grey sky.

But Morgan did not look up. He leant forward, to find how near the terrible hummocks were. A cry of astonishment broke from his lips:

"The sea—the sea!"

And behind him were the nameless peaks. He looked ahead. The peaks were there also. To the right and the left still peaks, towering and immense.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 213.

A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT THURSDAY: "THE HERO OF ST. JIM'S!"

Crooks Takes a Load off Morgan's Mind—The Ichthyosaurus.

The engineer's first glance had deceived him. It was not the sea, but a vast land-locked mass of water, shimmering under the white moon. They were too brain-weary and shaken to look just then. Crooks, the man of iron, stumped up the ladder, whistling sadly, with the brandy-and-soda. He informed the engineer that he had nearly bust the place. He was very gentle with Jackson, who had been terrified almost out of his wits. Crooks took him to bed.

"By thunder!" said Morgan. "That chap hasn't got any more nerves than a locomotive!"

"What about yourself, Teddy?" asked Lance. "You pulled us through grandly."

"Ach, wonderful—wonderful!" panted Von Haegel, who was as pale as death. "I could not again go through such a time. Ach, it was most dreadful! Dear lads, mine head all swim round and round!"

"Try some brandy," said Maurice.

Von Haegel's teeth chattered so much that he could not drink. It was marvellous that they had lived through such a brain-shattering journey. He lay back, limp and panting. Poor Tooter was almost prostrated. He could only sit and shake. Fordham, too, was nervous and shaking. Lance, with his gentle disposition, though lighter of build than his friend, had come out of the ordeal splendidly. Morgan advised them to go to bed. He was full of the aeronef, and could chatter about nothing else. What other vessel built by human hands, and devised by human brains, could have come scatheless through such an ordeal?

They took his advice, because they could not help it. Endurance has its limits, and they had reached it.

Lance remained above, striving bravely to hold up. He fell asleep in the professor's chair. The lean form of Mr. Crooks glided through the darkness, and Morgan saw his eye gleaming through the doorway.

"Not in bed, Crooks?"

The cook snorted.

"That was a hinsult, Teddy. Why not?" he growled.

"We was men, and they was children. Why not?"

Crooks put out his big paw, and the engineer shook it.

"By thunder!" said Morgan. "You're a full-sized man, and that's a fact!"

Mr. Crooks turned his eye kindly on the sleeping figure of Lance.

"That was a good lad," he remarked. "I was thinkin', Teddy. Why not? This 'ere was a bad voyage, and we was short-handed. We was growed-up men, you and me. They was more tender, and not able to stand it. Candles that burn at both ends was soon out. And why? It was too much. We must look arter 'em, Teddy. Show me how to work her. Why not? Then you goes to bed till I wakes yer?"

Again Morgan gripped the lean cook's hand. In whispers he explained what had to be done. Crooks needed little or no teaching. Morgan soon discovered that the cook had little to learn.

"By thunder!" he said. "Why do you bottle yourself up so? You seem to know about as much of the thing as I do!"

Mr. Crooks tapped his nose and winked his glowing eye.

"Why not?" he said, dragging up his thunderous voice.

"I have heerd niggers tell that monkeys never talk, 'cos if they did we'd make them work. My forefathers and five-mothers came over with William the Corneurer. Why not? My five mothers did his washin', which was one pair of tin socks per month!" Then he grinned. "Teddy, we was men, so keep your mug closed; they was only kids. If we is to get back, me an' you must do it."

"You're mighty conceited," said Morgan, smiling. "Well, take your spell, old chap. By thunder! Just give me three hours, and I'll be as fit as a fiddle!"

Morgan's heart felt much lighter as he gave the cook's bony shoulder a hearty slap and said "Good-night!" He thought well of Crooks, and felt secure in leaving the aeronef in his keeping. A man like that was more valuable than a million goldmines. Teddy's one dread was that he might break down or have an accident. It was a splendid thing to have such a man, and had Crooks known what the engineer was thinking of him as he threw himself upon his bed, Crooks might possibly have blushed.

The lean cook was as kind and as thoughtful as he was strong. He wrapped a warm rug round Lance, and took a survey of the suspensory screws. They sang persistently and monotonously. Anyone except Crooks would have felt lonely. The cook did not.

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"THE JAPE AGAINST THE FIFTH!"

Is the Title of the Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. appearing in this week's "MACNET" Library. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.

"It was a grand night," he thought, "but it was hottish. First there was snow and then there was tropics. Why not? It was warm, and it was light. Why waste more light. Why not?"

Crooks switched off the electric lamps except those of the wheelhouse. He could see better without them. He was thirsty, but the soda-syphon was empty, and he scorned the brandy. The tanks had been rammed with snow, and, making sure that all was snug, the cook hurried below for some water.

At the bottom of the steps he halted. Safe as everything seemed, it was not right to leave the deck. He darted back again and seized a pail and a rope. Then he gently sank the aeronef to within six yards of the lake and flung the pail over.

He drew it up, and lifted some of the water in his hand to his lips. It was salt and bitter. Crooks spat it out disgusted. It was warm, too, and the flavour was abominable.

"It was pizen!" growled the cook. "Pah! Ugh! Why not? It was rotten!"

His mouth burned. He looked into the pail, and staggered. Something luminous was floating about in it. Crooks did not care to examine further. He emptied the bucket over the side, and in doing so let it fall. Just then a slight breeze fanned his cheek. As the bucket sank, something rose among the ripples. Crooks bent his eye downwards curiously.

"Why not?" he growled.

Two heart-shaped, pink objects, each as long as his leg, and wider by far than the full length of one of his long arms, rose above the water. They were followed by what appeared to be a half circle of black, quite the size of a waggon-wheel cut in half. The pink object acted as sails. The queer thing began to leave the water.

It was a monstrous ammonite, but Crooks did not know it. And the true ammonite had been extinct for years.

"That was a codder," he muttered. "Why not? All things was codders 'ere."

Crooks watched the flotilla glide away before the breeze, and thought—

"Why not?"

Nothing could astonish this extraordinary man, nothing could excite him, and nothing could frighten him.

Had he not been terror-proof he would have shrunk with dread a few minutes later.

He suddenly noticed that the space between water and aeronef had lessened, and was lessening. Crooks did not hurry. The descent was too slow to cause any alarm. He propped the rifle against the rail, and rammed down the tobacco in the pipe. The pipe was clogged. Crooks scooped the tobacco out with his knife and refilled and relighted.

The aeronef and the water were not five yards apart. Crooks went to the levers. Even the phlegmatic chief jumped at the sudden shock, and glanced over his shoulder. He heard the roar of water that had been lashed high enough to lick the vessel's keel. The drops beat against the glass. Then there was a ghastly hissing sound that made him leap out.

Lance shook himself clear of the rug, awoke and stared round with startled eyes.

"It was a submerterranean persplosion! Why not?" growled Crooks.

Crooks meant a submarine explosion. The water below was seething and frothing. The aeronef had risen quite fifty feet. The cook dropped the barrel of the rifle, and felt the hard cartridge with his thumb. A few salt drops splashed cold against his face.

"That was a whale," he grunted.

He fixed his brilliant eye on a conical ebony mass that had suddenly risen into view. Around it the water boiled, just as it was boiling below him.

"My word!" said the cook. "Was them electric lights? Why not?"

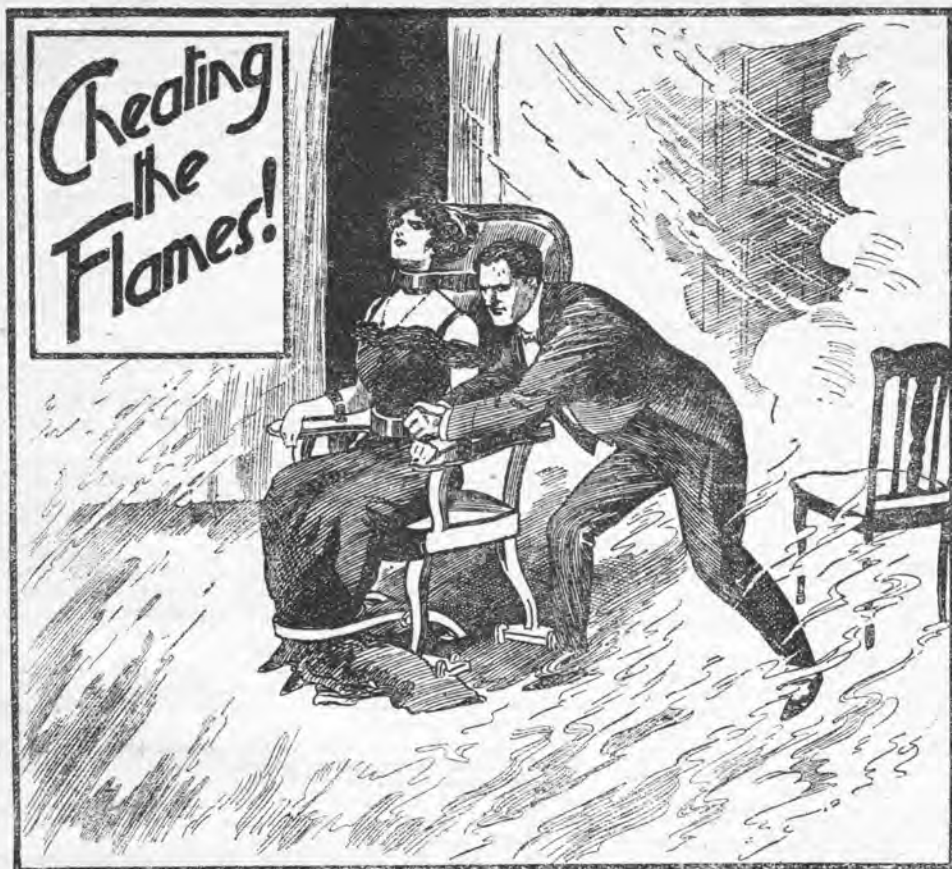
S-s-s-s! Two great, green eyes, bigger than his head, shone like a lamp. Crooks glared, and rubbed his great nose against the barrel of the rifle. The beast—the monster—headed towards him at lightning speed. Like luminous mountains, the waves rocked and rolled behind him.

"It was a hundred foot long, why not?" growled the cook. Then he almost dropped the rifle. The tossing water split asunder beneath the aeronef. Another monster, larger and more terrible, emerged.

Its great ivory-lined jaws opened as if to swallow the aeronef.

"Good heavens!" gasped the voice of Lance. "The ichtyosaurus!"

(This grand serial story will be continued in next week's issue of "The Gem" Library. Order now. Price 1d.)



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DOLORES—
His Pretty Lady
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**"THE
STOLEN
BIPLANE!"**

CHAPTER 1.

Dolores Finds Herself in a Tight Corner.

MISS KATHLEEN O'BRIEN stepped down from the imposing entrance of the Hotel Cyril, in the Strand, and entered the electric brougham which was waiting by the kerb.

Frank Kingston's fiancée was bound for Portman Square, for that evening Lady Thirlmere was holding a brilliant reception. Dolores, although she was a stranger to both Sir Guy Thirlmere and his wife, had been invited among dozens of other well-known society people.

Frank Kingston would have escorted her, only, unfortunately, he was out of London, and would not return until later on in the evening.

"Never mind," Dolores told herself, "Frank will turn up long before the evening's over, so I sha'n't find it necessary to come home alone. It's a pity Mrs. Benson can't be there; I know her better than anyone else who's asked to the reception."

The thought that everybody at the great house to which she was being rapidly driven were mostly strangers did not worry Dolores in the least. Kingston would arrive little more than a couple of hours late. The great detective had just completed a case at Bristol, and was even then on his way to London.

Dolores looked out of the window at the passing traffic interestedly. The night was quite clear, and the brilliant lights of the Strand seemed more glaring than usual. And suddenly, in one of the brightest spots, and while the brougham was held up for some traffic, a man calmly opened the side door and stepped in. He was a tall man, in evening-dress and opera-hat.

The whole thing happened in less than five seconds, before Dolores, quick-witted as she was, realised what was occurring. In one movement the man had closed the door, and in another he pressed a soft pad to the girl's nose and mouth. The drug with which it was impregnated acted immediately, and without even a struggle Dolores sank back unconscious.

A grim smile spread over the man's sallow features. "That's the way to do the trick, my dear Miss O'Brien!" he murmured. "By Jove, it couldn't have passed off better!"

He then put his lips to the speaking-tube, and gave some instructions to the driver.

"I am afraid Miss O'Brien didn't give her chauffeur a very searching look," he murmured. "Had she done so she would have seen that Crawford, her own man, had been substituted for another."

Mr. Jimmy Bramstone lay back looking mockingly at the beautiful face of his captive. Her eyes were closed, and her face just a little pale.

"She's a lovely girl, and no mistake!" thought the man. "Gad, but it's a good thing Kingston isn't in London just now! He's a jolly smart chap, and if he'd been going to this reception, we shouldn't have been able to do this trick."

Jimmy Bramstone was one of the sharpest swell mobsmen in England, but he knew, just the same as thousands of other criminals knew, that Frank Kingston was one too much for him. Consequently, he always kept out of the great detective's path. But in the present instance he thought Kingston was in Bristol, as did nearly everyone else. But Dolores had received a wire from her fiancée saying that he would be at the reception some time during the evening.

The electric brougham quickened its pace now, and after a short run came to a standstill in a quiet street. The chauffeur hopped from his seat, and opened a pair of high gates; then he drove the vehicle in and up a short, half circular drive. So when Dolores was lifted out and taken into the house, no one from the street could possibly see what was occurring.

She recovered her senses slightly, and knew that she was being carried upstairs. Then, as she entered a brilliantly-lighted apartment, consciousness returned in full. The key of the lock sounded as she opened her eyes, and she saw that she was being held upright by Bramstone.

"What is this?" she inquired, looking round her amazedly. "Where am I? I thought—"

"What you thought doesn't matter in the least," said the scoundrel, with a grim smile. "You're in my power at the present moment, and until I choose to let you escape you will remain a prisoner."

Dolores looked round her quickly.

"You scoundrel!" she cried. "What is the meaning of it? Why have you brought me here? I am not defenceless, and I will not hesitate to shoot."

As she had been speaking she backed away, and in a flash produced a tiny silver-plated Derringer revolver. But before

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE HERO OF ST. JIM'S!"

she could even point it at Bramstone her arm was roughly seized and the little weapon, snatched away.

"Quick, Jim," exclaimed a woman's voice—a soft, purring voice—"put her in the chair! It will be the safest!"

Dolores had no chance to see who the new-comer was, for she was suddenly seized and forced into a big leather-upholstered chair. And then a startling thing happened. The very instant she had seated herself two thick steel bands shot out from the arms of the chair. Simultaneously two other actions took place—a band circling her feet and one claspings itself across her throat.

It almost seemed as though the chair were human, for it slipped its manacles around Dolores silently, and with an accuracy that was remarkable. The brave girl found herself as securely held a prisoner as though in a vice, and it was even impossible for her to struggle. Yet, strange enough, she was not uncomfortable.

"There, Miss O'Brien, I think you will be harmless now!" murmured the purring voice; and Dolores found herself looking into the eyes of a woman about her own height and build. But her face, although beautiful, was not of the same type of pure beauty as Dolores'. Her lips were thin and her eyes cruel.

She was Jimmy Bramstone's wife. The pair were responsible for many daring and audacious jewel robberies, and the principal mover in each had been the woman—Tiger Jess, as she was called by her intimate friends.

"What are you going to do with me?" asked Dolores defiantly.

"Nothing. We are not going to harm a hair of your head," said the man. "But you can give up the idea of attending Lady Thirlmere's reception."

He turned and looked at his wife.

"Quick, Jess!" he exclaimed. "There's no time to lose, you know! Get those things ready!"

A minute later Tiger Jess was seated before a little table, a complete set of make-up materials before her. Frank Kingston's fiancée watched fearlessly, as with an experienced hand the woman disguised herself until she was the very counterpart of the captive. At the end of fifteen minutes she rose to her feet and surveyed herself in a long mirror. Her dark evening-dress was very similar to the one Dolores was wearing, and her hair the same colour.

"I think I shall do now, eh, Jim?" she inquired.

"Splendid!" answered Bramstone admiringly. "By Jove, Jess, I don't believe Kingston himself could tell the difference!" A smile played about his lips. "But Kingston won't be there," he went on easily. "Happily for us he's the other side of England now."

"What are you going to do, I repeat?" said Dolores suddenly.

"Well, if you very particularly wish to know," replied the scoundrel, lighting a cigarette, "I'll tell you. Lady Thirlmere is at present the possessor of some very valuable jewels, and it is our intention to appropriate them for ourselves. We have kidnapped you because you are a comparative stranger to the Thirlmères, and therefore my dear wife runs practically no risk."

"But suppose she is discovered?" asked Dolores.

"Then, my dear Miss O'Brien, I'm afraid it will go hard with you," sneered Bramstone. "I should see that Jess escaped, and afterwards you would have the greatest difficulty in proving your innocence."

Bramstone turned away with a chuckle, and Dolores was glad he did so, for otherwise he might possibly have seen the gleam of hope which entered the brave prisoner's eyes.

"He doesn't know that Frank's going to be there," she told herself again and again. "They both think that he is still at Bristol. But he's not. He's on his way to London, and when he arrives at the reception and sees my double—"

Dolores smiled confidently. She knew, better than anybody else, that Kingston would not be deceived for a single second.

A few minutes later the front door slammed heavily, and the precious pair had departed to carry out their villainous scheme.

Dolores was alone, helpless!

CHAPTER 2.

Kingston Turns the Tables.

"HALLO, sir! Jolly glad to see you back!"

"Yes, Tim. I've been away longer than I expected," replied Frank Kingston, as he walked sharply into his consulting-room, at No. 100, Charing Cross, having just arrived from Bristol in his huge Rolls-Royce landaulette. "Is everything ready?"

"Every blessed thing, sir!" replied Tim Curtis smartly.

"Good! Come on, young 'un, you can help me!"

A few moments later the celebrated detective was preparing himself for going to Lady Thirlmere's. There had been

a little delay on the road, and consequently Kingston had none too much time to spare.

In a very short while he was attired with his usual immaculate care, and looked, more than ever, a careless, leisurely man about town. Kingston usually bore the appearance of being a dandy; but this was merely his way. A sharper-witted, stronger-willed, and brisker detective did not exist. Even Carson Gray, the famous private inquiry agent, voluntarily took second place beside his great friend and rival.

Kingston walked with that seemingly leisurely but nevertheless quick gait to the waiting Rolls-Royce without. A minute later he was on his way to Portman Square.

The journey was only a short one, and soon after he was gazing searchingly through the crowd of well-dressed men and women at the reception, trying to locate Dolores.

Suddenly a smile appeared upon his face, and he moved quickly over to where Tiger Jess stood, talking animatedly with an old Army officer. But Kingston did not stop; he walked right past them, and found himself in a deserted corridor. His face had not changed an atom, but still wore that immobile and careless expression.

But his mind was by no means so much at ease.

"That woman is not Dolores," he told himself anxiously. "She is remarkably cleverly disguised, but I saw in one glance that she is an impostor. Good heavens, what can have happened to my girl?" Kingston stroked his chin thoughtfully. "There must be some plot," he mused. "Dolores must have been kidnapped, and this woman has come in her place; that is the only explanation. How can I find out where Dolores is? I must know—I shall know!"

For a second a fierce light blazed in his calm eyes, then he walked thoughtfully back among the guests. Suddenly his eyes narrowed a trifle, and this time he walked straight from the room out into the hall.

"By Jove," he murmured, "I've got it!"

He had just met Jimmy Bramstone face to face, or nearly so. In the nick of time the detective had turned away and saved himself from being seen by the villain. Kingston had recognised him instantly.

"He's at the bottom of this affair," he told himself firmly. "That woman masquerading as Dolores is his wife. What have they done with her? By heavens, if they've harmed her in any way they shall pay dearly for it! But there's no means of finding out where Dolores is without running the risk of causing a great scene, and even then I might not get from them the address where they've left my girl a prisoner. For very spite they may refuse to tell. No, I must think of something else. By jingo, the very thing!"

Never had Kingston been so anxious as he was now. The scheme which had just flashed into his mind was by no means an original one; but it struck him that two could play at Tiger Jess's game.

"I must see the host," he thought quickly. "Before I do so, however, I had better disguise myself, so as not to run the risk of being recognised."

Kingston's disguise was a very simple one. He merely altered the expression of his face by a slight muscular effort, and in a moment he looked almost twice his real age. He could, if necessary, hold his features in this manner for a considerable period.

Five minutes later he was engaged in serious conversation with Sir Guy Thirlmere. The detective knew the baronet slightly, and the pair, after a short talk, quitted the ante-room. Sir Guy was about forty-five, and a popular member of society. He entered into Kingston's scheme with enthusiasm.

For the detective had realised at once that Bramstone and his wife were there bent on robbery.

"Mr. Hassley, I believe?" inquired Kingston, suddenly confronting Bramstone.

"That is my name, sir," replied the swell mobman calmly—he was using the assumed name of the Hon. Rupert Hassley. "I am afraid you have the advantage."

"My name is Somers. I hear you are interested in Eastern coins," went on Kingston imperturbably. "Our host has just informed me that collecting coins is a great hobby of yours."

Jimmy Bramstone flicked the ash from his cigarette.

"That's so," he replied truthfully, for he had indeed made some such statement to the host by way of conversation. "Are you interested in the same game?"

"Very much so."

"Well, I expect you know heaps more than I do," said Bramstone, edging out of his statement. "I only spoke in a general way, you know."

But Kingston had attained his object; he had introduced himself to the jewel-thief without the man having a suspicion of the truth. For fully twenty minutes they remained in conversation, then Kingston thought it safe to make a suggestion—the suggestion he had been leading up to the whole time.

"You really ought to see these coins I've got," he said, with an air of enthusiasm which was absolutely convincing. "Just come along with me to one of the smaller rooms. I brought them along to show Sir Guy, and he's examining them now. I'm sure you'll be delighted with them."

"It's all right," thought the jewel-thief. "Jess won't be ready for me for another half-hour yet."

So he lit another cigarette, and sauntered off with Kingston. They found Sir Guy Thirlmere in a small room, bending over a collection of old coins. The thing was being done properly.

"I am really not much of a judge," laughed Bramstone, striding forward into the room.

Then he suddenly started, for the click of the lock as the key was turned sounded distinctly. He spun round, and stared at Kingston.

"Why have you locked the door?" he exclaimed.

"Because, my dear Mr. Jimmy Bramstone, I have no intention of letting you escape," drawled Frank Kingston languidly.

At the same moment he relaxed his features, and they assumed their normal condition. The villain started back.

"Frank Kingston!" he gasped.

"Quite so. You've made the slip of your life on this occasion, Bramstone," said the detective easily. "You're caught like—"

"Caught, am I?" snarled Bramstone, glaring round him. "By heavens, I'll—"

He concluded with a curse. His hand had flown round to his side-pocket for his revolver, but the weapon wasn't there. His pocket was empty, and Kingston held the revolver in his hand.

"I took the precaution of removing this little article as we were coming along," he explained quietly. "So much safer, you know. Now, Sir Guy, if you don't mind."

In a few moments Bramstone was bound hand and foot. He made a desperate struggle, but against Kingston his strength was utterly useless.

Kingston now rapidly disguised himself by his friend Professor Polgrave's special method, and, with startling rapidity, his features changed themselves until he was the very image of Bramstone. The villain looked on in amazement, and Sir Guy was no less surprised. A few finishing touches, and the transformation was complete.

Half an hour later Tiger Jess approached Kingston carelessly as he was strolling in the hall smoking a cigarette. No one was about there, but the woman looked up and down cautiously before speaking.

"I've got them, Jim!" she exclaimed quickly.

"Good!" murmured Kingston, in Bramstone's exact tones.

"I knew you wouldn't fail, Jess."

"We must go at once, as we arranged. You go out first, and get a taxi ready, then I can walk straight out and into it."

CHAPTER 3.

The Overtaken Lamp—Dolores' Deadly Peril.

THE taxi drew up sharply at the gates of the Bramstones' house, and the disguised Kingston and Tiger Jess alighted. Fortunately, the woman had instructed the taxi-cabby where to drive to.

"I've got the whole lot, my boy!" cried Tiger Jess triumphantly, a few minutes later when they were in the drawing-room, with the light of a high standard oil-lamp shedding its rays on a little pile of jewellery. "It was the easiest thing in the world. But we must clear out mighty quick, or else the police will be after us. You've got those tickets, I suppose?"

"Of course," replied Kingston promptly, although he did not know what she meant.

Jess's eyes suddenly dilated. She was looking straight at Kingston's left hand, and a look of puzzled amazement came into her face.

"The scar, Jim!" she cried. "It's gone! What—Good heavens! You're not Jim! You're—"

"Frank Kingston," put in the detective quickly, realising that it was useless carrying the thing any further. "The game's up, Mrs. Bramstone, so I must ask you to submit quietly. Your husband is now under arrest."

"Under arrest!" screamed Tiger Jess, flaring into a fury of rage and disappointment. Kingston had just dropped the last of the jewels into his pocket. "Jim copped! Then I'll have my revenge on you! You've done this for me, so I'll see that your precious Dolores is robbed of her lover the same as I'm robbed of my husband!"

And before Kingston could realise what the woman was doing she had whipped out a revolver and fired. Kingston jerked aside in the nick of time, and the bullet whizzed past his ear. Quick as thought he stepped forward, but Tiger Jess was quicker. She backed before him, to fire again.

Crash!

In a second the standard lamp, which had been immediately behind her, crashed to the floor, and in another a huge blaze shot up, caught some draperies on the wall, and flashed to the curtains. In less than half a minute the room was a seething mass of flame.

"The door!" cried Kingston, standing in the centre of the room scorched by the heat. "Open the door, and get out!"

"Get out?" cried the frenzied woman. "Not before I've finished you, you demon!"

She rushed to a corner of the room, heedless of the flames, and suddenly there was a click. The next moment Kingston felt the floor disappear beneath him, and he was precipitated into a dark void. Then he struck something hard, although he still kept his feet. He looked up, but the flooring which had hinged downwards was in its place again, evidently actuated by a strong spring.

"By Jove!" murmured Kingston to himself. "I certainly did not expect this. In ten minutes the house will be a furnace—and Dolores is somewhere upstairs!" He set his teeth hard. "I've got to do some quick work now—the quickest I've ever attempted!"

His pocket electric lamp was out, flashing round the confines of his prison. An ordinary man would have been an absolute prisoner, but the plaster wall on one side, although very strong, could not resist the terrific onslaughts which Kingston made upon it. He was desperate, terribly desperate, and cared nothing for bruises or scratches.

In three minutes he found himself in the cellar. Up the stairs he dashed, opened the door at the top, and then paused, choking. The fire had spread with lightning rapidity, and already the lower part of the house was well alight and choking with smoke and fumes.

"Heavens, if I should be too late!"

He rushed through a room which he took to be the kitchen, opened another door, and was in the hall. This was full of smoke, and scorchingly hot. The drawing-room was opposite, and from the door sparks and flames were bursting forth.

Sounds of shouting dimly reached his ears, but he bounded up the stairs five at a time. The landing was clearer, although here the smoke was as thick as a London fog. He paused irresolutely, for, being in a strange house, he did not know which way to turn.

"Dolores!" he roared. "Dolores!"

A faint answer reached him from the left, and almost immediately he was inside the room which Dolores had been taken into earlier in the evening. Then he gasped with real horror, for he saw quite plainly through the smoke, the terrible peril in which Dolores stood. The steel bands of the chair were claspings her so tightly that it was quite impossible for her to get free.

"Don't worry, Dolores," said Kingston encouragingly.

"I'll have the things off in less than no time."

"You can't, Frank; it's impossible!" cried Dolores.

"Look!"

The fire was creeping in from the next-door room, and the smoke belched in great volumes. Black and perspiring, Kingston, with all his tremendous strength, could not break those steel bands. They were as firm as a rock—immovable. Dolores' position was indeed awful. Another five minutes, and nothing could have saved her.

"You can't do it, Frank," she cried. "Leave me, and save yourself!"

"Leave you! By heavens, I'm going to get you out of this fix!"

He grasped the chair firmly, and then exerted every ounce of his abnormal strength. Suddenly there was a crash, and Dolores, chair and all, fell into Kingston's arms. He had wrenched the thing completely out of its setting, for it had been fastened to the floor.

Then, lifting the brave girl in his arms, still clasped in the firm embrace of the diabolical chair, he staggered to the door. His eyes were smarting, and his throat felt as though it were red-hot. Any other man would have fainted long since. But, with a step firm and steady, he descended the stairs. The next moment he was out in the open air, under the stars—safe!

Dolores would have met her death, but for the indomitable courage and abnormal strength which was characteristic of her famous fiancé. Frank Kingston had passed through the most exciting three hours of his life.

Tiger Jess had managed to stagger from the burning house, and was found in the garden, unconscious. She, together with her husband, is now serving a long sentence in penal servitude. Frank Kingston and Dolores were none the worse for their exciting adventure, but the great detective was never more thankful for his great strength; it had enabled him to save from certain death the girl he loved.

(Another Thrilling, Complete Story of Frank Kingston and Dolores next Thursday.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 213.

A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT THURSDAY:

"THE HERO OF ST. JIM'S!"

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



Next Thursday's Complete Story.

"THE HERO OF ST. JIM'S"

is the title of next week's splendid long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co., and my readers will be delighted to hear that it is one of Martin Clifford's very best stories. To tell you who the hero turns out to be would be giving the game away, but my girl readers will be specially interested to hear that Edith Glyn, the St. Jim's inventor's pretty sister, is concerned in the exciting events with which this splendid story teems. All keen Gemites would be well advised to order next week's GEM Library, containing

"THE HERO OF ST. JIM'S,"

well in advance.

Letters—An Interesting Proposition.

Here is a letter in which a Scotch reader moots a very interesting idea, upon which the opinion of all GEM readers is invited. I will let my Scotch chum's letter speak for itself.

"Muirkirk.

"Dear Editor,—Allow me a few moments to congratulate you on your interesting papers, 'The Magnet' and THE GEM. Don't you think it possible to have the first numbers republished—say number one up to a hundred? Could it not be possible now? You could easily obtain the old halfpenny numbers from some of your readers if you have not them. Or you could publish a complete volume of them and sell them at a price which would be able to pay you. Do publish this note in your 'Chat,' and you will be surprised at the number of readers—both boys and girls—who are of the same opinion. It was a sister of mine who gave me the idea, so you will be pleasing the girl readers. But as it is leap year, we ought to let them speak for themselves.

"From

"ONE OF YOUR MANY SCOTCH READERS."

What do my chums think of the idea, I wonder?

Back Numbers Offered and Wanted.

R. Duncley, of Main Street, Blenheim, New Zealand, is willing to pay any amount up to half-a-crown for Nos. 1 to 39 of the halfpenny issues of THE GEM Library.

C. H. Finch, of 34, Ramsbury Road, St. Albans, Herts, has the following numbers of THE GEM and "The Magnet" Libraries to dispose of cheap: "The Magnet" Library, Nos. 1 to 111; THE GEM Library, Nos. 1 to 48 (old series), and Nos. 1 to 111 (new series).

Can any reader oblige C. Hulett, of 20, Tennyson Road, Kettering, with the first number of "The Magnet" Library ("The Making of Harry Wharton.")?

W. Rose, of 23, Rock Road, Sittingbourne, Kent, is in need of Nos. 193 ("Tom Merry & Co.'s Downfall"), 200 ("The Raiding of the Rival School"), and 204 ("Captain D'Arcy") of THE GEM Library. Can any other reader oblige?

Will any reader who wishes to give away any halfpenny editions of THE GEM Library please write to H. Drury, 14, Park Avenue, Eccles.

R. W. Simpson, of 5, Lowden Road, Herne Hill, London, has a number of back numbers of THE GEM and "The Magnet" Libraries which he wishes to dispose of at half-price.

Can any reader oblige C. Francis, 108, Victoria Street, Cwmbran, Mon., with any halfpenny issues of THE GEM Library?

S. Woolfson, 235, Burdett Road, Limehouse, London, E., wishes to obtain back numbers of the halfpenny GEM and halfpenny "Magnet."

Replies in Brief.

Albert C. (Oldham).—The complete tales of Frank Kingston now running are proving immensely popular with the majority of GEM readers. The letter which Mark Linley received cannot possibly be construed into any reflection upon the education of the Lancashire people. Of course, they are at least as well educated in that county as in any other, while on the other hand, Lancashire—and every other county, too—contain a number of illiterate folk. I cannot promise a new serial on the lines you suggest. Yes, the characters you mention are still at St. Jim's. Thanks for cutting, which, as you say, may be helpful, to some fellow-reader.

Dorothy M. E. L. (Brighton).—The Christian name of both Figgins and Kerr is George.

H. B. and T. M. (South Australia).—Thanks for letter received. In sending on your friend's name—Miss I. Morgan—for the "Correspondence Exchange," you have forgotten to give her full address, the name of the town being omitted altogether. If you will send it in again correctly, I will have pleasure in inserting it in the "Exchange."

Correspondence Exchange.

Miss Dorothy and Miss Irene Baxter, ages eighteen and nineteen years respectively, of 33, Baldovan Terrace, Dundee, Scotland, would like to correspond with two boy readers whose ages are about twenty-one or twenty-two.

A. G. Wagg, of 60, Sandtoft Road, Charlton, S.E., wishes to correspond with a girl reader.

Miss Alice Kemp, 80, Hinton Road, Herne Hill, S.E., would like to correspond with a boy Gemite, aged eighteen to twenty.

W. Kipp, aged seventeen, of 58, Totterdown Street, Tooting, London, S.W., would like to correspond with a girl reader.

W. Mathieson, of Ashton Place, Meadowfoot, West Kilbridge, would like to correspond with a girl friend of 14 or 15 years of age.

F. Fidge, 15, and H. Fidge, 14, of 15, Cruden Street, St. Peter's Street, Islington, London, N., would like to correspond with two girl readers of the same ages.

Miss N. Smith, of 79, Leander Road, Brixton Hill, London, S.W., would like to correspond with a boy Gemite age about 15 years. She is dark, and ordinary looking.

W. Hardy, 18, would like to correspond with a reader of the same age interested in stamp collecting. Address, 65, Napier Road, Ponder's End, Enfield, Middlesex.

D. Eascott, Chapel House, Camborne, Cornwall, would like to correspond with a girl reader who lives in Surrey or Hampshire. Age 16.

G. Hawley, 128, Warham Street, Camberwell, London, S.E., would like to correspond with a girl chum about 16 years of age.

Miss B. Keillor, of 55, Kelvin Road, Highbury Park, London, N., would like to correspond with a boy or girl chum in the Colonies, age about 18-20.

William H. Badham, 41, Charnminster Road, Bournemouth, Hants, would like to correspond with some Gemites in the Colonies. Age 15.

George R. Wright, 122, Hankinson Road, Bournemouth, Hants, would like to exchange correspondence with a Gemite anywhere. Age 15.

H. Kneebone, 13, of Rosewarne Lane, Gwinear, near Hayle, would like to correspond with a reader about the same age.

G. Webster, of 235 Upper Parliament Street, Liverpool, would like to correspond with a girl reader, age 15-16.

THE EDITOR.

NOTE.—Readers should see Page iii. of the cover for a further list of names and addresses of those desiring correspondence.