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By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



Monty Lowther raised his silk hat in his most graceful manner. "Fraulein Erlen?" he inquired. The German girl looked at him. "That is my name," she said in English. (See Chapter 7.)

CHAPTER 1.

A Little Absent-minded.

"**H**A, ha, ha!"
Thus Monty Lowther of the Shell Form at St. Jim's.

There was a gasp from the other Shell fellows, and Mr. Linton, the Form-master, jumped. For the Shell were in their Form-room at second lesson, and the whole class were silent, and more or less attentive, while Mr. Linton was expounding to them the hidden mysteries of deponent verbs—those troublesome verbs which are passive in form and active in meaning.

Some of the Shell fellows felt inclined to yawn, and some felt inclined to doze. But they did not venture to do either under the sharp eyes of the Form-master. They did not feel inclined to laugh. There was nothing comic in deponent verbs. Deponent verbs were serious affairs—very serious indeed. But even if the Shell fellows had felt inclined to laugh, Mr. Linton's severe brow would have checked their risibility. The Form-room was not a place for merriment.

That sudden burst of laughter from Monty Lowther, therefore, dropped like a bombshell into the silence of the Form-room.

Lowther had been sitting very quiet, apparently listening to Mr. Linton with the most devoted attention. His youthful brow had been corrugated with thought. But as it happened, the humorist of the Shell was not thinking about the Latin grammar at all. Like the celebrated Dying Gladiator, his eyes were with his heart—and that was far away. While Mr. Linton's dry voice hummed on, Monty Lowther was following his own train of thought, and apparently he had quite forgotten that he was in the Form-room at all.

Mr. Linton jumped.

In the dull silence of the Form-room Monty Lowther's sudden outburst seemed to echo like a thunderclap.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Shell fellows stared at Lowther. Mr. Linton spun towards him, fixing his eyes upon the absent-minded junior with a basilisk glare.

Lowther turned crimson.

There was a hush—a dreadful hush—like the calm that precedes a tropical storm. Then Mr. Linton spoke.

"Lowther!"

"Yes, sir!" gasped Lowther.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Tom Merry, who sat beside

Next Wednesday:

"THE OUTSIDER'S CHOICE!" AND "A BID FOR A THRONE!"

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Lowther. "You've done it now, you ass! What the dickens—"

"What the deuce—" murmured Manners.

"Lowther! Kindly stand up!"

Monty Lowther stood up. All eyes in the Form were fixed upon him, and his face looked like a freshly-boiled beetroot. The unfortunate junior was fully conscious of the enormity of his offence. In the midst of the sacred stillness of the Form-room he had laughed—suddenly and loudly—interrupting the Form-master by that burst of ill-timed merriment. No wonder Mr. Linton's brow grew as black as a thunder-cloud, and his voice seemed to have a knife-like edge upon it as he addressed the culprit! Loquor, locutus, sum, and loqui were utterly forgotten in the horror of the moment.

"I think you laughed, Lowther."

"D-d-did I, sir?"

"You did?"

"I—I—I'm s-s-sorry, sir!" stammered Lowther.

"You have interrupted the lesson, Lowther, by this exhibition of ill-timed and unseemly merriment," said Mr. Linton, in a grinding voice. "May I venture to ask you to explain yourself?" Mr. Linton could be heavily sarcastic at times.

"Will you have the extreme goodness to point out to me the comic element in the Latin grammar, which has hitherto escaped my notice?"

Lowther did not reply. He wished fervently at that moment that the Form-room floor would open and swallow him up. But the solid planks of the floor showed no sign of obliging him in that way.

"I am waiting for your reply, Lowther. I should be glad to know in what respect a deponent verb appears to you in a comic light?"

"I—I—I—" stuttered Lowther.

"Perhaps you were not thinking of the lesson at all, Lowther?"

"Nunno, sir!"

"Indeed! Perhaps you were not thinking at all, and that ebullition of laughter was simply the sign of a vacant mind?" suggested the Form-master.

"Yes, sir—I—I mean, no, sir."

"You were thinking of some extraneous matter, then?"

"Ye-e-s, sir."

"And what was this important matter which occupied all your attention, to the exclusion of such smaller trifles as your lessons?" demanded Mr. Linton, still in the heavily sarcastic vein.

"I—I—it—I—I was thinking, sir—ahem!—"

"Well?"

"Of—of—of our—our play, sir."

"Of what?"

"Our p-p-play, sir!" gasped Lowther. "W-w-we are doing a play at the end of the term, sir, before breaking-up, and—and—I was thinking, sir—ahem!—"

"And you judge that the Form-room during lessons is a suitable place to think of the play you are arranging for the end of the term?"

"Nunno, sir!"

"Then why," demanded Mr. Linton, dropping the sarcastic vein, and speaking in a voice like the rumble of distant thunder—"why, Lowther, do you withdraw your attention from your lessons and concentrate it upon some absurd play-acting nonsense, and disturb the attention of your more dutiful Form-fellows by a sudden ebullition resembling that of a—a—a hyena, Lowther?"

Monty Lowther groaned inwardly. He could see that he was in for it. Certainly it was out of place to laugh suddenly and loudly in the Form-room. But he might have committed homicide there, to judge by Mr. Linton's expression.

"I—I—I—it flashed into my mind all of a sudden, sir," stammered Lowther. "I—I was thinking it out, sir, and—and I got the idea all of a sudden, sir. That's how it was, sir. I just forgot where I was."

"Certainly you appear to have forgotten yourself entirely, Lowther. I quite agree with you in that. I am sorry, Lowther, that such trifling matters as lessons should interfere

with your valuable thoughts on the subject of plays and play-acting. But I fear that I must impress upon your mind the fact that the Form-room is the place for work, and not for idle thoughts and disrespectful laughter. Come here, Lowther!"

Mr. Linton took a cane from his desk. Monty Lowther advanced reluctantly before the Form.

"Hold out your hand!"

Swish!

"Ow!"

"Now the other!"

Swish!

"Grooooooooh!"

"After lessons, Lowther, you will write out the sentence I must not be idle and ridiculous a hundred times!"

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"Now go back to your place!"

Monty Lowther groaned, and went back to his place. His hands were tingling and aching. Mr. Linton had laid on those cuts with terrific vim. The unfortunate junior was not likely to laugh again that morning. Mr. Linton laid down his cane, and the lesson was resumed. And for the rest of the morning Mr. Linton devoted special attention to Monty Lowther. He did not mean to give the junior a chance of allowing his thoughts to wander again. He dragged Lowther up and down through the Latin grammar, so to speak, till the unhappy victim's brain was dancing with all kinds of verbs and substantives and pronouns, and he began to feel that life was not worth living with a Form-master like the master of the Shell. Monty Lowther was really on the point of exhaustion when the hour of dismissal came at last, and he escaped.

CHAPTER 2.

A Stroke of Genius.

"YOU frabjous ass!"

"You howling duffer!"

Such were the sympathetic remarks of Tom Merry and Manners to their suffering chum when they came out of the Form-room.

Monty Lowther groaned. His hands were still aching, and his head was in a buzz. His feelings towards Mr. Linton were not amiable.

"What on earth did you cackle like that for?" demanded Tom Merry. "You might have known Linton would come down on you like a sack of coke."

"Ass!" growled Lowther. "I tell you I was thinking, and I forgot I was in the rotten Form-room, doing rotten Latin, with a rotter! But I don't care—I've got the idea."

"What idea?"

"For our comedy."

Tom Merry and Manners did not look unduly impressed. As a matter of fact, they were full of ideas themselves for that play.

The term was near its end at St. Jim's, and the Junior Dramatic Society in the School House intended to give a performance as a wind-up to the term—something out of the common—which was to "knock" all previous records.

Parents and relations, sisters and cousins and aunts, would be visiting St. Jim's in great numbers on that great day, and the "Co." meant to give something worthy of such an audience.

The Terrible Three were the prime movers in the enterprise, though Blake & Co. of Study No. 6 and Figgins & Co. of the New House were very keen indeed about it.

But the Terrible Three were not quite in agreement on the subject. Whether the great performance was to be a tragedy or a comedy was not yet settled, and there was considerable argument on the subject. As the Terrible Three's arguments generally proceeded on the lines of Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther all talking at once, a satisfactory solution had not been reached.

"It flashed into my mind," said Lowther, speaking eagerly, and forgetting the ache in his palms for a moment. Monty Lowther was devoted to amateur theatricals—indeed, he had once done a "turn" upon the histrionic boards, unknown to the school authorities, and had very nearly come to grief over it. "You see, our play is to be a comedy."

"Tragedy!" said Manners.

"I was thinking of a variety show," Tom Merry remarked.

"Of course, it's to be a comedy!" snapped Lowther.

"People don't want to be made to cry on a holiday occasion. And they don't want a series of ancient gags and chestnuts, Tom Merry. Of course, it must be a comedy; and, of course, we must have a good comic part in it. I've already selected the comedy."

"Like your check!"

"It's called 'Catching the Colonel,'" pursued Lowther, unheeding, "and, with some improvements by ourselves, it will be ripping. The part of the comic colonel can be made

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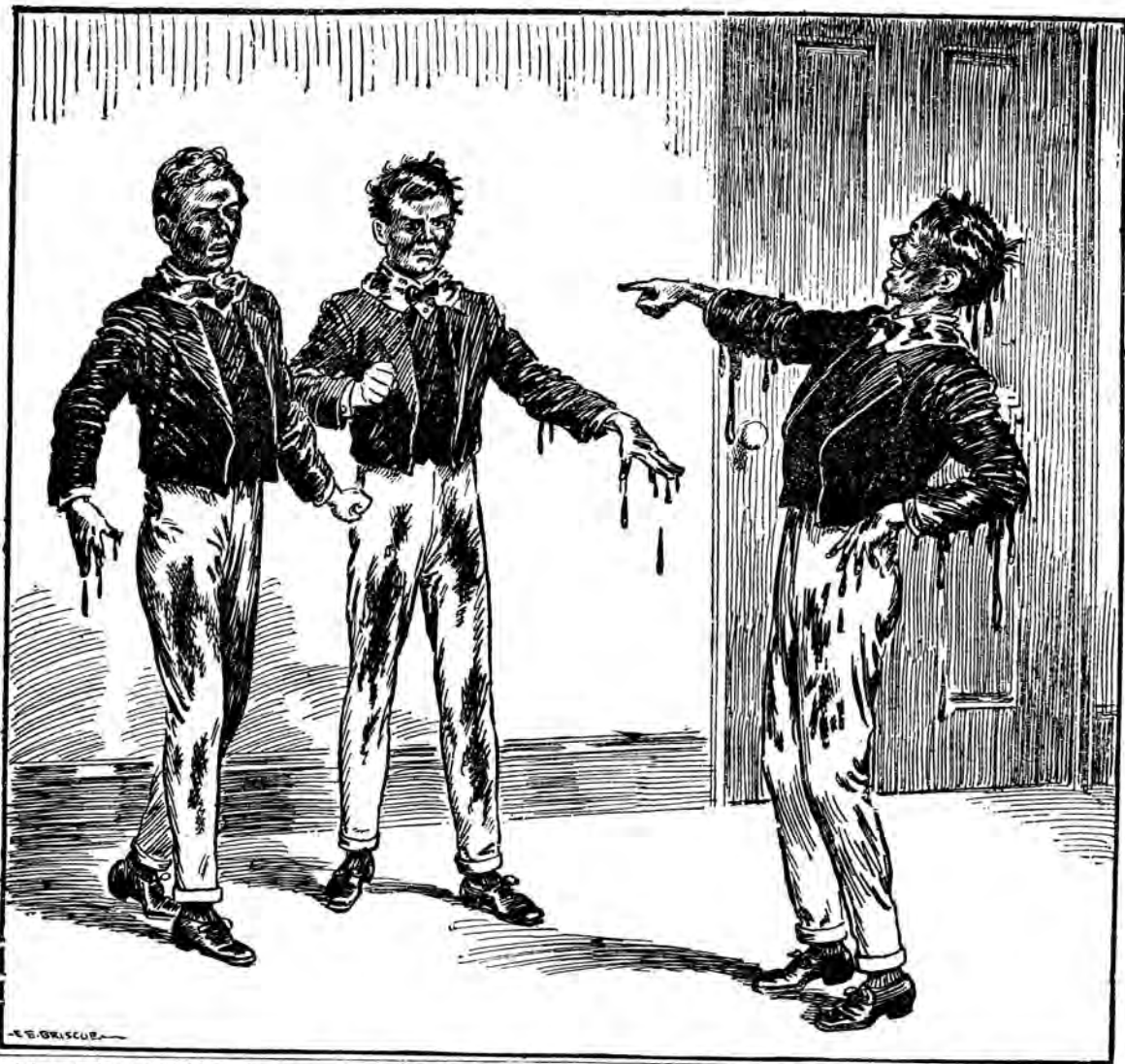
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A bear's hug would have been more welcome than Monty Lowther's to his two chums at that moment! Tom Merry and Manners tore themselves away, smothered with tar, and Lowther burst into a yell of laughter. (See Chapter 4.)

simply stunning in good hands—ahem! Of course, I take that part."

"Well, my hat!"

"Only the part, as it stands, is rather weak. I've been thinking hard over it for an idea of improving it—something to make it really go, you know. And all of a sudden, in the Form-room this morning, it flashed into my mind. It was so funny that I simply couldn't help giving a yelp. Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at now?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther. "The idea, you know. It's topping—simply topping! It will make the audience yell!"

"Well, we'll give it a hearing," said Tom Merry considerately. "If there's anything in it, we'll give you a chance. What's the wheeze?"

"You see, the comic part has got to be strengthened," explained Lowther. "I've thought of turning the comic colonel into a German, a fat old chap, with yellow whiskers and a bald head and broken English, complete. That would be funny enough to start with. But, of course, I want a model to study, to work up the part. And then it flashed into my mind—old Schneider."

"What!"

Herr Schneider was the German master at St. Jim's. Monty Lowther had often declared that a true artist could not afford to be a respecter of persons. He would have "taken off" his own grandfather on the amateur stage, if he could have got a laugh from the audience by doing so.

But that he should think of taking one of the masters at St. Jim's for a model for a comic part took his chum's breath away.

"Old Schneider, of course," said Lowther eagerly. "He was simply built for a comedy. The way he speaks English would make an owl howl. Then his way of poking his head forward, and blinking at you over his glasses, and rubbing his fat chin with his fat forefinger—why, that's worth a fortune to a comedian. And his socks, too—a big fat man, in pretty silk socks—think of that! And the way he wears his trousers turned up to show his socks. My dear chaps, he's a perfect gold-mine. I wonder it never struck me before. Of course, I don't mean to make up to impersonate him, or anything of that sort. That wouldn't be allowed. What I mean is, to study his language, and his mannerisms, and reproduce them in the part of the comic colonel. See?"

"You—you utter ass!" said Tom Merry. "And what will Schneider say when he sees you doing it?"

"He won't be here himself. Haven't you heard that his niece is coming from Germany, Fraulein something or other, to fetch him away two or three days before breaking-up? Though I don't suppose he would recognise his manners and customs on the stage played by me. Men never know how funny they are, you know. That's the beauty of it. Practically all grown-up men are funny in one way or another. Even the Head—"

"You'd better let the Head alone, you chump!"

"I know; but he is funny, too. The way he coughs when he's going to make a speech is killing. Linton, too, in his

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"THE OUTSIDER'S CHOICE!"

sarcastic vein is simply comic; but he doesn't know it. Lathom, the Fourth Form-master, is a scream—a regular scream. He doesn't know it. People get funnier and funnier as they grow up, you know, and they never become aware of it. I've seen the funniest merchant laughing at a funny part in a play, and never dreaming that they were funny themselves. But Herr Schneider, he's the cream—the giddy cream. He's worth a fortune as a model."

"But—"

"I'm going to take up German enthusiastically, and talk to him like a Dutch uncle," said Lowther. "In a week I'll be able to reproduce all his ways—all his manners—all his customs. And when I bring them out in our comedy, it will set the house in a roar."

"You seem to have settled that it's going to be a comedy," grunted Manners.

"Must be!" said Lowther decidedly. "Look here, you fellows know that I know more about the stage than you do. Didn't I nearly get sacked once for running away and joining a travelling company? Haven't I got friends in the theatrical profession? Can't I act your heads off?"

"In the comic line, perhaps," said Manners. "But my Hamlet—"

"Blow your Hamlet! Fellows are fed-up on Hamlet. Besides, we can't play Hamlet. Every chap would want to be Hamlet, and we should never agree about it."

"Something in that," said Tom Merry, laughing. "But this scheme of imitating old Schneider is a little too thick. If Schneider didn't recognise it, the other masters would."

"They couldn't say anything. A comedian has a right to turn up his trousers and wear flaming socks if he likes. He can talk in broken English if he wants to. Of course, old Schneider's name won't be used. The comic colonel's name will be something in German—Colonel Sauerkraut, or Colonel Kase, or some nice name like that. And as Schneider won't be here, there won't be anybody's feelings to be hurt. I tell you this idea is the catch of the season. Now, that's settled. I ask you chaps as a personal favour to back me up, and I'll answer for the results."

"Well, if you put it like that," said Manners, relenting. "I do. I tell you it's a topper. A regular topper. I'm going to make a regular study of Schneider."

"Don't let him catch you doing it!" grinned Tom Merry.

"Trust me for that! Now, is it a go?"

"Well, yes, you mean to have your way, anyhow, and we've argued about it long enough," said Tom Merry.

"Good egg!"

"Dry up. Here comes Schneider," said Manners.

The Fourth Form, who had been doing German, had just been dismissed. Herr Schneider came out into the Form-room passage.

He was a fat gentleman, with a round, fat face, generally good-humoured in expression. In class he was a tartar, having a most uncomfortable sense of duty which made him insist upon driving the most terrible, irregular verbs into the thickest heads, calling in the aid of a "pointer" when necessary. Herr Schneider was not popular; but he was not really a bad sort in his way. The prospect of breaking up for the vacation, and going on a holiday in his beloved Rhineland, made the German master unusually amiable just now, and he nodded kindly to the Terrible Three in the passage, and paused to speak to them.

"I hear tat you shall give ein play mit yourselves before preaking-up," he remarked. "I am sorry tat it is not tat I shall stay to see him mit meinsel."

"We are very sorry you won't be here, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Very sorry, indeed, sir," said Monty Lowther, whose eyes were "taking stock" of the German master already in a professional manner for future use. Herr Schneider, like many fat gentlemen, had very small feet for his size, and he was proud of them. He wore the nattiest shoes, and turned up his trousers, always displaying an inch or two of silk socks of the finest quality and most gorgeous colours. He wore spectacles perched on a fat nose, and had a way of peering over them, and bending his head forward at the same time, which reminded one of a tortoise putting out its head. Monty Lowther, who was quite carried away when the artist in him was uppermost, was already jerking forward his head in the same manner quite unconsciously. Tom Merry and Manners found it difficult to keep grave.

"Ja, ja, I shall be sorry," said Herr Schneider. "But meine nichte Marichen—my little niece Marie—she shall come to take me away to Chermany, and it is not tat I shall be here after. So I shall not see him. But I vish you to greatest of success."

"You are very kind, sir," said Tom Merry. "When does Miss Schneider come?"

The German master smiled. The expression on his fat face showed that he was very fond of his niece, and the juniors liked him the better for it.

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"It is not tat meine niece is name Schneider," he explained. "Marichen is to daughter of mein sister. Fraulein Erlen is to name—Marie Erlen. She shall come here dis veek, and to Head have ferry kindly say tat he is bleased if mein niece she shall stay few days at te school mit me. Das war sehr goot. It will be a great bleasure for me."

And the German master nodded kindly and walked on.

"Never knew he had a niece," said Manners. "I wonder what she's like?"

"Twenty stone, most likely," said Monty Lowther. "If she takes after her uncle, anyway. It's a pretty name, though; and the German diminutive is very pretty—Marichen—Little Marie. But never mind her. Did you spot him? I was taking him down all the time. Look here!"

Lowther glanced round to make sure that Herr Schneider had gone, and then went on:

"Mein poys! Ich bin ferry sorry tat it is not tat I shall stay mit meinsel and yourself for to see tat te play mit yourselves and ourselves."

He reproduced Herr Schneider's beautiful accent exactly, poking forward his head, and peering in the same way, and the Shell fellows roared.

"Bai Jove! What's the little joke, deah boys?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form as he joined them.

"We've settled about the play," explained Lowther.

Arthur Augustus adjusted his eyeglass, and regarded Monty Lowther severely.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Well, what is it?" demanded Blake of the Fourth. "If it's 'Hamlet,' you can put me down as the Prince of Denmark. That's my little bit."

"Tain't 'Hamlet'!"

"Well, if you want to make it 'Othello,' I don't mind. I can make us as a giddy Moor rippingly!" said Blake, in a thoughtful way.

"Tain't 'Othello'!" snapped Lowther. "'Tain't Shakespeare at all."

"Well, I don't object to a modern play," said Blake, in the most accommodating manner. "I agree to anything but Bernard Shaw. Must have something a bit more serious than the front page of 'Chuckles.' Put me in the title-role, and I'm your man!"

"It's a comedy—"

"I should have pweferred a twagedy," said Arthur Augustus, with a shake of the head. "I am wathah a dab at twagic parts!"

"Well, if we had a tragedy, you'd turn it into a comedy, so it would come to the same thing!" Lowther remarked.

"It's a comedy called 'Catching the Colonel'!"

"And I'm the Colonel?" asked Blake.

"No; I'm the Colonel!" said Blake.

"Don't be funny!"

"That's just what I'm going to be—as the Colonel!" grinned Lowther. "Colonel Potsdam, that's the name, and I'm the man!"

"Look here—"

"Yaas, wathah; look heah—"

"No time," said Lowther. "I've got to write up my part!"

And Monty Lowther sauntered away, chuckling gleefully over his great idea. D'Arcy and Blake looked wrathful.

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"Yaas; look heah, Tom Mewwy—"

Tom Merry seemed to be afflicted with sudden deafness. He strolled out of the School House whistling.

"Look here, Manners—"

"Look heah, Mannahs—"

"Coming, Tom!" said Manners, and he followed Tom Merry.

Blake and D'Arcy looked at one another.

"The awful nerve!" exclaimed Blake indignantly. "Those Shell bouders have too much cheek! The nerve of it!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy, with equal indignation. "I quite agree with you, deah boy. It is weally altogethah too thick!"

"Of course, I must play the title-role."

"Eh? You mean I must play the title-wole, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus gently but firmly.

"Oh, don't you be an ass!" said Blake crossly.

"Then don't you be a fathead!" said D'Arcy warmly.

"It stands to reason—Weally, Blake, I wish you would not walk away when I am talkin' to you—"

But Jack Blake had walked away, and there was an end of it.

ANSWERS

CHAPTER 3.

Very Keen on German.

MONTY LOWTHER believed in striking the iron while it was hot.

That afternoon the Shell had German, and German was regarded, as a rule, in the light of a painful affliction. But to Lowther, at least, that lesson was a joy. While Herr Schneider was labouring to drive German verbs into English heads which did not seem at all receptive, Monty Lowther was studying him, from an artistic point of view. He noted every little mannerism, he picked up every shade of the Herr's beautiful accent, he imitated the peculiar way in which the Herr rubbed his fat chin with a fat forefinger, as if brushing crumbs away. At the same time Lowther was a most attentive pupil. To cultivate the German master purely as an artiste it was necessary to get into his good graces, and that Lowther set out to do.

Herr Schneider was quite pleased with him that afternoon, and gave him a warm word of commendation at the end of the lesson. Monty Lowther came out of the Form-room very cheerfully. He felt that he was getting on. In the course of the week he was sure that he would be able to reproduce all Herr Schneider's comic little ways without a fault; and the character, when he had completed it, would be a "regular scream."

But if Herr Schneider was a thing of beauty and a joy for ever just now to Monty Lowther of the Shell, he did not appear in the same light to other fellows, who had no artistic designs upon him. Levison and Mellish of the Fourth were muttering together in the passage as Lowther came along, and the Shell fellow caught Herr Schneider's name. He stopped at once. He knew Levison's little ways, and he guessed that some "jape" on the German master was under discussion.

"What are you two rotters up to?" Lowther inquired politely.

"Find out!" replied Levison, with equal politeness.

"It's that beast Schneider!" said Mellish. "He's given us an impot each, because he says we slacked at German this morning. Blessed if I can learn his barbarous lingo. And I don't want to, either!"

"Ass!" said Lowther. "German is a poetical language, and Herr Schneider is a jolly good sort!"

The Fourth-Formers stared at him.

"First time I've heard you say so," said Levison. "What are you sucking up to Schneider for I'd like to know?"

"He's a beast!" said Mellish viciously. "And he's jolly well going to get it in the neck this time!"

"Shurrup!" murmured Levison.

"Well, Lowther won't sneak, I suppose?"

"Keep it dark, ass, all the same!"

"I won't sneak," said Monty Lowther. "But you're not going to play any tricks on old Schneider. He's a good sort, and I won't have it. If you play any rotten games on him, I'll hammer you. So remember that!"

And Lowther walked away.

"Got a bee in his bonnet, I should think," said Mellish, in surprise. "Why, he's been caned and gated himself for tricks on old Schneider!"

"Oh, he can go and eat coke!" growled Levison. "We're jolly well going to make Schneider sit up! I've got a straw-basket that will do beautifully. I'll line it with paper to keep in the tar."

"He, he, he!" chuckled Mellish.

"We can easily get the tar; there's plenty in Taggles' tarpot in the tool-shed. And when it comes down on Schneider's napper, perhaps he'll be sorry that he's handed out impositions so liberally—what?"

"He, he, he!"

And the two young rascals went off to make their preparations for laying a "booby-trap" for the unfortunate expounder of German verbs.

Tom Merry and Manners were looking for their chum. They found him talking to Herr Schneider in the passage near Mr. Lathom's study. Lowther had a volume of Goethe in his hand, and he had stopped the German master to ask him to explain a passage in it.

Lowther was a little weak in German, and the request was quite a natural one on the part of a keen student of German. Lowther, it is true, had never before shown any special keenness for that branch of learning; but it was a sign of amendment that was sure to find favour in Herr Schneider's eyes.

Herr Schneider was very keen on the poets of his native land, and a junior who took an interest in them outside lesson-time was sure of his good graces.

Tom Merry and Manners looked on with interest. They knew their chum's real object, which the Herr had no suspicion of.

"I am ferry bleased mit you, Lowther!" said Herr

Schneider, beaming over his spectacles. "Ven it shall be tat you can read te Deutch more easily, you shall find great bleasure in perusing te vorks of te immortal Goethe. I am ferry glad to see you taking up te poem of Faust, vich is a great poem, only a leetle difficult for a beginner. I will always gift you any assistance."

"You are very kind indeed, sir," said Lowther demurely. "I—I was thinking of asking you if I might come to your study sometimes, sir, and ask you things."

Herr Schneider beamed like the full moon.

"Certainly, certainly mein boy! Come to my study after tea. I go now to tea mit Herr Lathom, but at six o'clock you may come to my study, and I shall be dere."

"Thank you very much, sir!"

"Not at all; I am ferry bleased! Now, dis passage—I will explain him. 'Nur mit Entsetzen wach' ich Morgens auf—that shall say, it is only mit misgivings tat I shall wake meinself up in te morning. Pring tat pook mit you, and ve will go over him togeezzer."

Lowther thanked the German master warmly, and Herr Schneider went into Mr. Lathom's study.

Tom Merry and Manners swooped down on their chum.

"You ass—"

"You fathead—"

"Getting on—what?" grinned Lowther. "When I have him in the study all to myself, I can study him at my leisure. Half an hour a day without interruption—think of that!"

"Blessed if I quite like it!" said Tom Merry. "You're pulling his leg!"

"What were German legs made for?"

"Well, you're taking him in," said Tom Merry uneasily, "and he doesn't smell a rat."

"If he did, how could I take him in?"

"I don't half like it, anyway!"

"Rats!" said Lowther. "L'art pour l'art, you know."

"Eh?"

"Art for art's sake, to put it in simple language suitable to your understanding," said Lowther compassionately. "Somebody said once that the true artist is bound to be unscrupulous. There was a painter once who used to poison people for the purpose of studying their dying expressions, to be reproduced on canvas. Of course, I don't believe in going so far as that—"

"Really?" asked Tom Merry sarcastically.

"No," said Lowther calmly. "I call that going too far. But an artist must be allowed a certain amount of latitude. And I've got to work up the part."

"Tea's ready!" growled Manners.

"Right-ho! I'm due in Schneider's study at six."

The Terrible Three went up to their study to tea. Monty Lowther, quite taken up with his artistic designs, hardly noticed what he ate. He was so preoccupied that Tom Merry put sugar upon his sardine, and Lowther ate it without a murmur. At five minutes to six he jumped up.

"Hold on!" said Tom. "There's a cake to follow!"

"Sorry! Keep some for me!" said Lowther. "I'm off!"

And he fairly ran out of the study.

"Off!" growled Manners. "I should think he is off—right off—his rocker! And we'll jolly well finish the cake!"

Monty Lowther, careless of the fate of the cake, hurried downstairs, and made his way to Herr Schneider's study. The door was a few inches ajar, and Herr Schneider was not there. Lowther pushed open the door, intending to wait in the study until the German master came in; but he never got into the study.

As he pushed the door open there was a sudden swoosh! Lowther started back with a gasp, but he backed too late. A flat basket that had been perched on top of the door had fallen and fairly bonneted him. Something that was sticky and slimy and smelly swamped over his head and face, and Monty Lowther staggered into the passage, unrecognisable, and gasping and choking and snorting frantically.

CHAPTER 4.

Very Fortunate Indeed.

GROOHH! Hoooooh! Ugh!" Lowther dabbed frantically at his face. He pitched off the basket, and it crashed to the floor, but most of its contents remained upon Monty Lowther. His hands came away black from his face.

"Groooh! Ow—ow! Tar! Yah! Oh! Ugh!"

"What on earth's the matter?" exclaimed Kildare of the Sixth, coming down the passage at a run as he heard those wild, gurgling sounds. "Why—what—who—"

"Gerrof! Gerrooooofff! Gerrrrooggg!"

"Great Scott!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who is it?"

"It's a giddy Christy minstrel!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"THE OUTSIDER'S CHOICE!"

There was a rush of fellows from all quarters to see the extraordinary phenomenon. Monty Lowther gouged cold tar out of his eyes and nose and mouth, and gasped.

"Grooof! Groooogg!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Who is it?" yelled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It's somebody playin' a twick. But what a weally remarkable twick!"

"Groogh! Ow—ow! Ugh! Grooooggh!"

"It's Lowther!" roared Blake. "What have you done that for, Lowther?"

"Lowthah, bai Jove! He's smothered himself with tah! How verry cuivious!"

"Gerroogghh!"

"What did you do it for?" roared Kangaroo of the Shell. "Where does the joke come in, Lowther? Blessed if I can see it!"

"It's funny!" chuckled Blake. "Funny enough—ha, ha, ha!—but I don't see where the fun comes in for Lowther! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah! I should wegard that as most uncomfy. H, ha, ha!"

"Groooooooh!"

Yells of laughter rang along the passage. Monty Lowther, streaming with thick tar, was certainly comic to the view, though he was not feeling at all amused himself. Kildare leaned against the wall and roared. The juniors simply shrieked. And Monty Lowther gasped and gurgled, and gurgled and gasped, as if for a wager.

"Mein Gott!" ejaculated Herr Schneider, coming along the passage with Mr. Linton, looking very angry, at his heels. "Vat is tat, den?"

"Is that Lowther?" gasped the master of the Shell.

"Lowther, answer me!"

"Groogh!" groaned Lowther. "Yes, sir!"

"So this is another of your tricks!" thundered Mr. Linton. "You must learn to keep your peculiar sense of humour in control, Lowther! How dare you—how dare you, sir, smother yourself with tar in this disgusting manner?"

"Groogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! Lowther, explain yourself at once! Upon my word, you shall be flogged—most severely flogged—for this revolting—this disgusting—"

"Groogh! Do you think I did it on purpose?" shrieked Lowther. "Do you think I like having tar swamped over my napper? Groooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! This is not a laughing matter! Lowther, do you mean to say that this was an accident?"

"Yes—grooh!—of course it was! Ow!"

"Then what were you doing with tar in the house?" demanded the master of the Shell. "You were intending, I presume, to play a trick upon someone else, and it has recoiled upon yourself."

"Groogh! Yow! No!"

"Then explain to me immediately how this occurred, Lowther!"

"Groogh! It was a b-b-b-booby-trap, I suppose," gasped Lowther. "I opened Herr Schneider's door—grooh!—and the thing fell on my napper! Groogh!"

"Mein goodness!"

"Do you mean that it fell upon your head, Lowther?"

"Ugh! Yes. Ugh!"

"Then say your head if you mean your head, and do not use ridiculous slang expressions!" said the master of the Shell crossly. "I hope you are telling me the truth, Lowther. Why were you going into Herr Schneider's study at all?"

"Groogh!"

"Tat is all right, sir," said Herr Schneider. "Lowther asked me to explain to him a passage in Cherman, and I tell him to go to mein study at six o'clock."

"Indeed! Lowther is showing a desire for knowledge that I have never observed in him before," said Mr. Linton sarcastically. "However, it certainly appears that Lowther is not to blame for once. Indeed, this is a very fortunate occurrence. That booby-trap was evidently intended for you, Herr Schneider, and Lowther has fallen into it by accident. Very fortunate indeed!"

"Groogh!" groaned Lowther. He did not regard it as fortunate in the least.

"Mein Gott! But it was ferry lucky!" said Herr Schneider. "You are quite right, Herr Linton. Lowther, I am sorry for you, but it shall be ferry fortunate for me tat you come to mein study mit yourself."

"Groogh!"

"You had better go and get yourself cleaned, Lowther," said Mr. Linton sharply. "You are in a most disgusting

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state. And I shall make the strictest inquiry for the author of this outrage—the strictest. Go at once!"

Lowther grunted. He felt that he was a most unfortunate individual, and he was not at all pleased at having saved Herr Schneider from a booby-trap in this way. He felt that the least Mr. Linton could have done was to show sympathy. But Mr. Linton was angry, and he had no sympathy to waste—indeed, knowing the peculiarly humorous disposition of Monty Lowther, he was probably not quite satisfied that Lowther was wholly innocent in the matter. It was possible that Lowther had been placing the booby-trap in position when it had fallen on his head—quite possible. Lowther's sudden and unaccountable desire for knowledge, which was his ostensible reason for being there at all, seemed very suspicious in his Form-master's eyes.

Indeed, Mr. Linton was glaring at Lowther as if he were a culprit, instead of the most unfortunate of juniors. He waved his hand to him impatiently.

"Please go! You are in a most disgusting state! Go at once! Oh! Ah! Do not brush against me, Lowther! Be careful, you utterly stupid boy!" shrieked Mr. Linton, as Lowther bumped on him in passing and smeared his scholastic gown with tar. "You—you stupid young rascal! Get away!"

"Sorry, sir—"

"Get away—get away!"

Mr. Linton pushed Lowther roughly away, and his hand came off Lowther's shoulder thick with tar. Lowther grinned under the coating of tar on his face, and went down the passage, all the fellows backing away and giving him a very wide berth. They did not want to share the spare tar with Mr. Linton. A shout of laughter followed Lowther up the stairs. The accident seemed more funny to the juniors even than if Herr Schneider himself had been caught in the booby-trap.

"Serve him jolly well all right!" said Gore of the Shell. "What is he swotting German for? Serve him right!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He will want a curry-comb to get all that off, I guess!" chuckled Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther tramped furiously up the stairs. Tom Merry and Manners had heard the disturbance below, and they had come out of their study, leaving the cake unfinished, to see what was the matter. The sight of Lowther streaming with tar almost doubled them up.

"M-m-my hat!" gasped Manners. "What the dickens—"

"What the deuce—" stuttered Tom Merry. "Oh, Lowther, this is too rich! Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?" roared Lowther, with a tarry glare. "I couldn't help it if some beast fixed up a booby-trap for Schneider, could I? And do you think I put my head under it on purpose, you silly jays?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's giddy justice!" sobbed Tom Merry. "This is your punishment for pulling the Schneider's leg! Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly, cackling chumps—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you—you—"

Words failed Monty Lowther. He rushed at the two yelling juniors, and grasped them in his tarry arms, and hugged them as if he loved them. Then Tom Merry and Manners ceased to laugh—all of a sudden. A bear's hug would have been more welcome than Monty Lowther's at that moment. The tar smothered them, and they roared with laughter as they struggled to escape.

"Groogh! Leggo! Idiot! Beast! Villain! Leggo!"

"Yow-ow! Chuck it! Leggo, you rotter! Yah!"

Tom Merry and Manners tore themselves away. Lowther burst into a yell as he looked at them. It was his turn to laugh now.

"Ha, ha, ha! How do you like it? Ain't it funny? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Grooogh! You sticky beast!"

"Ow! You slimy rotter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther.

He fled to a bath-room, as his chums rushed at him, and locked himself in. And Tom Merry and Manners, after breathing dire threats through the keyhole, proceeded to another bath-room, and for the next hour the Terrible Three were very busy and very tarry.

CHAPTER 5.

Lowther's Line.

EVERY cloud, it is said, has a silver lining, and Monty Lowther's misadventure was not wholly unfortunate for him. Herr Schneider understood that the junior had received the consignment of tar intended for himself,

and he was very pleased by his narrow escape, and very kind to Lowther afterwards. Monty Lowther had saved him from a very unpleasant experience, though quite unintentionally, and it helped him on in his new "wheeze" of getting into the German master's good graces. Mr. Linton's strict inquiry did not result in revealing the culprit, but both Mellish and Levison were seen with thick ears and swollen noses that evening, after an interview with Lowther, so the perpetrators of the booby-trap did not escape unpunished. And Herr Schneider, in the kindness of his heart, kept Lowther for an hour that evening, explaining German poetry to him, and promised him another hour the following afternoon.

Perhaps that final act of kindness was a little too much even for Monty Lowther, anxious as he was to study the German master and memorise his peculiarities. For next day was a half-holiday, and Lowther wanted to play cricket. But he thanked Herr Schneider very warmly, and left the German gentleman with an impression that he was a very nice and very studious lad, with a proper appreciation of Deutsch poetry.

Tom Merry and Manners waited for him to come out of Herr Schneider's study. They missed him, and were not wholly pleased by his assiduity in cultivating Herr Otto Schneider. Art for art's sake was all very well, but there were limits. They were glad to see that he looked tired when they met him in the passage.

"Fed up?" asked Manners.

"Well, it is rather thick," agreed Lowther. "I've had yards and yards of Goethe, and some Uhland and Korner thrown in, and it's buzzing in my head like a hive of bees. But I'm getting on a treat. I'm getting Schneider down splendidly, and I shall have him grunt-and-snort perfect by the time we give the play."

"Suppose he spots what you're doing?"

"Oh, rot!"

"There's another thing I've thought of," said Tom Merry seriously. "His niece is coming in a day or two. You know how sharp women are. I'll bet you she will spot the little game."

"Bosh! She will only think of meal times and sour krout and things," said Lowther. "Bet you she weighs twenty stone and talks only German. Besides, I shall be careful. Don't make difficulties. I tell you this is a stunning wheeze, and we shall simply bring down the house when I do my Colonel Potsdam on the stage."

"Lowther!" Mr. Linton looked out of his study doorway as the Shell fellows passed. "Have you done your imposition?"

"Ahem! No, sir."

"And why have you not done it?" demanded the master of the Shell.

"Ahem! I—I've been doing a lot of German, sir," said Lowther meekly.

Mr. Linton looked at him very suspiciously.

"I hope that this extraordinary application on your part, Lowther, is entirely sincere," he said surely.

"Ahem! I hope so, sir," assented Lowther.

"This sudden outburst of activity, Lowther, astonishing as it is, must not be allowed to interfere with your work. I expect those lines this evening."

"Yes, sir."

The Terrible Three went their way. In their study Lowther glared at Tom Merry and Manners, who were grinning.

"Lot of encouragement a chap gets when he starts swotting at a difficult language," he growled. "I think it's up to a Form-master to encourage a chap."

"He doesn't believe it's genuine," chuckled Manners.

"You see, he knows you too well."

"I call him a suspicious beast," growled Lowther. "Now, what about arranging the parts for the comedy. We must give parts to a dozen fellows at least. All Study No. 6 will want to come in, or there will be trouble, and Figgins & Co. will have to have bits. It will want some wangling to satisfy everybody."

"Leave it to us while you do your lines."

"Rot! Ain't I stage-manager? I've got to see that the parts are suitable, or as suitable as possible. We've got no actors, excepting myself and Kerr of the New House. The rest of the company will be pretty poor stuff."

"Why, you cheeky ass—"

"Yaas, you awfully cheeky wottah!" said Arthur Augustus, looking in at the door. "I have come to see you fellows about that. Blake says that if you play 'Catching the Colonel' he will have to be the colonel. I wegard that as wubbish!"

"Quite right!"

"Hewies says he ought to be the colonel, and Dig says the same, and I have told them quite plainly that they are a pair of asses!"

"Hear, hear!"

"The fact is, of course, that I had better be the colonel. In the title-role of a play you require a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"It's settled," said Tom Merry. "Lowther's the colonel. It's a special comic part, and he's studying Herr Schneider especially to work up the business."

"So that is the reason why you have been muggin' up German, Lowthah. I must remark that I wegard it a playin' it wathah low down on Schneidah. Schneidah i wathah a beast, but I do not approve of pullin' his leg in this way."

"Which way do you approve of pulling his leg, then?" inquired Lowther.

"I do not approve of it at all. I twust you will now dwo the whole ideah," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"Certainly, I don't think!" murmured Lowther.

"You had better leave the colonel's part to me," urged Arthur Augustus.

"Impossible! You are a nut——"

"What!"

"And you can't be a nut and a kernel, too," argued Lowther.

"I did not come heah to heah wotten puns, Lowthah. What part are you thinkin' of givin' me, I should like to know?"

"There's a splendid part for you. You wear evening-dress all the time," said Lowther. "As stage-manager, I pick that part out specially for you."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's brow cleared. He fancied himself in evening-clothes, and Monty Lowther's words went fast to pour oil on the troubled waters.

"Well, that sounds all wight," he admitted. "I dwess it evening-clothes all through the play?"

"All the time!"

"Well, I will take that part," said D'Arcy. "I am not specially keen about it, you know, but if there's a chawootah who has to wear evenin' clothes, it's better to pick out a chap who can weah them gwacefully. I'm your man."

"Good!" said Lowther, making a note on a sheet of impot paper. "D'Arcy looks the part of Henry. The scrip will be given out to-morrow, Gussy, and you will be expected to be letter-perfect in three days."

"That's all wight. I'm wathah a dab at learnin' things by heart. I suppose I come on the stage pretty often."

"You are on the stage practically all the time, oftener than the leading actor."

"Oh, good! That's all wight, then."

And Arthur Augustus retired satisfied. Tom Merry and Manners looked a little puzzled. Why so important a part should be assigned to the swell of the School House, who was certainly not a leading light in the Junior Dramatic Society they did not understand. Monty Lowther took the book of the play from his pocket, and as the Shell fellows looked at it they understood.

"Henry—a waiter!"

That was the last name in the list of the dramatic personæ.

"A waiter!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Yes; character who wears evening-dress all the time," said Lowther calmly. "Suit Gussy down to the ground."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've always said that Gussy ought to be in the House of Lords when he grows up, or else become head-waiter in a grand hotel," said Lowther. "It's much the same kind of thing. And this part will suit him splendidly."

"Poor old Gussy! Ha, ha, ha!"

"The play takes place in an hotel," explained Lowther. "I'll make Blake and Herries and Dig extra guests a dinner. Figgins can be the hall-porter. He's big, and will look all right in a coat and a gold-laced cap. Kerr will take the part of Lieutenant Fred Lynn, the hero!"

"Hold on! Where do we come in?" demanded Tom Merry.

"You come in as policemen."

"Wha-a-a-at!"

"Two policemen are required, and they will do for you parts beautifully."

"Look here! I'm going to be something better than a bobby!" roared Manners.

"Shush! A member of his Majesty's Police Force is a respectable person, I suppose? It's an honour to take the part of a bobby."

"You can put me down for the lieutenant, the hero!"

"Imposs! That will require acting."

"You silly chump! Can't I act?"

"The giddy goat, yes; but a naval lieutenant, that's rather above your weight," said Lowther calmly. "You see, the plot is that the colonel and his daughter are staying at the Grand Hotel, Slobberwasserbaden. The lieutenant is in love with the young lady, and the old colonel won't hear of it."

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Scene, when he finds Kerr—Lieutenant Lynn—at dinner at the next table. Comic business by the colonel, who flies into a rage. Hall-porter and waiters in horror at such a scene in the best hotel at Slobberwasserbaden. Manager—fat manager in white waistcoat—that's for Fatty Wynn—requests Lynn to retire. End of first scene. Colonel Potsdam's old enemy—Redfern of the Fourth—I mean, General Frumpstein—has followed him to Slobberwasserbaden, intending to force him to fight a duel. General a dead shot. Colonel, funky, wants to keep out of it. Comic scene when general enters, and colonel hides behind the head-waiter. I shall work that up splendidly."

"But what are we going to do?" roared Tom Merry and Manners together.

Lowther made a soothing gesture.

"Wait a bit; your part's coming. General Frumpstein is smitten with colonel's daughter Fidelia, and gives up his deadly intentions; but colonel doesn't know it—sneaks about in a state of terror. Found skulking behind a pot of ferns on the terrace by Kerr of the Fourth—by Lieutenant Lynn, I mean. Lynn scares him by telling him the general is just round the corner. Colonel, in blue funk, begs young man to save him. Lynn promises to do so, on condition colonel gives consent to engagement. Colonel agrees. Lynn—"

"But where do we come in?"

"Shush! Lynn—lemme see—Lynn undertakes to challenge the general, and shoot him dead if he doesn't immediately quit Slobberwasserbaden. Knows he is going, anyway. Comic colonel, peering over terrace, sees general making for the railway station with his bag. Enter Lynn. Colonel falls on his neck. Bless you, my children—curtain!"

"But we—"

"Where do we—"

"Oh, they call in a couple of bobbies in the third scene, when the general is stalking the colonel round the hotel. You're the bobbies!"

"Are we?" said Tom Merry grimly. "Well, we'll soon alter all that. I'm the lieutenant!"

"So am I!" said Manners warmly.

"You can't all be lieutenants," said Lowther argumentatively; "and if a New House chap doesn't have a good bit there will be trouble with the fellows over the way. But I'll tell you what—you shall be awfully swanky guests at the hotel, and we'll leave out the policemen!"

"Rats!"

"Well, you can be waiters if you like."

"Bosh!"

"Well, I'll make one of you General Frumpstein, then," said Lowther despairingly. "Blessed if it isn't enough to turn a chap's hair grey to be a stage-manager. Redfern can be a waiter."

"Well, I'll do the general if you like," said Tom.

"What about me?" demanded Manners.

"Oh, blow you!"

"Look here—"

"Well, you can be the hotel manager if you like, and I'll make Fatty Wynn the head-waiter," said Lowther.

"Does he have to say much?"

"Well, he says 'Gentlemen, gentlemen!' several times when there's a row!"

Manners snorted. The prospect of saying "Gentlemen, gentlemen!" several times did not seem to exhilarate him.

"The chief difficulty," resumed Lowther, "is about the heroine. We can't get a girl to take the part of Miss Potsdam. I've asked D'Arcy, and he says his cousin Ethel can't come. Cousin Ethel would have done beautifully, but she's away with her blessed Aunt Adeline. It's rotten luck! One of the fellows will have to make up as a girl—and the part won't be a success, I'm afraid. Luckily, the colonel has most of the business—"

"Trust you for that!" snorted Manners.

"Still, if we can dig up a girl from anywhere, we may fill that part all right yet," said Lowther, unheeding. "Now, I hope you're satisfied. My hat! It's too late to do my lines for Linton—just on bedtime!"

"You'll get a licking, and serve you jolly well right!" growled the dissatisfied Manners.

"Never mind; it won't take me long. What the dickens does Linton mean by bothering me with lines when I'm getting up a play?" said Lowther. "I'll take him at his word, and give him one line!"

"Eh?"

Lowther took a sheet of impot paper, and wrote a line upon it. Tom Merry and Manners gasped as they read it over his shoulder.

"You're not going to take that to Linton?" howled Manners.

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"Why not? It's what he said!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Didn't he say plainly, 'Write out the sentence, 'I must not be idle and ridiculous' a hundred times?'" demanded Lowther.

"Ha, ha! But he meant—"

"Never mind what he meant. That's what he said, and it's good enough for him. If he's got any sense of humour, it ought to make him chuckle!"

"Ha, ha! Try it!"

"Well, I'm going to."

And Lowther blotted the line, took up the paper, and quitted the study.

The humorist of the Shell presented himself in Mr. Linton's study, and that gentleman gave him a severe glance.

"You have done your lines, Lowther?"

"My line, sir!"

"What! I gave you a hundred lines!"

"Then I—ahem!—misunderstood, sir," said Lowther blandly. "As it was only one line, I've left it rather late, sir. Here it is!"

Mr. Linton took the sheet, and read the line Monty Lowther had written. It ran, "Mr. Linton must not be idle and ridiculous a hundred times."

The Form-master's face was a study for a moment. He looked at Monty Lowther as if he would eat him.

"Lowther!" he gasped.

"Yes, sir."

"You—you have written this?"

"Yes, sir. That's the line you gave me in class this morning, sir," said Lowther, with a face of perfect and dove-like innocence.

Mr. Linton started to his feet.

"I understand, Lowther, that you are supposed to be something of a humorist in the Shell. Your Form-master, sir, is not a proper subject for your humour, however. I think I must attempt to make you take a serious view of these matters, Lowther. Hold out your hand!"

Swish—swish—swish—swish!

Tom Merry and Manners met the unfortunate humorist as he came away from his Form-master's study, with his hands tucked under his armpits, and apparently trying to fold himself up like a pocket-knife.

"Well, how did it go?" grinned Manners.

"Ow! Ow!"

"Wasn't he satisfied?" chuckled Tom Merry.

"Ow! Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The beast hasn't even a glimmering of a sense of humour!" groaned Lowther. "Ow! Yow! Catch me wasting any more topping jokes on him! Ow! Ow! Yow-ow-ow!"

And Monty Lowther groaned dismally all the way up to the dormitory. It was only too evident that humour of Lowther's peculiar brand was utterly wasted on the master of the Shell.

CHAPTER 6.

In For It!

HERR SCHNEIDER sat in his study. He was seated in his favourite armchair, with his favourite meerschaum in his mouth, and he looked happy.

Tap!

"Gum in!"

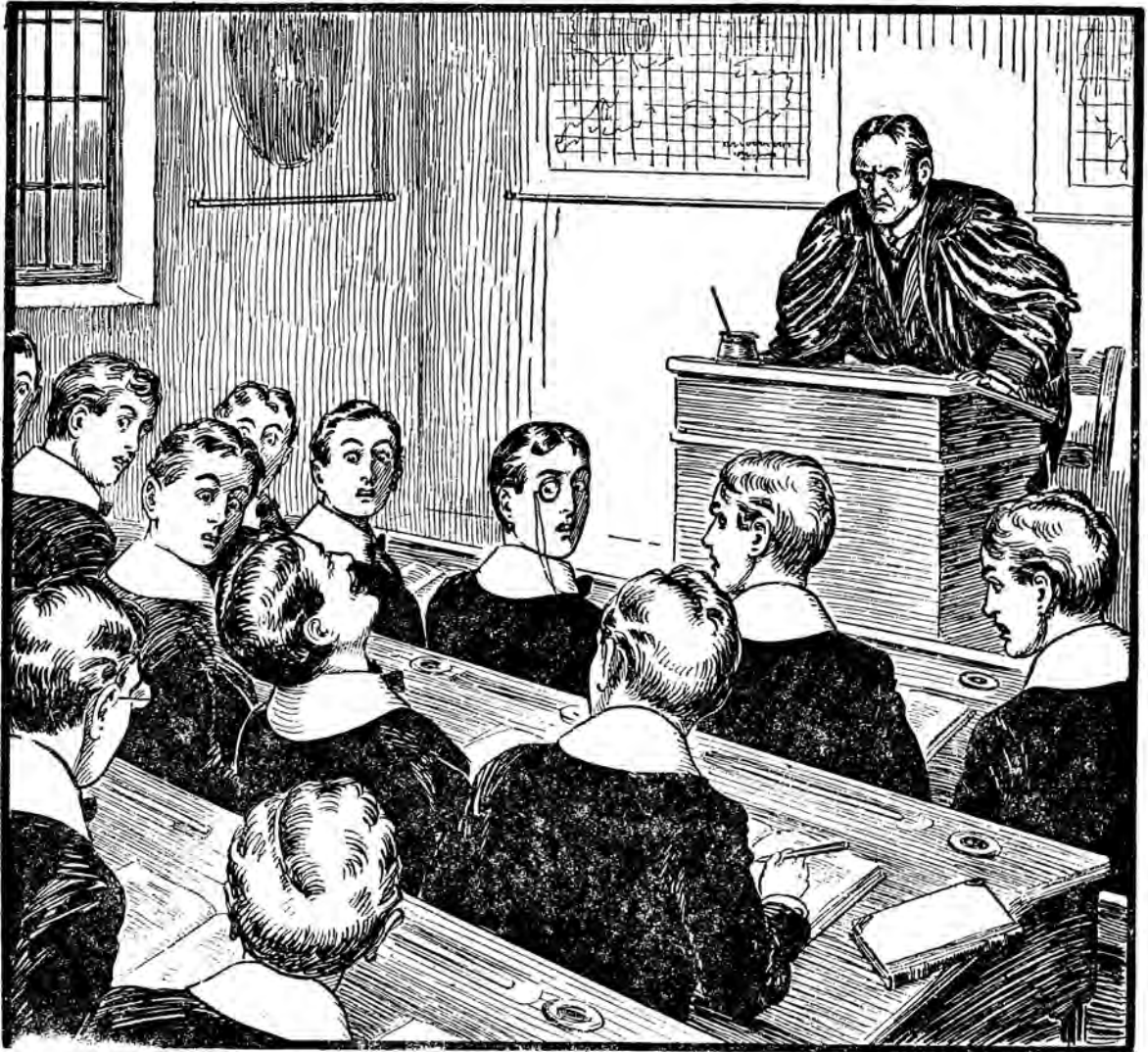
Monty Lowther entered, and Herr Schneider smiled beamingly upon him. It was a half-holiday that afternoon, and most of the juniors of both Houses at St. Jim's had gone down to the cricket-ground. There was a senior match on Big Side, where Kildare and the great men of the First Eleven were displaying their prowess, with a crowd of fellows watching their mighty exploits. And on Little Side, Tom Merry & Co. of the School House were playing Figgins & Co. of the New House in a junior House match.

Monty Lowther was a member of Tom Merry's eleven; but he was out of it that afternoon, and Hammond of the Fourth had taken his place.

Herr Schneider was naturally pleased. His beautiful and poetical language was much misunderstood and misprized by the juniors, as a rule, and it was gratifying to know that a junior schoolboy had given up a cricket-match in order to penetrate the hidden mysteries of German verbs.

As a matter of fact, Lowther had not intended to carry his new scheme of "mugging up" German to that heroic extent. But Herr Schneider had offered him an hour that afternoon, and Lowther was too keen to keep on the right side of the Herr to think of declining.

Hence he had stood out of the cricket-match—not very cheerfully. But he contrived to present a cheerful counte-



"Ha, ha ha!" The Shell fellows stared at Lowther. Mr. Linton spun towards him. There was a hush—a dreadful hush, like the calm that precedes a tropical storm. Then Mr. Linton spoke. "Lowther!"
(See Chapter 1.)

nance as he came into Herr Schneider's study, with a big book under his arm. He was fairly in for it, and he resolved to make the tremendous sacrifice with good grace.

He could hear the merry shouts from the cricket-field through the open window of the study; but he bore it with manly fortitude.

"Ach! You have gum, den?" said Herr Schneider, with a pleased smile, removing the meerscham from his mouth.

"Eh?" For a moment Lowther fancied that the German master was asking if he had had any gum. Then he understood. "Yes, sir, I've come. You promised to help me with 'Faust' this afternoon, sir; but if you are busy—" Lowther added eagerly.

"Not at all, mein boy—not at all," said Herr Schneider, beaming over his glasses, and stroking his fat chin with a fat forefinger. "I am fery bleased. I can giff you an hour, and den I must go to mein pupil at Greenvale." Herr Schneider earned an extra honest penny by visiting a pupil at a village near St. Jim's on half-holidays. "Now ve vill begin, mein boy!"

Lowther was very pleased to hear that in an hour Herr Schneider had to start for Greenvale. The herr was so keen about German poetry, and so pleased with Lowther's newly-discovered taste for it, that he would probably have kept the junior grinding "Faust" all the afternoon, if no other engagement had intervened. Lowther brightened up considerably. If he escaped in an hour he would be able to play in the match after all. Tom Merry had done his best

for him, and Figgins, the skipper of the New House juniors, had been accommodating.

It was arranged that the New House were to bat first, and that if Lowther got away from his German in time he would bat for the School House in their innings. In that case Hammond of the Fourth would only field during the New House innings, and Lowther would play after all. If Herr Schneider had to depart in an hour it was all right for Lowther. The New House innings was pretty certain to last as long as that. And even if it ended unexpectedly quickly, Lowther would be in time to go in late on the School House list—last man in, if necessary.

Now that he was certain of not missing the match after all, Lowther felt much more cheerful and contented. True, it was a terrible bore to grind German on a sunny afternoon, when the rest of the school was at play. But all the time he was taking stock of the unconscious model for the part of Colonel Potsdam, the comic colonel.

What Herr Schneider would have said if he had known Lowther's real object can hardly be imagined. Fortunately he was not likely to know. Lowther's artistic proclivities and his devotion to "Tart pour l'art" were quite unknown to the unsuspicious German master.

And Herr Schneider, like many gentlemen with peculiar little ways, was quite unconscious of them, and, indeed, regarded himself as an imposing and extremely solemn and dignified personage.

As the herr expounded German poetry to him, Lowther was drinking in, as it were, every trick of gesture, every THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 338.
A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

peculiarity of speech or mannerism, and storing them in his memory for future reproduction.

With that inward satisfaction he was able to bear the masterpiece of Goethe with becoming equanimity.

"Ach! Your English will not render him in his beauty!" sighed Herr Schneider, as he paused in the midst of a really noble passage. "You must tinker him out, and den read and unders-and him in te Cherman, to get te beauty of tat."

"In jedder Kleide werd ich wohl die Pain,
Des engel Erdenleben fuhlen.
Ich bin zu alt, um nur zu spielen,
Zu jung, um ohne Wunsch zu sein!
Was kann die Welt mir wohl gewehren?
Entbehren sollst Du, sollst entbehren!"

"Beautiful, sir!" murmured Lowther. He was looking at the clock on the mantelpiece, over Herr Schneider's shoulder, and he had noted that the hour was more than up. From the cricket-field came a yell of School House voices:

"Well caught, Tom Merry!"

Herr Schneider glanced at the clock and jumped up.

"Mein Gott! I shall be late, isn't it? Ach! Te beautiful poetry of Chermany—vat bleasure for you, Lowther, ven you read him can! I must meinself hurry."

Monty Lowther rose with alacrity.

"Don't go, mein poy," said Herr Schneider. "I have vun little favour to ask, tat I tink will be a bleasure to you."

"Certainly, sir!"

"Mein nichte—mein niece shall arrive dis afternoon," Herr Schneider explained, as he took up his hat. "She gum to Rylcombe Station mit herself. I tink tat I shall be able to go and meet mein little Marichen, but it is to go to Green-vale tat I must. But I do not like tat Marichen shall arrive mit herself and no vun to meet her. Shall you go to te station to meet mein niece and bring her mit herself to te school, Lowther? It is not eferyone tat I would send for dis, but you are a goot poy, and I tink tat you shall deserve te bleasure."

Monty Lowther suppressed a groan. Sincerely, at that moment, he wished that he was not a good boy and that he did not deserve that pleasure. His hope of playing in the Form match after all was knocked on the head now.

He could not refuse. It would have been discourteous, in the first place, and in the second place the German master would have been offended, and those heart-to-heart talks, in which Lowther was mentally piling up so much "business" for the comedy, would have stopped at once. In a few more days he would be Schneider perfect, so to speak, and he could not afford to spoil it now.

"I—I—I—" murmured Lowther.

"It is tat you shall like to go, hein?"

"It will be a great pleasure, sir," faltered Lowther.

"Te train he gum in at half-past tree," said Herr Schneider. "You have goot time to go."

"But—but if Miss Erlen doesn't speak English, sir, there will be some difficulty," murmured Lowther, as a sort of last hope that the German master would pass him over and select somebody who could speak German.

"But mein niece speak goot English—ferry goot," said Herr Schneider. "She speak him to te manner porn."

"Oh!"

"Also you gum on ferry goot mit your Cherman, Lowther. I must hurry now, or it is tat I shall late be. Good-afternoon, mein poy! You vill tell te Fraulein tat it is sorry I am tat I shall not be mit meinself to meet her at te station, and tat she shall me see ven it is tat she is here, nicht war?"

"Yes, sir," murmured Lowther.

And Herr Schneider jammed on his silk hat and hurried away.

Monty Lowther waited till he was gone, and then he hurled the volume of "Faust" on the study carpet and jumped on it. Then, a little relieved in his feelings, he left the study and fetched his hat. He came gloomily out of the School House, and as he crossed the quad several cheery voices hailed him from the tuckshop. The New House innings was over, and both sides had adjourned to the tuckshop for refreshment in the shape of ginger-beer before the School House went in to bat.

"This way, Lowther!" shouted Tom Merry. "Come and have a ginger-pop. You must be feeling dry."

"Yaas, wathah! Woll up, deah boy! It's my twcat," said Arthur Augustus hospitably. Arthur Augustus was very cordial towards Lowther now. He had not yet discovered that Henry in the play was a waiter.

"Wherefore that worried look?" asked Manners. "Isn't the German finished?"

"Yes," growled Lowther.

"Must be," said Blake. "I spotted Schneider going out. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 338.

Jolly lucky chap you are, Lowther, to get extra toot for nothing."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, rats!"

"But he doesn't look pleased," grinned Figgins of the Fourth. "What's the matter, Lowther? You're in time to bat for the School House, ain't you?"

"No."

"Bai Jove! What's w'ong, deah boy?"

"Schneider's niece is coming to St. Jim's to-day!" groaned Lowther.

"Well, she won't eat you," said Tom Merry, puzzled.

"What does that matter?"

"Schneider's gone off to see his beastly pupil at Green-vale, and he's asked me to go to the station to meet his niece."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?" demanded Lowther savagely. He was feeling very sore.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors.

"It's poetical justice," grinned Kerr of the Fourth.

"You've been pulling the Schneider bird's leg, and he's taken you seriously and given you a treat. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus. "The way of the twangswessah is hard, deah boy."

Lowther snorted.

"Don't you want to go?" grinned Redfern. "She may be an awfully nice girl, you know."

"Twenty stone, I'll bet you!" chuckled Kangaroo of the Shell. "Twenty stone, with glasses and an umbrella and a German accent. Lowther will enjoy himself."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Howevah, it is up to Lowthah to play the game," said Arthur Augustus. "Aftah all, you should weally wegard it as a honah, Lowthah."

"Oh, rats!"

"Poor old Lowther! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, let Gussy go!" said Tom Merry. "Gussy is a lady's man, and the Fraulein would like him ever so much better. I'll put Hammond on in your place, Gussy."

"Good idea!" said Lowther heartily. "You go, Gussy. I'll explain to Schneider that we sent you because you're ever so much nicer."

"That would be quite cowwect," assented Arthur Augustus calmly, "and I would go with pleasuah, but it would be pwactically givin' away the match if I don't bat."

"We'll risk it," said Tom Merry.

"Wats! I wese to wisk a House match because Lowthah has got himself into a sowpae, which serves him jolly well wight," said D'Arcy. "I weally do not approve of his conduct towards Herr Schneider at all. I wegard it as playin' it wathah low down."

"Silly ass!" growled Lowther.

"Weally, you know—"

"You've got to go, Lowther," said Fatty Wynn. "Have some tarts before you start, old chap? I'll stand 'em. Nothing like laying a solid foundation when you're going through a licking or anything very rotten, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I think Blake might go," suggested Lowther. "Blake has a very nice way in dealing with girls—"

"Thanks!" said Blake, with a chuckle. "But I'm not going."

"Suppose Kangaroo went? Kangy has a very taking way, too—"

"I may have a taking way," grinned Kangaroo, "but I'm not taking any now, thank you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Time we were batting," said Tom Merry. "Sorry, Monty, old man! You've fairly landed yourself this time."

"Yaas; let this be a warnin' to you, deah boy."

"Br-r-r-r-r-r!" said Monty Lowther.

And the unhappy junior whose artistic unscrupulousness had led him into this scrape walked away, and the cricketers chuckled and returned to the cricket-field to finish the House match.

CHAPTER 7. Lowther's Prize.

"MY hat!"
Monty Lowther uttered that exclamation under his breath.

He had arrived at Rylcombe Station and taken up his post on the platform to wait for the three-thirty.

The three-thirty was a local train from Wayland Junction, and it did not usually carry many passengers, so there was not likely to be any difficulty in picking out Fraulein Erlen, though Lowther had never seen the lady before.

As a matter of fact, he was expecting to see a lady built on the same lines as Herr Schneider, and such a dame would certainly have been easily distinguished in a crowd.

Five or six passengers alighted from the train, but Lowther looked in vain for a stout lady with big glasses and an umbrella.

There were two or three farmers, a commercial traveller, and a soldier, and only one passenger of the gentle sex.

That, then, was evidently Fraulein Erlen, especially as it was evident at a glance that she was German.

But—

No wonder Lowther ejaculated "My hat!" No wonder the gloomy look vanished from his face, and he smiled cheerfully. For, instead of the sixteen-stone lady of uncertain age he had been expecting to see, he beheld a slim and graceful girl of about his own age, with flaxen curls and big blue eyes, and a somewhat timid expression. Herr Schneider had not described his niece, so it came as a complete surprise to the junior who had come to meet her, and a very pleasant surprise indeed. Monty Lowther fairly ran across the platform to greet the foreign young lady.

She was standing on the platform, looking about her timidly, as if in expectation of seeing someone she knew. Probably she expected to be met there by her uncle from the school. Monty Lowther raised his silk hat in his most graceful manner.

"Fraulein Erlen?" he inquired.

The German girl looked at him.

"That is my name," she said in English, with only a slight and very pretty trace of a German accent.

"My name is Lowther—Monty Lowther. Your uncle asked me to come and meet you here, and take you to the school, as he has an important engagement."

The fraulein smiled.

"You are very kind!" she said.

"Quite a pleasure!" said Monty Lowther. "Let me take your bag. That's right. This way."

Monty Lowther felt as if he had captured a prize as he escorted Fraulein Erlen out of the station. He chuckled inwardly as he realised that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy would be ready to kick himself when he saw Lowther march in with the pretty fraulein. Outside the station he passed two or three fellows belonging to the Grammar School, and smiled serenely as he noted their envious glances.

"Is it far to the school?" asked Miss Erlen.

"Only a short walk—quite a pleasant walk," said Lowther eagerly. He didn't want to take the old station cab under the circumstances. He was willing to prolong the pleasure of that escorting as long as possible. "A beautiful lane. You will—ahem!—see our English countryside at its best at this season."

"It is very pretty!" said the fraulein, as they left the village high street and entered the leafy, shady lane.

"Yes, isn't it?" said Lowther. He was looking at the fraulein's charming face as he spoke. "Lovely, I think."

"Is my uncle away from the school?"

"Yes; he's gone to Greenvale, but he'll be back soon after you get to St. Jim's. How well you speak English, Miss Erlen."

"I have lived a long time in England. My father is in business in London," explained Fraulein Erlen. "I am to take my uncle to London, and then we go to Germany for the vacation."

"But you're going to stay at St. Jim's for a bit?" asked Lowther, remembering what Herr Schneider had told him.

"Yes; for two or three days."

"How ripping!"

"Hein?"

"I—I mean, it's very nice at St. Jim's just now," stammered Lowther. "Beautiful weather, you know, and—and you'll be able to see a cricket match, too, if you stay over Saturday."

"I should like that," said the fraulein. "It was very kind of you to come and meet me at the station. I should not have known my way. Isn't that bag heavy?"

It was rather heavy, as a matter of fact, but Monty Lowther did not care.

"Light as a feather!" he said mendaciously.

"You must be very strong," said the fraulein, with a smile. "You are one of my uncle's pupils at the school?"

"Yes. I'm awfully keen on German," said Lowther, beginning to think that his new devotion to that language was rather a good thing after all. "Of course, I can't speak it much. But we do it in class. We like it better—him!—than any of the other lessons. And—and your uncle helps me with German poetry out of lesson-time. He's very kind."

"Yes, he is very kind and good," said Miss Erlen.

Lowther whistled softly. It had never occurred to the juniors that the ponderous old German master was a human

being with the ordinary emotions of any other human being, and that he had relations—a charming niece, for instance—who might be very fond of him. The juniors weren't fond of him. German irregular verbs were not conducive to affection. But to the fraulein he was not a musty, crusty old German master. He was her kind Uncle Otto. It was quite a discovery.

"We—we all like him," said Lowther, drawing on his imagination a little. "Why, this afternoon he gave me a whole hour explaining 'Faust' to me. It's jolly good of him to give up his leisure time like that, don't you think so?"

It was, as a matter of fact, but it had never occurred to Lowther himself until he mentioned it to Miss Erlen.

"He is always kind," said the fraulein affectionately. "We are all very fond of Uncle Otto, and he is so happy when he comes with us to Deutschland in the holidays. He is like a big boy when he comes home among the vineyards on the Rhine."

"My hat!" murmured Lowther. The vision of Herr Schneider as a big boy disporting himself among the vineyards was rather a staggerer.

"What did you say?"

"I—I said it must be ripping—really ripping. I—I've been thinking of asking my people to let me go to Germany next vac," said Lowther boldly. "How jolly it must be on the Rhine—at—Munich, or—or Hamburg—"

"Munich is a great distance from the Rhine," she said.

"Munich!"

"You call it Munich in English."

"Oh! Munich sounds ever so much better," said Lowther thoughtfully. "We spoil the names of foreign places by changing them into English. I—I've always thought so. I—I suppose you can read 'Faust' in the original, Miss Erlen?"

Miss Erlen laughed heartily.

"Why, of course, as I am German!" she said.

"Yes, of course," agreed Lowther, laughing too. All the same, it seemed a wonderful performance for anybody, German or not, to read "Faust" in the original, when it was such a twister to Lowther himself.

"You are fond of German poetry?" asked the fraulein, with interest.

"I—I adore it!" said Lowther. "There's some ripping lines in 'Faust'—perhaps you know them:

"Mit deinen blauen augen,
Siehst du mich lieblich an!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Isn't that right?" asked Lowther anxiously.

"Yes, yes; but those are lines of Heine."

"Hiney!" murmured Lowther, pronouncing the name a la Shell, so to speak. "Who the dickens is Hiney? But they're jolly good lines," he added aloud.

"Very pretty," agreed Miss Erlen demurely.

As the lines meant in English, "With thy blue eyes thou lookest lovingly upon me," it was evident that Monty Lowther was getting on. Never had Lowther found the subject of German poetry so attractive. He quoted more and more, and more and more recklessly, attributing all sorts of mispronounced lines to all sorts of authors who had never heard of them, and he kept Miss Erlen in a continual smile until the gates of St. Jim's came in sight. And that walk—from the village to the school had never seemed so short to the Shell fellow.

"Is that the school?" asked Miss Erlen, as she looked at the grey old buildings and the high tower over the trees.

"Yes, that's St. Jim's," said Lowther. "Your uncle won't be back yet. There's a cricket match going on now. I should really have been playing, only—"

"Only you came to the station instead," said Miss Erlen softly. "That was very, very kind of you."

"Not at all," said Lowther. "We can play cricket any day. But perhaps you'd like to see them—what?"

"Very much."

"Right—ho!"

And Monty Lowther deposited the heavy bag in Taggles' lodge, with instructions for it to be taken to the Head's house, and escorted his charming companion to the cricket-field. The House match was still in progress. Most of the School House wickets were down, and Tom Merry and Kangaroo were batting, a couple more batsmen waiting their turn. One of them was Hammond of the Fourth. There was still time, therefore, for Lowther to bat, after all, if he chose. But he was thinking of anything but batting now.

Lowther was not, as a rule, a susceptible youth. He had chipped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy unmercifully on account of his susceptibility to the fascinations of the fair sex. But somehow or other the deep blue eyes of the fraulein had worked wonders, having a most extraordinary and unaccountable effect upon the humorist of the Shell. Monty Lowther

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was experiencing an extraordinary feeling just now as if he were walking on air. And when Cutts of the Fifth, passing them in the quadrangle, cast an admiring glance on the fraulein, Lowther looked at Cutts as if he would have liked to eat him.

All eyes on the cricket-ground were turned upon the batsmen, who were hitting away in great style. But when Lowther arrived at the pavilion with Fraulein Erlen all eyes turned from the wickets to Lowther and his companion. Arthur Augustus gazed at the pretty fraulein through his eyeglass as if fascinated.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "That boundah is in luck. If I had known—"

Arthur Augustus crossed over to them, as Lowther found the fraulein a seat outside the pavilion to watch the game. He raised his cricket cap most gracefully.

"Miss Erlen, I pwesume?" he said.

Lowther glared at him.

"Your wicket down?" he asked.

"I have not batted yet, deah boy. Hammond and I are waitin'. Welcome to St. Jim's, Miss Erlen." And Arthur Augustus murmured almost ferociously to Lowther. "Pway introduce me, deah boy."

"Go and eat coke!" murmured Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"You'll be wanted at the wickets soon."

"Wats! You're next man in!"

"I'm not in the team, you ass!"

"Yaas, you are. Now you've come back Hammond will stand out, of course."

Lowther shook his head.

"That would be too rotten on Hammond, as he's expecting to play," he replied. "Hammond is going to bat. I'm not so selfish as that."

"As a mattah of fact, I'm not rewy keen on battin'. You can go in next, Lowthah, and take my place."

"Rats!"

"Well bowled, Fatty!" came a shout round the field.

"Bai Jove! 'Tom Mewwy's out!"

And Tom Merry came off the field.

CHAPTER 8.

Monty Lowther's Check!

TOM MERRY came up to the pavilion with his bat under his arm. He raised his cap to Miss Erlen, and Lowther reluctantly introduced him. Somehow or other, Monty Lowther felt a perfectly idiotic desire to keep the fraulein all to himself. And the other fellows observing it were naturally determined to be introduced. In the course of a few minutes Miss Erlen learned more names than she could possibly remember.

"Man in, Gussy!" said Tom.

"Lowthah is battin'—"

"I'm not!" said Lowther.

"It's between Lowther and Hammond," said Tom.

"You're next on the list, Gussy. Get to the wicket. You're keeping the field waiting."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy reluctantly tore himself away, and went on to bat. Harry Hammond came over to Lowther.

"I s'pose you're goin' in?" he remarked.

"Not at all," said Lowther affably. "I wouldn't deprive you of your chance to show what you can do in a House match, Hammond, old fellow."

"I don't mind standin' out," said Hammond, a little puzzled. "It was understood—"

"My dear chap, I'm not going to be selfish. You're going to bat."

Hammond looked inquiringly at Tom Merry.

"It's all right," said Tom, laughing. "You bat, Hammond."

"Oh, good!"

Hammond did not have to wait long. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's eyes, as a matter of fact, were more upon the pavilion than upon the bowler. He fell to the deadly bowling of Fatty Wynn before the over was finished.

"Wotten luck!" remarked Arthur Augustus, as he came off with a duck's egg to his credit, to meet several savage glares from the other batsmen.

"Rotten batting, you mean!" growled Manners.

"Never mind. We only want three to win," said Tom Merry. "Hammond and Kangaroo will knock up three, or we'll scalp them."

But those three were not easy to knock up. Fatty Wynn and Redfern of the New House were bowling their best in turn, and though the wickets did not fall no runs came. The School House crowd watched the finish keenly, but Monty

Lowther had no eyes for the cricket. For once he was utterly and supremely indifferent to the result, even of a House match.

Surrounded by juniors, all of whom had on their best manners and their best smiles, Miss Erlen did not forget that Lowther was her first friend, and that he had generously given up a cricket-match in order to meet her at the station. Monty Lowther was first in favour, and that loyalty on the part of the German fraulein increased his good opinion of her. It showed that she was a girl of judgment.

The fraulein looked away towards the school gates.

"My uncle has not come back yet?" she asked.

"Not yet," said Blake. "May not be back for quite a long time. I was thinking—"

"I was thinkin'—" began Arthur Augustus.

"I was thinking," said Lowther, looking fiercely at the Fourth-Formers with the eye that was furthest from the fraulein, "that you might like to have tea in the study, Miss Erlen. It would be an honour and a pleasure to us."

"Yes, rather," said Tom Merry and Manners heartily.

"I was just goin' to suggest—"

"Thank you so much," said Miss Erlen. "But I am to have tea with Mrs. Holmes. I am to stay in the Head's house."

"Bravo, Kangaroo!"

The Cornstalk had just run two, and the score was equal now. A few minutes later Hammond ran a single, and a roar from the School House crowd announced that the School House had won the match. Figgins & Co. came off the field. Lowther scented a new and general demand for introductions, and he rose.

"It's finished," he remarked. "May I take you to the Head's house, Miss Erlen?"

"Thank you!"

And Monty Lowther walked the fraulein off, under the envious eyes of the other juniors.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "I wegard it as sheeah cheek of Lowthah to walk Miss Erlen off in that mannah!"

"What a stunning girl!" said Figgins. "Who is it?"

"Schneider's niece."

"My hat! Lowther was saying a twenty-stone—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The beast is in luck," growled Blake. "Of course, I would have gone to the station if I had known."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Trying to keep us off, too," said Blake indignantly.

"Blessed if I didn't have to stamp on his foot before he would introduce me. And he wouldn't have done it then, only he jolly well knew I'd introduce myself if he didn't."

"Yaas; I wegard Lowthah as a gweedy beast!"

"And he didn't want to go to the station," snorted Manners. "I'll bet he hasn't told the fraulein that."

"And he is studayin' her uncle to mimic him!" said Arthur Augustus. "Weally, someone ought to warn that charmin' gal against such an insidious boundah as Lowthah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here!" said Figgins. "We must get round Schneider to stay a bit longer, and see our play. After all, he ought to see it."

"Good egg! We'll go to him in a body, and request the pleasure of his company in the audience," exclaimed Kerr.

"After all, he's a decent old chap."

"Quite a ripping old gentleman, if you look at it in the right way," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "Looking at it in the proper light, he's quite right to make us swot at German. We come here to learn those things, you know."

"It's rather rotten to find fault with a man because he has a sense of duty, I must say," remarked Blake.

"Yaas, I was just thinkin' so. As a mattah of fact, I have always had a great respect for Herr Schneider's chawactah."

It was really surprising the high opinion the juniors had now of the master who had hitherto been far from popular in the Lower Forms at St. Jim's. Herr Schneider seemed to have jumped into popularity at a bound.

"We'll talk plainly to Lowther about this," said Manners.

"He's jolly well not going to keep Schneider's niece all to himself. It's only decent to—to look after her a bit while she's staying at the school, especially as old Schneider is such a good sort."

"Yaas, wathah! She must come to tea in Studay No. 6."

"Oh, that's rot, of course," said Manners. "She's coming to tea in our study."

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Where has that boulder got to?" said Tom Merry, looking towards the Head's house. "He's gone in, and he hasn't come out."

"My only hat!" ejaculated Blake. "He's quite mean enough to stay to tea."

"Oh, the rotter!"

"The—the swindler!" exclaimed D'Arcy indignantly.

As all the juniors would have jumped at the chance of going to tea in the Head's house while Miss Erlen was a guest there, it was difficult to see precisely where the meanness of Lowther came in. But they were all agreed that it was frightfully mean. And it was clear that Lowther had secured an invitation to tea with Mrs. Holmes, for he did not emerge from the Head's house.

The cricketers left the field, and Tom Merry and Manners went to their study to tea. Monty Lowther did not join them there. He was happy elsewhere.

The chums of the Shell had finished their tea, and were reading up their parts in "Catching the Colonel," when Lowther came in at last. There was a beatific smile upon Monty Lowther's face. His chums glared at him.

"Where have you been?" demanded Tom.

"Mrs. Holmes was kind enough to ask me to stay to tea," said Lowther calmly. "Of course, it was more entertaining for Miss Erlen to have a fellow of her own age there as well as Mrs. Holmes and the Head."

"Did she try her weight at the station?" asked Manners sarcastically. "There's a weighing-machine on the platform, you know."

"Try her weight!" said Lowther, with a stare. "No. Why, you ass?"

"Then you don't know whether she's sixteen or twenty stone?"

"Look here—"

"You were doubtful about that, you remember," said Manners calmly. "One time you said sixteen, and one time you said twenty—"

"If you can't speak respectfully of Miss Erlen, Manners, you'd better shut up!" said Monty Lowther. "I think your jokes are in bad taste."

"Well, you ought to know all about jokes in bad taste," conceded Manners. "They're in your line. What price chumming up with a nice girl, and imitating her uncle on the stage?"

Monty Lowther started.

"Oh, my hat! I'd forgotten the play!"

"Forgotten the play!" exclaimed his chums, in a breath.

"By Jove, yes! I—I say, we shall have to change it!"

"Change the play?"

"Yes."

"Too late!" grinned Tom Merry. "The parts have been served out, and some of the fellows are mugging them up already. Besides, it's a good comedy. It will bring down the house. Your part in imitation of the fraulein's uncle will be a regular shriek."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Manners.

Monty Lowther groaned.

The horror of the situation had burst on him suddenly. He was to imitate Herr Schneider on the stage for the laughter of all St. Jim's, and Herr Schneider was the affectionate Uncle Otto of that charming fraulein! For the first time it dawned upon Monty Lowther that the unscrupulousness of a true artist might be carried too far. Lowther looked so distressed that his chums took pity on him.

"Never mind," said Tom Merry comfortingly. "They'll both be in Germany before the play comes off. It's not till Wednesday week, and they're both going on the Saturday or Monday."

Lowther brightened up.

"Of course!" he said. "I—I was quite knocked over for a minute. Mind, you chaps, not a word—not a whisper! Miss Marie is a stunning girl—and awfully intelligent for a girl, too—but she wouldn't understand. She would think it insulting."

"Well, it is, isn't it?"

"Oh, rats! I mean, she'd never forgive me if she knew I'd taken her uncle off on the stage. She's fond of her uncle somehow."

"Give up the wheeze," suggested Manners.

Lowther shook his head.

"Impossible!" he said decidedly. "I've got the part simply perfect now, and it will be a regular scream. Of course, Schneider is a good sort—a very good sort. I've always had a very great respect for Herr Schneider. A chap can't help liking a really fine character like Herr Schneider's. As a pupil, I respect him no end. But as an artist—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"As an artist," repeated Lowther, "I regard him as my legitimate prey. I'm going to play the comic colonel, as arranged. Miss Erlen will be home in Deutschland by that time, so it will be all right. She will never know."

"Home where?"

"In Deutschland."

"Do you mean Germany?" asked Tom, with a stare.

"Germans call their country Deutschland," said Lowther. "It sounds ever so much better, to my mind. Sounds very sweet and poetical, I think."

"Ha, ha, ha! Since when?"

"Oh, don't be an ass! Have you had tea?"

"Of course we've had it!"

"Anything left?"

"Not a crumb! What the dickens do you want? You've had tea with the Head, haven't you?"

"Well, yes; but—but—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Manners. "This reminds me of the time Gussy was spoons on Glyn's sister. He lost his appetite."

"Don't be a silly ass!" growled Lowther, turning red. "Besides, I haven't lost my appetite. I'm jolly hungry. I was passing things to Miss Erlen, you know, and—and trying to talk German, and—and I didn't get much."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you silly asses are going to cackle like hens in a barn yard—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom and Manners, in chorus.

"Then I'll jolly well go to the tuckshop! I'm not going to stay here and hear you exploding like silly Chinese crackers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Slam!

Monty Lowther retired from the study, closing the door with a bang that rang the whole length of the Shell passage. But Tom Merry and Manners did not heed him. They roared.

CHAPTER 9.

Tom Merry Thinks of It.

HERR SCHNEIDER was surprised. He had reason to be surprised. During the next two or three days his surprise went on increasing.

German had never been the most popular item in the curriculum at St. Jim's. Learned and poetical as that great language undoubtedly is, the St. Jim's fellows had never really "gone" for it. They had tolerated it because there was no choice about the matter, and that was all.

But a remarkable change had come over the School House juniors, and a good many of the New House fellows too. From being a dry-as-dust subject, only barely tolerable in lesson hours, German had suddenly jumped into popularity. Fellows who had said that German gave them the toothache now took to German like ducks to water. In the German class Herr Schneider had a host of attentive pupils, who hung upon his lips, so to speak, for the pearls of wisdom that dropped therefrom.

And out of lesson-time fellows awfully keen on German would ask Herr Schneider to explain passages in Goethe, Heine, Korner, Schiller, Wieland, and all sorts and conditions of Deutsch poets. There was quite a run on Herr Schneider's leisure hours. His study was a remarkable centre of attraction. It was really extraordinary, and it was no wonder that the German master was surprised.

The German master's study was a pleasant room, with windows that looked on the quad, and roses growing round the window. It was large and airy and pleasant, and certainly very comfortable. But the fellows had never observed its attractions before. They had avoided that pleasant study as they might have avoided the Black Hole of Calcutta. Now, all of a sudden, every fellow—or nearly every fellow—was anxious to call on the German master, and get a quarter of an hour's extra German if possible. To be asked to tea by Herr Schneider was a delight and an honour.

Perhaps the extraordinary change might have been accounted for by the fact that Miss Erlen was a great deal in her uncle's study. Fraulein Marie was staying in the Head's House as a guest of Mrs. Holmes, who had taken a great liking to her. She spent a good deal of time in the German master's study. They would talk German together at great length, while the old gentleman smoked his moor-schaum and Marien knitted or sewed. She was a busy little lady, and her fingers were hardly ever idle. When fellows came in for "extra toot" Marien would sit by the window sewing while her uncle imparted great knowledge of irregular verbs to the happy pupils, whose attention very frequently wandered from books to the window.

Whether the fraulein was aware of her great attraction was mystery. She certainly showed no sign of being aware of it, and apparently did not care in the least about it at all. She was devoted to her uncle, and seemed to think more of the crusty old German master than of all the cheerful youths who learned German from him. But that, as Arthur Augustus remarked, only showed what a really ripping girl she was. Indeed, Arthur Augustus averred that she was as nice as his Cousin Ethel—than which there was no higher praise.

Herr Schneider was good-natured, and he was pleased by the popularity of his language and himself. But his leisure time was limited, and he did not exactly see any reason for giving it all up to extra tuition of ever-so-eager students of

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German. But fellows who could not get extra lessons would drop in to ask for the expounding of a single passage in Goethe, or the explanation of a word or two in Schiller, or even to borrow a German dictionary or grammar. Fellows who hardly knew whether Goethe was a poet or a poem would come in to talk German poetry with Herr Schneider.

But Lowther had the "pull" over the rest. In the course of two or three days the German master recovered from his surprise, and he began to understand. Then he would chuckle to himself a fat German chuckle whenever an innocent youth would drop in with a German book under his arm. And when he kindly gave Blake of the Fourth a list of German verbs to learn by heart, and suggested to D'Arcy that he should write out the whole of "Faust" from beginning to end as a valuable exercise, it became evident that Herr Schneider was not wholly wanting in a sense of humour.

But Lowther was high in favour. His devotion to German had started before the arrival of the fraulein, and therefore was evidently genuine.

So Monty Lowther had the run of the German master's study, and little walks with his kind master, in which Miss Erlen generally took part.

After those walks his chums would ask him whether he was getting on well in his study of the Schneider tricks and traits for the part of the comic colonel in the play; questions which Lowther answered very morosely.

As a matter of fact, Lowther was feeling a few tinges in his conscience over the way he was, practically, taking in the German master.

While Herr Schneider had been an unpopular and unpleasant taskmaster he was fair game; but now that the kinder side of his nature had been revealed, it did seem a little bit "thick" to be taking advantage of him in this way.

But the artist in Lowther was too strong for his better nature.

The character of the comic German colonel, as he worked it out for the play, was certainly excruciatingly funny, and his comrades were almost as keen about it as Lowther was by this time. It was certain to bring down the house. And Lowther comforted himself with the reflection that Herr Schneider and the fraulein would be hundreds of miles away before the performance came off. Meanwhile, of course, he was very careful—more careful than ever—to keep it dark.

Miss Erlen had heard about the coming play, and regretted very much that she would not be at St. Jim's to see it when it was performed. Monty Lowther regretted it too, though if it had been possible for Marichen to see the performance, it would certainly not have been possible for him to play his comic colonel as planned.

Meanwhile, the amateur dramatic society was getting on famously with the play. They all agreed in being down on the stage-manager. Lowther's part was so good that it put all the other parts in the shade, and there was so much "fat" in the part of the comic colonel that Lowther was pretty certain to take most of the biscuit. In the early rehearsals the fellows had to admit that Lowther was screamingly funny in his part, based on the German master. He made them howl with laughter in the midst of rehearsal, so it was pretty certain that the part would "knock" the audience.

Some of the amateur players were quite rusty about it. Lowther had bagged the best bit in the comedy, and he had bagged the German master as a model. But besides that, he had bagged the fraulein, for Miss Mario remained loyal to her first friend. That she liked Lowther better than the other fellows was never in doubt. And the fellows knew that she would never speak to him again if she knew how he

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was "taking off" her beloved uncle in every rehearsal of "Catching the Colonel."

It was like Lowther's check, they all agreed upon that. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was especially indignant. When he discovered that the part of Henry, who appeared in evening-dress throughout the play, was that of a waiter, and not even a head waiter, D'Arcy's feelings were almost too deep for words. He found some words, however, in which to tell the stage-manager his opinion of him. But Monty Lowther went on his way regardless.

Arthur Augustus had to take the waiter's part or "chuck" it, and he decided to take it. Not that it was worthy of his powers, of course; but, as he confided to Blake, the only way to make the play a success was to have at least one good actor in it, even in a small part.

Satisfied or not with their parts, the youthful players threw themselves heartily into the preparations for the great occasion.

One difficulty still remained unsolved as the days passed—the part of Fidelia in the play. Who was to play the heroine was a question. D'Arcy's Cousin Ethel, who had sometimes helped the Dramatic Society on such occasions, was unavailable. Lowther sadly admitted that there was only one fellow at St. Jim's who could play a girl's part successfully, and that it was himself, and he was not available for that part. And the kind offers of a crowd of fellows to relieve him of the comic colonel's part, and leave him free to play the colonel's daughter, were refused with discourtesy.

Nobody was very anxious to take a feminine part in the play, and Lowther had no confidence in the ability of any of his comrades to do justice to the part. Digby, who had a smooth and good-looking face, was about the best fellow for making up as a girl, but whether he could play the part was very dubious. But it was necessary to select somebody, as it was impossible to cut the part. Digby went through the rehearsals as Fidelia, the daughter of the comic colonel, in a way that made his manager tear his hair.

"We shall have to get a girl to take the part somehow!" said Lowther desperately.

"Can't be done!" said Tom Merry. "Dig will have to do it, and as the play comes off next week, you'd better make up your mind to it."

"I'll cut the part as short as I can," said Lowther thoughtfully. "Anyway, I shall knock them with the comic colonel, and they won't notice Dig's howlers."

"My bit as the ferocious general will come out all right now I'm working it up," said Tom Merry. "Better put in a few more lines for me."

"Rot!"

"And I think the hotel manager ought to come on in all the scenes," said Manners—"that is, if I take the part."

"Bosh!"

"Look here, Lowther—"

"Hallo, I've got to get to Schneider's study! I'm due for a lesson!"

"Cheeky ass!" growled Tom Merry. "Is the fraulein there?"

"She generally is," said Lowther calmly.

"Isn't it about time you chucked extra German? You must be Schneider perfect by this time."

"I'll keep it up till—till Schneider goes."

"Till the fraulein goes, you mean."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Lowther. And he left the study.

"Blessed cheek!" growled Manners. "I jolly well wish that Herr Schneider were staying for the play after all!"

"The chaps in Study No. 6 were talking of a deputation to him, to ask him to stay," said Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"Jolly good idea!"

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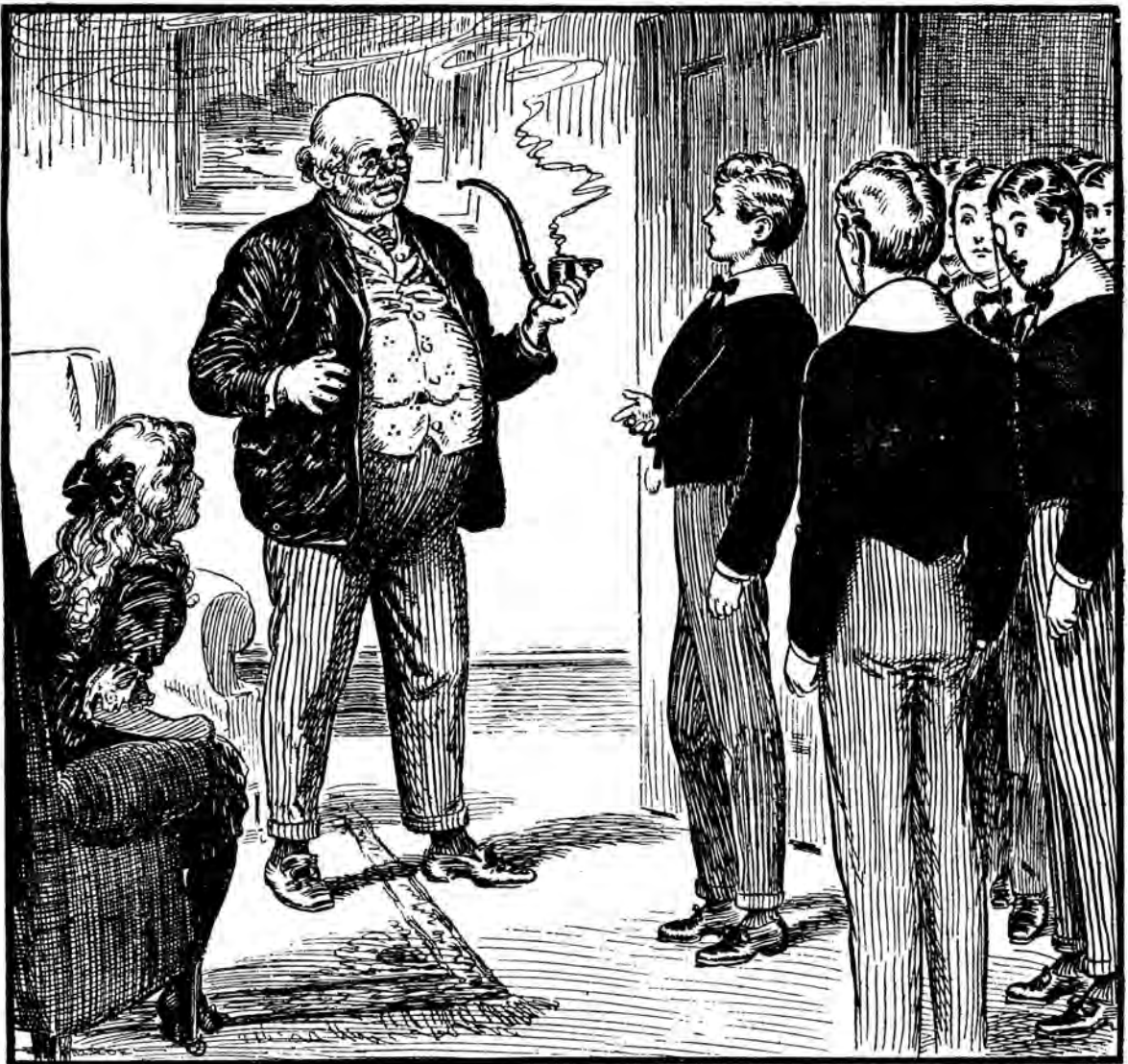
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"If you please, sir," said Tom Merry, "we're a deputation. We want you to stay at the school until after our performance." Herr Schneider beamed. Never had he dreamed his company was so esteemed in the Lower School! "I had alretty thought of staying till offer Speech Day," he said. "You are ferry kind, mein peys! I will stay mit pleasure!" (See Chapter II.)

"My hat!" Tom Merry jumped up suddenly. "My only hat! Hurrah!"

Manners stared at him.

"What's biting you?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

"What's the matter?"

"I've got it!"

"Ass! What have you got?"

"The idea—the catch of the season! If we can get Herr Schneider to stay for the play—it's only a couple of days later than he intended to leave, you know—why, his niece will stay too, of course!"

"Well?"

"Well, don't you see? She's very interested in the play, because she's done amateur theatricals at school. She said so—I heard her."

"So did I," said Manners. "But what—"

"Don't you see—Fidelia! She's our Fidelia! She can take a part in the play—our play! She can play the colonel's daughter!"

"By Jove!"

"The part will suit her down to the ground!" exclaimed Tom Merry enthusiastically. "She could do it like toffee. And she would if she's here; she's good-nature itself. Besides, she likes acting in plays. I've heard her speaking

about it. Schneider would be pleased, too, and we—ahem!—want to please him."

Manners drew a deep breath.

"What a stunning wheeze!" he exclaimed. "Why, that gets us out of all the difficulties at one fell swoop."

"It's ripping!"

"Hold on, though!" said Manners suddenly. "If the fraulein plays, what about Lowther's part? He can't take off her uncle under her very nose, you know."

"Oh! I forgot that!"

"He'll have to alter it," said Manners. "After all, I don't quite like the idea of caricaturing Schneider on the stage, when he's been so decent lately. I thought it was rather too thick all along. Let him change it a bit. He can make it a comic Frenchman instead of a comic German."

"Anyway, we're going to have the fraulein in the play if we can manage it," said Tom determinedly. "Why, it will be the making of the play. We've got a meeting of the Dramatic Society this evening, and we'll put it to the fellows and let it go by vote."

"Good egg!"

Meanwhile, Monty Lowther was basking in the sunshine of the fraulein's smiles, so to speak, in Herr Schneider's study, quite unconscious of what was impending.

CHAPTER 10.
A Minority of One.

"HERE we are!" said Figgins. The Amateur Dramatic Society had met in Tom Merry's study. Preparation had been hurried through, and the juniors were free for more important business.

The four chums of Study No. 6 were there, and Figgins, Kerr, Wynn, and Redfern, from the New House, and Kangaroo and Glyn, and the Terrible Three themselves. It was a large crowd for a junior study. The members of the society brought their "scrip" with them. By this time most of the fellows had their lines pretty well by heart.

Monty Lowther wore the worried look which a stage-manager is fully entitled to wear.

"All here?" he said. "Sit down, if you can find room. I'm afraid we've got to settle for Dig to take the feminine part in the comedy."

Digby snorted.

"Are you?" he exclaimed. "I'll bet you the colonel's daughter will play up better than the colonel, and chance it!"

"Order!" said Manners.

"Well, I'm not set on the part," said Dig. "I'm only taking it because you other fellows are too duffy to do it. I'd rather have the part of a bobby myself."

"Gentlemen—" began Tom Merry.

"Ahem!" said Lowther. "This isn't a meeting of the Debating Society, Tom. Let's get to business. Speeches are superfluous."

"Rats! I've got a proposition to make, to get us out of all the difficulties regarding the heroine's part."

"Oh! You've thought of some girl who could do it?" asked Lowther eagerly.

"That's it."

"Good! Who is it?"

"Fraulein Erlen."

"Wha-a-a-at!"

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Blake. "We're going to ask Schneider to stay and see the play, and I believe he will do it. And—"

"And she'd play if we asked her nicely," grinned Kerr.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's a ripping wheeze!"

"Impossible!" exclaimed Lowther, looking rather agitated. "I don't want you to ask Herr Schneider to stay and see the play."

"And why not?"

"Because I'm imitating him in my part, fathead!"

"You said yourself that he wouldn't know it if he saw the play, that he hasn't any idea of how funny he is," retorted Blake.

"Well, yes; but the fraulein would know. Girls are so jolly sharp—lots sharper than men. If he stays, she stays, and she'd spot it at once."

"Look here, Lowther. If you don't want the fraulein to stay longer at the school, we do!" exclaimed Kangaroo warmly.

Lowther coloured.

"I—I do want her to stay, of course. I wish she wasn't going away at all—I—I mean—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I don't want her to see the play, under the circumstances. How could I give a comic caricature of her uncle under her eyes?"

"Altah it," said D'Arcy. "I nevah approved of it at all. I wegard it as up to you, Lowthah, to chuck it up."

"Rot!"

"If you chawactewise my remarks as wot, Lowthah—"

"Rubbish!" said Lowther emphatically. "I can't possibly alter the part now. It's too late. Besides, the character would be nothing without the comic business I've worked up for it. The part as it's written would go flat as a pancake. It's the way I've worked it up that makes it a certain success!"

There was a general snort. Certainly there was something in what Lowther said: but the amateur actors were by no means disposed to admit that the whole success of the play depended upon Monty Lowther, and upon Monty Lowther alone. They were persuaded that their parts had at least something to do with it.

"Well, if your part goes flat, I dare say I shall be able to make a bit of a success of the general!" said Tom Merry.

"And I shall come out very strong as the hotel manager," Manners observed.

"And I really think I shall knock them as head waiter!" said Fatty Wynn.

"And my little bit as the naval lieutenant won't be an absolute failure, either," said Kerr, in a sarcastic tone.

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"You see, Lowther, you're weally not the only beastly pebble on the beach!" Arthur Augustus remarked severely. "And, even if your part falls flat, Miss Erlen will make a wippin' success of the hewoin's part, so that will be all wight!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I tell you it won't do!" roared Lowther. "I'm not going to spoil my part by altering it, and I can't possibly play it as I've arranged it if the Fraulein sees it. So that's knocked on the head!"

"Rubbish!"

"Yaas, wubbish and wats!"

"Bosh!"

"Come off!"

"Does this dramatic society consist of only a single member?" asked Figgins, rather excitedly. "I'm a pretty good actor, and I've let Lowther stick me into a part as hall-porter without turning a hair. But when it comes to leaving out a player that we need more than anybody else, I think it's time to tell Lowther to go and eat coke!"

"Hear, hear!"

"If Lowther can't make a success of his part without imitating Miss Erlen's uncle, and if he can't imitate her uncle in her presence, let him resign the part to somebody who can do it," said Figgins heatedly. "I could suggest a good many New House fellows who'd jump at it!"

"I should be perfectly willin' to twy that part myself—"

"I'll take it on if you like, Lowther," suggested Glyn. "I rather fancy myself in a part like that!"

Monty Lowther glared at the dramatic society. Opinion was evidently against him. Hitherto he had ruled with a high hand, but revolt was in the air at last. To give up his great part was not to be thought of. To give up all the comic "business" he had worked up for—it was asking too much.

At the same time, Lowther would have been very glad if the fraulein had played—if only circumstances did not make it impossible, for Lowther was really keener for Miss Erlen to stay longer at St. Jim's than any of the other fellows were.

It was a most unfortunate situation for Lowther—that he was forced to insist that the young lady whose presence was an endless delight to him should be excluded from the play. He realised, too, that the idea was an excellent one—that Marie was exactly the person for the part—if only the comic colonel had been based upon someone else, and not Herr Schneider. The "unscrupulous artist" in Lowther had landed the humorist of the Shell into a decidedly awkward position.

"Look here," he began desperately, "this isn't fair to me! I'd give anything to have Miss Erlen in the play; but—but you know it's impossible, unless I spoil the best part in the whole show!"

"We'll chance that," said Blake. "No worse to have the colonel a failure than to have the colonel's daughter a failure. And you can't say you think Dig would do the part as well as the fraulein would!"

"Well, no, I'd hardly say that. But—"

"Under the circumstances, a better player being found, I refuse to take the part," said Digby. "I decline utterly. I'm going to be a bobby!"

"Hear, hear!"

"If Dig refuses the part, there's no alternative to asking the fraulein," said Tom Merry. "Do listen to reason, Lowther!"

"But I tell you—"

"Put it to the vote!" exclaimed Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hands up for asking Fraulein Erlen to take Fidelia's part in 'Catching the Colonel!'" sang out Blake.

Every hand excepting Monty Lowther's went up.

"Now hands up against it!"

Lowther's hand was elevated in solitary state.

"Passed unanimously," said Blake. "It's agreed, then, that we go to Herr Schneider and ask him to stay for the play, and ask Marie to take a part?"

"Hear, hear!"

"But I tell you—" said Lowther despairingly.

"Rats!"

"Wubbish!"

"I tell you I can't alter the colonel's part at this time of day!" exclaimed Lowther. "I've got it fairly in my bones. I've made the character simply live. It must go on as I've planned it!"

"Then chance it!"

"And offend the fraulein, you silly ass!"

"Well, you must please yourself about that!" said Blake. "We can't have the whole thing mucked up because you've been rather unscrupulous in finding a model for a funny part. I call it unscrupulous, and that's plain English!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Silly ass! It's art!" howled Lowther.

"Art be blowed!" said Blake.

"If you mean this, you fellows—if you're determined——"

said the unhappy humorist.

"You bet!"

"Then I shall have to try to alter the part somehow. It will spoil it, and that may mean a failure for the whole thing!"

"Rats! Rubbish! Cheek! Bosh!"

"Perhaps some of us may be able to do a little bit towards saving it," sniffed Figgins. "I don't really believe it is quite a one-man show. There's such a thing as a conceited ass!"

"Well, perhaps the fraulein won't be able to play, after all," said Lowther, with a lingering hope.

"We'll jolly soon see about that," said Blake. "If she stays she'll play right enough. And if her uncle stays, she'll stay. Let's go and catch him on the hop now, you fellows. He's always in his best temper when he's smoking his pipe of an evening. Strike while the giddy iron's hot!"

"Yaas, wathah! Come on!"

"Good egg!"

And the Amateur Dramatic Society trooped out of the study, leaving Monty Lowther alone, in a most unhappy frame of mind. He did not take part in the deputation. He felt that he could not. One half of him—the schoolboy half—wanted the fraulein to stay at the school for ever and ever. The other half of him—the artiste half—wanted her to be gone before the play came on, to leave him free to make his great hit.

Whether he would be more pleased if she stayed or went he hardly knew himself. He waited in the study in a state of great anxiety to learn the result of the deputation to Herr Schneider.

CHAPTER 11.

Awkward for Lowther.

HERR SCHNEIDER was smoking the pipe of peace in his study. Fraulein Erlen, the charming Marichen, was seated on the opposite side of the hearth, reading aloud to him from a volume of German Lieder. The Herr looked very happy and comfortable. His niece's presence in the house had certainly made things more comfortable for the German master.

Indeed, the study looked so cosy and comfortable that it was difficult to see how the Herr could be anything but happy there. And it was much tidier than of old, too; and there were flowers on the mantelpiece and in the window, placed there by the little plump hand that had gathered them in the Head's garden, under the benevolent eye of the Head's gardener.

Herr Schneider was growing accustomed to plentiful visits to his study, but he looked a little surprised to see a dozen or more juniors when the door opened in response to his polite "Gum in!"

"Ahem!" said Tom Merry. "Good-evening, Herr Schneider!"

"Goot-evening, mein poy!"

"I—I hope we're not interrupting, sir."

The fraulein had laid down her volume.

"Tat is all right. Vat is it tat is wanted, den?"

"Only a few words, sir," said Tom. "The fact is, sir, we're a deputation."

"Mein Gott!"

"Yaas, wathah, sir! We wepresent the Juniah Dwamatic Society——"

"Yes, sir. We——"

"Betlah leave it to me, Tom Mewwy. You see, Herr Schneider——"

"Shurrup!"

"Weally, Mannahs——"

"You see, Herr Schneider, we're giving our play next Wednesday," said Tom Merry. "Before the school breaks up for our midsummer holidays, you know. It's rather an important occasion for us. But—but it seems that you are leaving on the Saturday or Monday before."

"On te Monday!" nodded Herr Schneider. "I am ferry sorry tat it is not tat I shall be able to see tat play meinself, isn't it?"

"That's what we've come about, sir. We want you to see it. We want to ask you, sir, whether you couldn't possibly stay over Wednesday, and see the play. There will be a ripping audience—most of the fellows' people will be here for the sports and the speeches, and so on—and you really ought to be present, sir. And if you could kindly manage to stay for that date, sir, you would be conferring a great favour on the whole of the Lower School, sir!"

That was really very well put; and it was impossible for

Herr Schneider to avoid feeling pleased. Never had he dreamed that his company was so esteemed by the Lower School of St. Jim's. The German master beamed all over his plump face.

"You are ferry goot, mein poy!" he remarked.

"I hope you will be able to do it, sir. It is possible that Miss Erlen might care to see the play, too!"

"Indeed I should," said Marie, with a smile.

Herr Schneider nodded.

"As a matter of te fact, mein poy, I had alretty tought of staying till ower Speech Day, after all," he said.

"Because Mrs. Holmes she have gootly ask mein niece if she like to stay for tat occasion, and I not vish to step in te vay of young peoples amusing demselves. I tink, den, tat I say it is ja. Ja wol! I tink tat I shall stay ower Speech Day, and so I shall see tat famous play. I hope tat it shall be vun great success."

"Thank you, sir."

"Bai Jove, that's wippin'!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I must wemark, sir, that I weally considah that you are a bwick."

"You are very good, sir," said Tom Merry, "and Miss Erlen will be staying, too?"

The German master smiled.

"Ja, ja; tat is so!"

"Then, perhaps, sir, Miss Erlen might care to take a part in the play?" pursued Tom Merry, encouraged.

Marie looked delighted.

Herr Schneider glanced at his niece, and could have no doubt as to whether she would care to join in the amateur theatricals or not.

"It might amuse Miss Erlen during her stay at St. Jim's, sir, to join in the amateur theatricals," said Manners.

"And there's a part in the play that would suit Miss Erlen beautifully, sir," said Blake. "We were going to let a chap make up for the part, but that would have spoiled it. If Miss Erlen would take it, it would be topping."

"Weally toppin', bai Jove!"

Herr Schneider laughed good-naturedly.

"I leaf tat to Marichen to say," he replied. "Vat is it tat you say, Marichen? You like to do him?"

Marichen clapped her hands.

"I should like it so much," she said. "That is, if I am not taking away someone else's part. Of course, I should not like that."

"Oh, that's all right, miss!" said Digby eagerly. "I was going to do Fidelia, but I'd much rather be a bobby."

"And you think I could do it well enough?" asked Miss Marie.

"Oh, sure of that!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That's all right, and there's nearly a week to rehearse."

"And Lowther will coach you," smiled Blake. "Lowther is a jolly good coach, you know. He's our stage-manager, and he will be delighted to get you to take the part."

"Then I shall be very pleased," said Marichen.

"Thank you, Miss Erlen," said Tom Merry. "It will very likely make the play a great success. We were simply stumped for a heroine. I've brought a book of the play for you to read over when you like. You part's Fidelia."

"Oh, it will be delightful! I shall enjoy it so much!" exclaimed the girl, her eyes sparkling. "Dear, kind uncle to stay here to please me, when I know you want to be away in Germany."

"Tat is nozzing, liebechen," said Herr Schneider. "I shall be ferry happy nut meinself ven it is tat I see you play yourself on te stage."

"Then it's settled," said Tom Merry. "We'll let you know about the rehearsals, Fraulein. Of course, we shall have to rehearse—ahem!—as often as possible, as it is only a week to the performance. Thank you so much. Good-night, Herr Schneider."

"Good-night, mein poy."

"Guten Abend, Fraulein!"

"Guten Abend!" laughed Marichen.

And the deputation retired greatly satisfied. And Miss Erlen proceeded to read "Catching the Colonel" to her uncle, instead of the Lieder she had been engaged upon when the deputation arrived.

Monty Lowther looked inquiringly at the deputation when they returned. It was evident from their looks that they had been successful.

"Well?" grunted Lowther.

"All wight, deah boy!"

"Right as rain!" chirruped Blake. "The Fraulein's staying, and she's going to play Fidelia. It will be a huge success."

"And what about my part?" said the unhappy humorist.

"Oh, blow your part!" said Blake.

"First rehearsal with Miss Marie in the cast to-morrow," said Tom Merry. "You'll have to be rather careful,

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Lowther. She's sure to be offended if you reproduce any of Herr Schneider's funny little ways."

Monty Lowther groaned.

"I sha'n't be able to help it. I tell you I've fairly got the thing going. I simply like the part. I'll do my best, but—"

"Well, if you offend Miss Marie, you'll have to stand out of the cast," said Figgins.

"What?"

"Yass, wathah! We're not goin' to have a fellow in the cast who offends the only lady membah of the company!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, go and eat coke!" growled the disgusted Lowther.

And for the rest of that evening Monty Lowther was not happy. He was glad that the Fraulein was not going away so soon, after all. But the prospect of having to unlearn all that he had learned of his part—of having to give a "wooden" show instead of the "regular scream" he had planned, simply dismayed him; and took away all his satisfaction in playing the title-role. What was the good of having all the "fat" if he was not to be allowed to make anything of it? And the part in itself was nothing. It depended entirely on the "business" the actor introduced into it. The idea of caricaturing Herr Schneider for the part had been an inspiration—a stroke of genius. And now it was knocked on the head. And there was no other model for such comic business at hand. Monty Lowther had to think out the part from an entirely new point of view—to rearrange it, and plan it out afresh in every detail.

He felt that it was not to be done. He had the part perfect, and if he dropped it as planned, it would come out stolid and wooden. In the rehearsals he would be able to keep himself in check, and simply "walk" through the part. But when the performance came—what if the artist in him broke out uncontrolled, and ran away with the part, so to speak, and played it on the lines already laid down? Lowther was a born actor, and he knew that that was possible. Once in the glare of the footlights, the impulse to play the part in the most telling manner—to make the very best of it, to squeeze out all the humour in it to the very last drop—might be strong enough to banish all other considerations.

But Lowther kept that doubt to himself.

For if he had confided his fears on that subject to the rest of the dramatic society, it was extremely probable that he would have been barred from playing the comic colonel at all.

CHAPTER 12. Doubtful Prospects.

MONTY LOWTHER sometimes wore a worried look in these days; but in some respects he was much to be envied, and the fellows certainly envied him. For to Lowther fell the task of helping the Fraulein with her part, and coaching her in the "business" of Fidelia, the daughter of the comic colonel in the play. Marichen was very apt; and her abilities as an amateur actress delighted Lowther—she took to the part like a duck to water, so to speak—indeed, Lowther's opinion was that the Fraulein was a "duck" in all respects. She soon had her lines by heart, and knew all her cues; and the slight German accent in her speech was, of course, suitable to the daughter of a German colonel in the comedy.

There was no doubt that the Fraulein was a tremendous acquisition. With such a heroine in the part of Fidelia, the comedy was really assured of success. Even if Lowther's part went flat, it wouldn't matter so much now, as his chums comfortingly told him. Lowther replied to such Job's comforters with painful frankness—indeed, his remarks to his fellow-actors at this time were, in the language of Truthful James, "frequent and painful and free."

But upon the whole Lowther was greatly enjoying himself. The necessity for studying the German master's little idiosyncracies was over now, and he was able to drop the "extra toot," to some extent, and devote his time to coaching Marie instead. And that coaching was undoubtedly a delightful experience. As much of Fidelia's "business" was in dialogue with the comic Colonel Potsdam, Lowther often went over his lines with Marie, under the elms in the quad, or walking by the shining Ryll. And at such times it was very difficult to avoid delivering the lines in the manner of Herr Schneider, as he had got them up. Often and often Lowther had to suppress a specially telling "bit" because he knew that Marie would recognise in it some peculiarity of her dear Onkel Otto. But sometimes the "patter" came out unconsciously in the manner of Schneider, and once or twice Lowther noticed that Marie looked at him curiously, and he would colour with vexation. In spite of all his caution, he felt that Marie was beginning to "tumble"; and then he would go on with his lines in a stolid and wooden manner

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FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE,

is the principal character in one of the complete stories contained in

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to reassure her. He knew only too well that if Marie suspected the truth, that Onkel Otto had been taken mercilessly as the model for a ridiculous character, she would never pardon him. She would never understand the excusable unscrupulousness of an artist.

But when Lowther was particularly careful to avoid delivering his lines in the telling manner so sedulously planned, they came out wooden and stilted, and he knew that Miss Erlen wondered at his want of effect in them, and was surprised that so wooden an actor had been chosen for the chief part in the play. He felt an almost irresistible inclination to show her how he could really do the part, if he chose—only that he knew it would lead to disaster. For offence taken by the Fraulein would have been disaster to Monty Lowther.

"It is curious," said Marichen, one afternoon when they were going over their parts under the elm after lessons. "Sometimes you speak your lines with a German accent, and at other times not. Is the colonel in the play supposed to speak with German accent?"

Lowther coloured.

"Ahem! It can be done either way," he stammered.

"We—we had an idea originally of making Colonel Potsdam speak broken English, but we dropped it."

"It makes the part funnier," said Marie.

"Yes, but—but upon the whole we've dropped the idea."

"You have had much experience in acting?"

"Heaps!" said Lowther.

"I think you could put more into the part if you liked," said Marie. "It always seems to me that you keep back something in it, as if you are keeping yourself in reserve. But such a part should be played with force, should it not?"

"I—I suppose so."

"It must be a very funny part—almost farcical," said the fraulein. "I do not think the audience will laugh if you do it so solemnly."

"I—I must try to make it funnier," said Lowther, with an inward groan. He could have made it funny enough if he had liked, but then the fraulein would have recognised the caricature of her uncle.

All the junior dramatic society were looking forward to the first rehearsal with the fraulein in the cast. Marichen was so pretty and charming, and at the same time so modest and almost timid, that all the juniors liked her immensely. Arthur Augustus was already three-quarters in love with her. The only fellow, in fact, who was proof against her charms was Figgins of the Fourth. To Figgins there was only one girl in the wide world, and that was Cousin Ethel. But even Figgins said that the fraulein was stunning.

It was with quite an unusual enthusiasm that the amateur actors came together in the junior common-room in the School House for the first rehearsal in which the fraulein took a part.

There were a good many fellows in the dramatic society, and lately Tom Merry, the president of the society, had been simply besieged by other fellows who wanted to join.

Kerr was envied by all the amateur actors. As Lieutenant Lynn in the play, he had to hold the fraulein's hand several times, and Kerr had suggested that the engagement scene could be made much more effective by Lieutenant Lynn and Fidelia kissing one another—a suggestion that made Monty Lowther glare at Kerr as if he would bite him.

Miss Erlen had her part quite pat for the rehearsal. All the other members played up uncommonly well, with the exception of Lowther. Lowther could have acted their heads off, as he told Tom Merry afterwards, with a groan, if he had let himself go. But he dared not let himself go. It was only by the strictest self-control that he avoided doing his part on the Schneider lines once so carefully laid down; and his self-control made his part in the rehearsal more wooden than ever.

When the rehearsal was over the juniors warmly congratulated the fraulein on the perfection of her part.

"We're all getting on rippingly," said Figgins, "with one exception."

"Yass, I must remark that Lowther's part goes awfully heavy," said D'Arcy.

"You must manage to put a bit more life into it somehow, Lowther," said Kerr, with a shake of the head. "You can't go through a part like the comic colonel in the manner of a tailor's dummy or a wooden horse."

"Just what I was thinking," chimed in Digby. "If you don't feel equal to the part, Lowther, there's still time to find a substitute—for the good of the piece, you know."

"I rather think Reddy could make it go," Fatty Wynn remarked reflectively.

"What do you think, Lowther?"

Lowther snorted.

"I think you're silly asses!" he snapped. "I can act your silly heads off, and you know it."

"Oh, draw it mild!"

"Kerr and I are the only actors in the school!" said

Lowther savagely. "The rest of you simply walk through the parts."

"Well, you don't walk through yours," said Manners.

"You roll through it. You bump through it! You—"

"Oh, rats!"

"Look here—"

"Well, you look here—"

"Pway wemembah there is a lady pwesent, you chaps,"

murmured Arthur Augustus.

And the argument, which was growing warm, ceased all of a sudden.

Monty Lowther walked back to the Head's House with the Fraulein. He was feeling very miserable. He knew only too well that his part was not a success the way he was doing it. He knew that the audience would yawn over the comic colonel, who was not at all comic in his new style, instead of roaring with laughter. Monty Lowther's part would be an utter, hopeless failure, and all because he had had to abandon the imitation of Herr Schneider, which would have made the part a regular "shriek."

He knew that the fraulein shared the opinion of the juniors as to his performance, though she said nothing of the kind, and he knew that she sympathised with him over his want of success. It made her very kind to him, and she said all sorts of nice things to encourage him, which made Lowther more devoted to her than ever, and less than ever inclined to shock her feelings by playing the part as he really could play it if he had chosen.

The amateur actors discussed Lowther freely when the fraulein was gone. They didn't want the performance spoiled. It was a great occasion—the greatest opportunity the amateur dramatic society had in the whole year of showing their abilities before a really distinguished audience. It was too rotten if the effect was to be spoiled by the shortcomings of their actor-manager.

"Lowther ought to be talked to!" exclaimed Blake. "This can't go on. He's frozen on to the fattest piece in the play, and he's mucking it up. I don't see it!"

"Wathah not!"

"If he can't act, let him make room for a chap who can," said Herries. "He's stuck me into the play as an extra guest at the hotel. I don't mind if he can do justice to the leading part. But he can't!"

"He can't, or he won't!" said Digby. "I'd be willing to take on the comic colonel, and let Lowther come in as a bobby."

"He freezes on to the part, and he's spoiling it!" growled Glyn. "I don't see that we've got to put up with it."

But Tom Merry and Manners backed up their chum. They understood the difficulties Monty Lowther was labouring under. They could not help sharing the doubts of their comrades, but they were loyal to Lowther. They simply would not hear of his being asked to give up the part.

"Besides, he wouldn't give it up," said Manners.

"Have a vote on it, and make him," said Digby. "It's for the sake of the play. It's nothing against Lowther. If he can't do it, let him stand down."

"He could do it ripingly," said Tom Merry. "You know how he made us yell over it ourselves in the first rehearsals. He's had to drop the Schneider bizney on account of Miss Marie. You all know that."

"It comes to the same thing. He can't do it now."

"It's his part," said Tom firmly. "I dare say he will play up all right, somehow, when the play comes off. After all, we know that he's the best actor in the school excepting Kerr."

"What's the good of a good actor who doesn't act?" growled Blake. "He's down on us like a sack of coke when he's not satisfied with us. And he does his part the worst of the lot. You must see that."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But Tom Merry was firm, and the players broke up in a very dissatisfied humour. It was too rotten to think that if they all did their best, and with such an acquisition as the fraulein too, the play might still be "mucked up" by the failure of the leading part.

Afterwards, in the study, Tom Merry and Manners ventured to hint to their chum that the dramatic society expected better things of him.

Lowther gave a dismal groan.

"You know how I could do it if I tried," he said. "I had the part perfect."

"But can't you think out some other wheeze?" urged Manners. "Couldn't you model the comic colonel on somebody else instead of Schneider? There's your own uncle, you know. He's rather a funny merchant."

"You let my uncle alone!" growled Lowther.

"Well, I was only making a suggestion."

"It's too late!" grunted Lowther. "I had the part exactly as it ought to be played. The possibilities in it were simply immense. Sometimes it comes out in spite of myself, and once or twice I've thought that Fraulein suspected some-

thing. Unless I speak the lines in a wooden way, I got unconsciously into the Schneider style. I have to go over them deliberately, or I should drop into it. If I once forgot myself in the part—and that's what an actor must do to make it a success—then I should bring it all out as I've planned it, and Marie would recognise her uncle at once."

"But if you go through it in that stilted way on the day we give the play, the audience won't see anything in it at all," said Tom Merry.

"Do you think I don't know that?" growled the unhappy humorist. "I've got to chuck up the biggest hit I've ever had a chance of making—for the fraulein's sake."

"That's all very well. But what about the play?" snapped Manners.

"Oh, hang the play!" said Lowther crossly. "I'm not going to hurt Marie's feelings for the sake of a play. It's rotten enough for me, anyway; and I think you fellows might be a bit sympathetic, instead of ragging a chap."

"Oh, we back you up, of course!" said Tom Merry, with an effort. "But it begins to look to me as if we've got jolly doubtful prospects. And it was going to be such a howling success!"

"Do you mean that you want me to stand out, after getting up the whole thing?" demanded Lowther. "Well, I can't! 'Tain't only that it's my part, but—but there are other reasons. The fraulein would be disappointed if I wasn't in it."

"Why should she mind?" asked Manners.

The only reply to that was a snort.

"Well, I don't see—"

"Besides, in the reconciliation scene at the end the colonel has to kiss his daughter," said Lowther. "He kisses her on the forehead."

"Well, Digby or Redfern could do that, couldn't they?"

"Could they?" said Lowther, looking positively murderous. "Let me catch 'em, that's all. If you want Digby or Redfern to get their necks broken, you'd better suggest it."

"Oh, there's no arguing with you!" growled Manners.

"Then shut up!" said Lowther.

And his chums shut up; but they were far from satisfied.

CHAPTER 13.

The Great Occasion.

THE great day arrived at last.

There had been continual rehearsals of late by the Junior Dramatic Society, and the comedy was going strong, with the single exception of the leading part. Monty Lowther still failed to give satisfaction to his fellow-actors.

But the Fraulein, in the part of Fidelia, was a dream, as the juniors enthusiastically declared. And all the other members were getting on famously. Fatty Wynn made an ideal head-waiter; he had the figure for it, as his friends told him admiringly.

Tom Merry was very good as a truculent general; Manners was quite satisfactory as an important and imposing manager of a Grand Hotel. Kerr left nothing to be desired as a naval lieutenant. Figgins made an excellent hall-porter, Digby a very passable policeman, Kangaroo, Glyn, and Herries and Reilly passed muster as fashionable guests in the hotel; D'Arcy and Kerruish and Dane and Redfern were excellent waiters. There were plenty of "supers" for still more considerable parts, and they all filled them very well. Only the great part of the comic colonel was really unsatisfactory. But the amateur actors had to "chance" that.

Lowther held on to his part grimly. Whether he could do it justice or not, he was going to do it. His motive might have been only his natural keenness to act, or the fact that the acting would be with the Fraulein, or the still more important fact that the comic colonel had to kiss Fidelia on the forehead in the last scene. His motives were probably mixed. Anyway, he was going to play the part.

On Speech Day there was always a big crowd at St. Jim's, and many things going on. Visitors arrived early, and many of them stayed late. There were school sports—now a minor consideration to the amateur actors. There was a Greek play by the Sixth, over which the visitors politely stifled their yawns. But the great event of the day—from the point of view of Tom Merry & Co.—was the great comedy of "Catching the Colonel," performed by the members of the Junior Dramatic Society.

Tom Merry had obtained permission to use the lecture-hall in the afternoon; it was required in the evening for the Sixth. The performance was therefore to be a matinee. The comedy was only the length of a "curtain-raiser," and would occupy only about an hour. Admission, of course, was free. The friends and relations of the actors would alone have made a considerable audience; but, besides them, there would be a crowd of St. Jim's fellows, and many of their friends and relations too. Some of the masters were coming.

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and certainly Herr Schneider. It was rumoured that the Head himself might come in with Mrs. Holmes.

The old quadrangle at St. Jim's presented an unusually lively scene that day, bright with unaccustomed gay dresses and hats.

Arthur Augustus's noble "governor," Lord Eastwood, arrived early with Lady Eastwood, and they were much interested in the play. Arthur Augustus would have been very glad to tell them that he was playing the leading role, and he could not help observing a slight smile on his lordship's face when he announced that his part was "Henry, a Waiter."

"Just the part for you, Arthur!" said D'Arcy's elder brother, Lord Conway, who was among the visitors.

"You will do it excellently, I am sure," said Lady Eastwood innocently.

"The success of the season, no doubt," smiled the earl.

"I'm afraid the play won't weally go as it ought," said Arthur Augustus, with a shake of the head. "Lowthah has the leadin' part, and he plays it wotterly! But we've got a wippin' hewoine—Herr Schneider's niece."

"Herr Schneider?" said Lord Eastwood. "Your German-master?"

"Yaas."

"The chap who makes you grind—what?" said Lord Conway. "The chap you are going to lick when you grow up?"

Arthur Augustus blushed.

"Did I evah say that?" he asked.

"Yes; I've heard you," said his brother cheerfully.

"Ahem! I take that remark back now. It was weally a wathah disrespeetful thing to say. Herr Schneider is a weally good sort."

"Eh?"

"He is a bwick!"

"Oh, he's a brick now, is he?" said Lord Conway. "Is his niece pretty?"

"A weglah dweam!" said Arthur Augustus enthusiastically. "She's as pwetty as Cousin Ethel, and vewy neahly as nice—in fact, quite as nice! We have all been wathah unjust to Herr Schneider. We see it now."

"Since his niece came?"

"Ya-a-a-as. Of course, that has nothin' to do with it!" said D'Arcy hastily.

"Of course not!" grinned Lord Conway. "I remember when I was a kid at St. Jim's there was a fellow in the Sixth we all wanted to scalp. But when his sister came there wasn't a more popular fellow in the school!"

"Weally, Conway—"

"How are you getting on with your German, Arthur?"

"Wippingly! It isn't weally such a beastly language as I supposed; it can sound vewy pwetty sometimes. I've been havin' some extwah lessons, too—Weally, Conway, I wish you would not chuckle in that idiotic way!"

But Lord Conway persisted in chuckling in that idiotic way, and Arthur Augustus walked away with his noble nose in the air.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry was welcoming his old governess and guardian—Miss Priscilla Fawcett. Manners's people had come, too, and Monty Lowther's crusty old uncle was there—somewhat less crusty than usual under the influence of the occasion. Old Mr. Lowther was rather a terrible old gentleman, and he had a way of staring directly at a fellow and ejaculating "Ugh!" that was quite unnerving. Manners dragged Lowther aside, after a talk with the old gentleman, and whispered excitedly in his ear.

"There's your chance, Lowther."

"Eh? What?" said Lowther. "What do you mean?"

"Your uncle."

"What about my uncle?"

"For a model!" explained Manners. "I suggested it to you the other day, and you didn't seem to cotton to it. He would be worth a fortune to any comedian. You know you said yourself that all grown-up people are funny without knowing it—"

"Look here—"

"Model the comic colonel on him!" pursued Manners, with keen enthusiasm. "Make him stare like an Egyptian mummy, and gurgle 'Ugh!' all the time—"

"You silly dummy—"

"It will bring down the house!" said Manners, with conviction. "It nearly makes me howl when I just see him talking to a chap. On the stage it would be irresistible."

Lowther glared.

"If you can't speak decently about my people, Manners, you had better shut up, unless you want a dot in the eye!"

"But, you know, you said yourself an artiste can't afford to be scrupulous about hurting people's feelings," urged Manners. "Anybody is fair game for a genuine artiste. Take off your own uncle on the stage instead of somebody else's uncle—"

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OUR COMPANION PAPERS: "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY. Every Monday. "THE PENNY POPULAR," Every Friday. "CHUCKLES," 10. Every Saturday, 2.

"You dummy—"

"I don't suppose he'd know—you explained that people never know how funny they are, you know. Everybody else would know, but you said yourself that that didn't matter."

"Fathead!"

"Well, I'm only quoting your own words, and I tell you your uncle is worth a fortune to any comedian. Where are you going, Monty, old man?"

Monty Lowther was stalking away.

Manners chuckled. It was very odd that a humorist like Lowther should not be able to see the humour of Manners's really excellent suggestion.

After dinner the amateur actors were very busy. The stage had to be prepared, and there was a great deal of work to be done. Tom Merry & Co. had expended a great deal of hard cash upon scenes, determined to spare no expense in getting up the comedy in a really first-class manner.

Members of the dramatic society who had not parts in the play were enlisted as scene-shifters; there was no lack of willing hands to make the work light.

The curtain was arranged so that it would go up and down without a great deal of exasperated persuasion. Everything was in apple-pie order. Polite juniors, with their best manners on, showed the audience to their seats as they began to arrive. The company gathered in the Green Room behind the scenes, already made-up for their parts. The audience began to arrive in goodly numbers.

In places of honour in the front row with Lord and Lady Eastwood was Lord Conway and Lowther's uncle. Herr Schneider was an honoured visitor, and he sat next to Lady Eastwood, and she found him a very agreeable old gentleman. The seats filled with visitors, and behind them were ranks of St. Jim's fellows, with quite a goodly number of seniors among the juniors, and at the back of the hall was a swarm of fags. Tom Merry looked out through a chink in the curtain, and smiled with satisfaction.

"Simply a stunning audience!" he said. "The place will be filled. There'll be standing room only soon."

"My hat! Here comes the Head!" said Blake, looking out through another chink.

"Schneider's there already."

"And Linton and Lathom!"

"And Railton's coming in," said Figgins, taking a peep; "and Ratty—our giddy Housemaster! Lot he cares about comedies! He's come to look at Gussy's giddy lords!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"First time we've had an opportunity of performing to the nobility and gentry!" grinned Redfern. "I suggest a vote of thanks to Gussy for bringing a contingent from the House of Lords to see our humble little effort!"

"Weally, Weddy—"

"Well, they're going to have a jolly good play!" said Manners. "It will buck them up for the Greek play this evening. They will want some bucking up when Kildare and Darrel and Cutts begin on them with Æschylus and the chorus begins to howl."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The seniors' play will be knocked into a cocked hat, of course!" said Tom Merry. "The visitors have to stand that kind of thing, but this is what they really like."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We've got to make it go with a bang," said Blake emphatically. "This is our first big chance before a really select and distinguished audience. We're lucky to get it. The play's got to be a success. If only the leading part isn't mucked up!"

"If!" growled Herries.

"Oh, rats!" said Lowther crossly. "Do keep off that!"

"Ach! But I am sure that the leading part will be a great success," said the frauclin, with her sweet smile.

And Lowther felt comforted. Fraulein Marichen did not know what a tremendous sacrifice Monty Lowther was making for her; but she was just as kind to him as if she did know, and her kind encouragement was very grateful and comforting to the harassed actor-manager. Even if he failed, he would have the consolation of knowing that he had failed for the sake of Marichen, to spare her feelings; and, at all events, he would have her sympathy, though she would never guess the cause of his failure.

"Time!" said Tom Merry, with a last anxious glance over the company. "You fellows all ready?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then we'll ring up the curtain."

The hour had arrived!

The signal was given, and the curtain went up without a hitch. The buzz of voices in the auditorium died away, and all eyes were turned upon the stage.

CHAPTER 14.

Lowther's Luck.

"S EHR gut!" murmured Herr Schneider.

And there was a murmur of approval from the audience.

The scene on the stage represented the dining-room of the Grand Hotel, Slobberwasserbaden, opening on the terrace. Half a dozen guests were dining at little tables, waited upon by quite professional-looking waiters—one of whom wore a monocle. No amount of persuasion had convinced Arthur Augustus D'Arcy that waiters in Grand Hotels did not wear eyeglasses. And it had been agreed, finally, that, as it was a comedy, there was no harm in D'Arcy being as funny as he liked. And certainly the sight of Henry, the waiter, in a monocle provoked a smile from the people "in front."

At a table well placed to be viewed from all quarters sat Colonel Potsdam and his beautiful daughter. Monty Lowther certainly looked the part of a comic German colonel, for he was a past-master in the art of make-up. He had avoided making himself look like Herr Schneider; but the bald head, the fringe of flaxen hair round it, and the yellow whiskers certainly had a suggestion of the German master about them, and so had the rimless glasses perched upon a somewhat ruddy nose.

Fraulein Marie looked the part to perfection, in the character of Fidelia. She sat very demurely toying with a knife and fork.

Behind the broad back of the colonel, at the next table, was Naval-Lieutenant Lynn, alias Kerr of the Fourth.

And the glances that passed between Lieutenant Lynn and Fidelia, behind the back of the colonel, were very well managed.

Lowther had to speak first, and his opening speech, as originally planned, was a "shriek" in itself. But the way Lowther spoke it now, on his guard lest he should unconsciously slip into an imitation of Herr Schneider's peculiar mannerism and mode of speech, was dull enough.

"Ah, now we are at peace at last! Here we shall not be troubled by that fire-eater General Frumpstein, and no more by that impertinent young jackanapes Lynn!" said the comic colonel, not at all comically.

"Yes, papa," says the fraulein, with a glance over the colonel's shoulder at the young man at the next table.

"What are you looking at there, Fidelia?"

"Oh, papa!"

The colonel looks round and observes the impertinent young jackanapes at the next table, and gives a snort of wrath. That snort of wrath had been carefully modelled by Lowther upon a similar snort which often escaped Herr Schneider when an obtuse pupil found German verbs too much for him. But he felt that Marichen would know that snort, as it were, and he dared not reproduce it.

So the snort was omitted.

"You—Lynn—here!" ejaculates the colonel.

Kerr rises and salutes.

"What a happy chance to meet you here, Colonel Potsdam, in Slobberwasserbaden!"

"Happy chance! How dare you come here?"

"How fair you gum here!" was how it ought to have been put, but Lowther was carefully eschewing the German accent.

"But my dear colonel—"

"Away with you! Get out! I will not have my daughter persecuted by the attentions of a popinjay in the English Navy! Away!" roared the colonel.

"In this hotel all are free to come!" says Lieutenant Lynn.

"Bah! Call the manager! Have that man put out!" shouts the colonel to the head-waiter.

"But, my dear colonel—"

Expostulations of head-waiter, other waiters, then of the manager—comic colonel growing more and more violent and unreasonable. Lowther, as the comic colonel in a rage, founded upon Herr Schneider in a rage, had made his fellow-actors almost weep with laughter in the early rehearsals. But now it was tame—very tame. The audience did not laugh. The colonel's rage did not seem very outrageous, and his want of fire damped the scene. All the actors felt it, as well as the audience, and it made them slack.

The scene, which should have been a shriek of laughter from beginning to end, went on without a single smile from the audience, and with a chill of doubt and want of conviction in the actors. All depended on the comic colonel—and the comic colonel was not comic. Once or twice, indeed, there came a gleam of humour from Lowther, as he forgot himself and relapsed into the part as it should have been played. But he quickly remembered who was present and pulled himself up short, falling once or twice into such confusion in consequence that he forgot his lines, and Manners and Blake had to "gag" to fill a blank.

The first scene, therefore, dragged by, without a laugh, in

a chill of silence, and people in the lecture-room were trying not to yawn.

The curtain went down on the first scene, and there was some faint-hearted hand-clapping, evidently dictated wholly by politeness on the part of the visitors.

Behind the curtain the actors were almost in despair.

"For mercy's sake, try to put a bit more life into it, Lowther!" said Tom Merry, almost with tears in his eyes. "You roll through it like a tub."

"You act like a chief mourner at a funeral!" groaned Manners.

"The audience will be taking it for a tragedy, instead of a comedy!" howled Blake. "I believe I saw some of 'em crying."

"Nuff to make 'em cry, anyway!"

"Some of them are going out!" groaned Figgins, taking a peep through the curtains. "They are fed up already."

"No wonder!"

"Pile in, Lowther!" urged half a dozen fellows. "You know what you can do if you try."

"I'm doing my best!" said Lowther moodily.

"It all hangs on your part," said Kerr. "The play is simply built up round that. You'll have your chance in the terrace scene. For goodness' sake put your beef into it, or the audience will all clear off. We can't do anything unless you make your part a little bit alive. You made yourself the centre of the whole show, and now you're acting like a dead fish!"

"Or a dying cod!" growled Herries.

Monty Lowther looked at the fraulein. She was silent and sympathetic. Evidently she felt that the lifelessness of Lowther's acting was ruining the play, just as all the other members of the company felt. If only she hadn't been there! But she was there!

"I suppose you think I'm an ass, like all the rest?" murmured Lowther desperately.

Marichen shook her head.

"No, no, no! Perhaps it is what you call stage-fright—heim?"

"Stage-fright!" said Lowther indignantly. "I've never had that! That's rot! I could make the audience simply yell if I liked."

Fraulein Marie opened her blue eyes.

"Then why do you not?" she inquired.

Lowther suppressed a groan.

"I—I've had to alter the part! It was stunning. Now I have to recite it like a kid reciting Shakespeare, or I shall drop into—into what I had planned, and—and—"

"But why not?"

Lowther could not reply to that question. He could not explain. If only Fraulein Marie hadn't been old Schneider's niece! If only he hadn't had that stroke of genius, in thinking of founding the character on Herr Schneider! He might have worked it up on some other lines—not so funny, perhaps, but good enough. But it was too late for that. He had the perfect part in his very bones, as it were, and if he departed by a jot or tittle from a sedate and stony manner he slipped immediately into the Schneider manner. Only by an iron self-control had he kept his artistic impulses in check during the first scene. He had felt the failure of the part even more keenly than the other fellows. That comedy was anguish to the humorist of the Shell.

"You simply must buck up!" Tom Merry whispered. "Put some life into it somehow. We can't have a rotten, staring failure, with all St. Jim's looking on, and all their friends and relations. Anything's better than that. After all, perhaps—perhaps the fraulein wouldn't mind much even if she spotted that you were caricaturing her uncle. You could explain to her afterwards."

"She'd never speak to me again!" said Lowther gloomily.

"Well, even if she doesn't, that's better than spoiling the whole show!"

"Is it?" growled Lowther. "Do you want me to hurt her feelings, when she's been so ripping all along?"

Tom Merry groaned.

"Well, no, you can't do it! Oh, you ass, what did you think of the rotten idea at all for, in the first place? We were all down on it. I suppose we've got to have a failure, and look a precious set of asses. And all the fellows are playing up as well as you let them! Can't be helped; the curtain's got to go up now."

"I—I'll do my best!"

"Get through it quick, and let's get it over and get out of eight!" said Blake bitterly. "That's the best thing that can happen to us now."

The curtain went up on the second scene.

The comic colonel, who was failing so lamentably to furnish the required comicality, was discovered on the stage, lurking among the palms on the terrace of the Grand Hotel. General

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Frumppstein crosses the stage, breathing vengeance and fury. The colonel pops out of sight behind a mass of ferns. General Frumppstein meets Fraulein Fidelia; they talk; the general repents him of his truculence on discovering that Fidelia is the colonel's daughter, and they walk off. Then enter Lieutenant Lynn, and discovers the terror-stricken colonel in hiding.

The following scene ought to have been the funniest in the whole comedy. But it did not begin funnily. And Lieutenant Lynn breathed in the colonel's ear:

"Buck up! Buck up, and talk as if you were alive, you silly ass!"

Fidelia was off the stage now. Perhaps it was the fact that the fraulein was no longer present. Perhaps it was the artistic impulse in his breast that would no longer be denied. Perhaps it was the determination to make that obstinate audience laugh, and arrest those who were quietly making their way to the door. Whatever was the reason, all of a sudden Monty Lowther bucked up. The comic colonel became really comic. All the youthful comedian's carefulness dropped away like a cloak. He threw himself into the part on the original lines.

And as he warmed up to it he forgot where he was. He forgot time and space. He remembered only that he was the comic colonel, and that it was his business to be comic.

Lowther was playing his part now!

The first laugh from the audience was like wine to him!

And, like wine, it seemed to go to his head.

He threw himself into the part with zest, with energy. He spoke in Herr Schneider's remarkable accent. He stroked his chin with his forefinger in Herr Schneider's inimitable manner. He puffed, and he snorted, and he ejaculated in exactly Herr Schneider's manner.

The audience were electrified.

Loud laughter greeted the earliest efforts of the newly-awakened comedian, and increased the roars as he went on.

To the St. Jim's fellows, who recognised the caricature of Herr Schneider, the acting was especially funny. They yelled with delight. And the Head and the other masters, who knew very well where Lowther had picked up all those comicalities, tried to look stern, but they could not. They laughed with the rest. Loudest of all laughed Herr Schneider, who saw the funniness of the colonel on the stage, and never dreamed for a moment that he was the model of it all.

In the wings the amateur actors gurgled with merriment. Lowther was almost too funny for words!

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the audience.

"Ha, ha, ha!" echoed from behind the scenes.

There was only one grave face, that of Fraulein Marie Erlen.

She had watched Lowther, with delight at first, from the wings, glad that her friend was making a hit at last, that he was showing that he could act, that he was the best actor in the cast. She had laughed at first. But gradually it dawned upon her what he was doing, and her pretty face became very grave. She glanced at her uncle in the seats, laughing and applauding in the innocence of his heart, and then at Lowther, reproducing with unmerciful exactitude on the stage every little trick of gesture and accent and manner, every little peculiarity of the unfortunate German master.

A gleam came into her blue eyes.

She understood.

That originally-planned part, which Lowther had so unaccountably dropped, was a cruel caricature of her kind Onkel Otto.

And now Lowther, doubtless urged on by the desire of success, and the previous coldness of the audience, had thrown all consideration for her to the winds, and was caricaturing her uncle with merciless abandon.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There were tears of laughter in the eyes of some of the spectators. There were tears of another sort in Fraulein Marie's eyes.

But Lowther had forgotten Marie by this time. Even when her cue came, and she had to appear on the stage again, Lowther was still the comic colonel, as originally planned. It was the artist triumphant, the artistic temperament galloping away with its owner, so to speak. Even Marie's grave looks and faltering voice did not recall Lowther to a sense of what he was doing. For the time he was Colonel Potsdam, and he played the part to the very last drop of humour in it.

Never had an amateur company of actors achieved such a success at St. Jim's. The audience were taken by storm. They laughed, they howled, they gasped, they applauded. The lecture-hall was in a roar. That killing scene atoned for all previous shortcomings. People who had gone out to yawn in peace were drawn back by the yells of laughter, and came in again to join in the hurricane of merriment. It was

a success that might have turned the head of any junior comedian.

The curtain went down at last amid thunders of applause. It had to go up again several times in response to shouts for Lowther. After Lowther had taken five or six calls there were still shouts of "Lowther! Lowther!" from the crowded hall.

Tom Merry wiped tears of laughter from his eyes.

He thumped Monty Lowther enthusiastically on the back.

"Oh, it was ripping—ripping—ripping!" he exclaimed. "Blessed if I didn't think Gussy's governor would have a fit! The Head was yelling like a fag! It was splendid—splendid!"

"I think it went off all right—what?" grinned Lowther.

"All right. It was a scream—a regular scream!"

"Hurrah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lowther glowed as he received the congratulations of his comrades. But the glow suddenly died out of his face. He remembered!

"Where's Marie?"

"Miss Erlen? Oh, she's here!" said Tom, looking round. But Miss Erlen was not there. The girl had quietly slipped away as soon as the performance was over.

Lowther gave a groan.

"Oh, I—I forgot her! She—she must have noticed—she knew—Where is she? I—I must explain—apologise—" Lowther rushed frantically away in search of the fraulein. Still in the guise of the comic colonel, but feeling anything but comic at that moment, the hapless humorist dashed away. He ran down the passage that led to the Head's house, and as he passed a window recess he heard a sob.

"Marichen!"

The girl looked at him.

Lowther stammered hopelessly. What was the use of trying to explain? There was no explaining to be done. But he tried. Never had he realised how fond of Marie he had grown until this moment when he knew that he had lost her for ever, that she would never feel anything but dislike and contempt for him again!

"Marie, I—I—I—I'm sorry! I—I want to explain. I—I—I—"

"There is nothing to explain. So that is why you were friendly to me, because you were watching my poor uncle to imitate him and make him ridiculous! It was wicked—wicked—wicked!" Her voice broke. "And—and I thought you were my friend, my good friend!"

"So I am," groaned poor Lowther. "I—I swear—I—I didn't mean—that is, I never thought—I mean to say that—that I never—I wasn't—if I—you—he—" Lowther was getting hopelessly mixed. "Don't you see? The—the—I—am—h'm—if—if—"

"Please don't speak to me any more!"

"But I—I—I—Marie—"

"Don't call me Marie! Don't speak to me! I despise you!"

And the fraulein walked away with her pretty little nose in the air, leaving Monty Lowther dumbfounded, and with wild ideas in his mind of blowing his brains out.

Fraulein Marichen did not speak to Lowther again before she left St. Jim's.

She departed with her uncle the next day, in apparent unconsciousness of Lowther's existence and of his imploring looks.

Lowther could not obtain forgiveness. He knew he did not deserve it, but it made him very miserable. He haunted the vicinity of the Head's house and the German master's study, without getting a word or a look.

And then Marie departed.

Lowther watched them drive away with a woebegone face, looking like anything but a successful comedian who had made the biggest hit on record.

He came back slowly to the School House in the deepest and bluest of blues.

"Never mind, old chap," said Tom Merry comfortingly.

"You made a splendid hit, anyway."

Lowther groaned.

"The fellows are still cackling over it," said Manners.

Groan!

"Art for art's sake, you know," urged Manners. "L'art pour l'art!"

Groan!

And Tom Merry and Manners went down to the cricket field and left him groaning.

THE END.

(Another Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's next Wednesday, entitled "THE OUTSIDER'S CHOICE!" By Martin Clifford. Order Early. Price One Penny.)

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OUR GRAND NEW SERIAL.



READ THIS FIRST.

Jem Stanton, a clever criminal, is sentenced to a long term of imprisonment on the strength of the evidence given against him by Paul Satorys, formerly a nobleman in the State of Istan. Stanton is the exact double of Satorys, and, escaping from prison, meets and strikes down his enemy. He exchanges clothes, and leaves Satorys lying in convict's garb, to be found by the warders. Stanton is aware that Satorys is the rightful heir to the throne of Istan, and determines to impersonate him, and make a bid for the throne himself. So exact is his impersonation, that even Satorys' fiancé, Grace Lang, is deceived. She urges him to push his claim to the throne, which he decides to do. His plans prosper, and one evening he sets sail for Istan in the yacht Bella, in company with Duvinny, Satorys' most trusted adviser, and Grace. In the meantime Satorys has recovered and proved his real identity, and is in chase of the impostor. Grace Lang also discovers the deception, but is helpless. When Satorys lands in Istan he finds that Stanton has established himself firmly upon the throne, and that Grace is a prisoner within the palace. In company with a loyal old sailor named Peter Mardyke, Satorys creeps into the palace grounds one night with the intention of catching a glimpse of the girl he loves.

(Now go on with the story.)

Satorys Sees His Message Delivered.

From the lighted room came the sound of wonderful music, low and soft; music which floated out into the moonlit gardens, to be lost amidst the mysteries of the night.

The sentry suddenly swung about, and moved away, his gigantic stature assuming enormous proportions in the half light. Peter gave a sigh.

"I never seed such a palace, sir," he said. "Puts me in mind of the place at Shepherd's Bush at home."

"Hush!" whispered Satorys, holding up his hand.

"That's just what I am doing," grumbled the old man.

"I have been hushing hard ever since I came out here, and it is main hard work, I can tell you. Give me the old Bull and Bush, where you can sing if you want to. Oh, I'm sorry, sir!"

At a second sign from Satorys the old man was silent as the grave, and in a sub-conscious way Satorys realised, as he gazed into the room he dimly saw before him, that the old man was there, ready to face death for him, brave as a lion, alert and strong.

But there was something else, something so wonderful that Satorys caught his breath. He saw the girl he was out to save come towards him. There was a sad and wistful look on her face, and as she advanced, attended by several women, he knew, of course, that she was entirely oblivious of his presence so close to her. Then, to his astonishment, he saw her turn and speak to a man who had just come forward, for he realised that the new-comer was Duvinny, and that the message was only now being delivered.

"Don't you do it, sir," said Peter, as Satorys made a movement to cross the terrace and gain the arched entrance of the room. "If you make yourself known at once, there will be an awful scene. Most likely the lady will faint, and

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then you will be nabbed as sure as eggs is eggs. Take things easy when you can, as the pickpocket said."

There was sense in the advice. Satorys kept back. There was a crowd of courtiers behind the vast hall. He caught sight of uniforms, the glitter of decorations, the sheen of beautiful costumes, and then as he watched the measured tread of the man on guard fell on his ear. Peter was right. It would have been utter madness for him to go forward and make himself known, and at that minute it seemed to him as though the girl were farther from him than ever she had been.

She came nearer to the open doorway, the scrap of paper in her hand, and Satorys watched her, seeing in her some vision of the night. She was saying something rapidly to Duvinny. Now she caught the arm of the man who had brought the message, and her face went white; but at a word from Duvinny she recovered herself and stood there outwardly calm, darting a nervous glance about her—at the animated throng, then at the soldier on duty a few paces away.

A Gilded Prison.

Duvinny had not found his task easy.

For long past Grace Lang had well-nigh abandoned hope of escape. She was watched night and day, unable to do more than exchange a few words now and again with Duvinny, who was, so far, unsuspected, troubled more than she could say by the attentions of the man who had seized the power, and whom she loathed.

When Duvinny entered the palace with Satorys' letter for the girl who was a prisoner despite the glittering parade with which she was surrounded, it was to hear that she was expected to pass through the gardens shortly on her way to church. It was there, and there alone, that the captive felt momentarily free.

"His Majesty is with mademoiselle at present," said one of the duennas who had the girl in charge.

Duvinny passed slowly into the sunlit gardens, affecting supreme nonchalance, hoping that chance would give him the desired interview, so that he might hand Miss Lang the note from the man she loved. Meanwhile, in the quarter of the Royal residence where Grace was lodged, Stanton, bearing himself with something of the dignity of his new role, was paying his daily visit on the girl whose obstinacy was bringing a dull hatred into his heart.

"You are still ready to think that I shall give way?" he said. "But you are mistaken. It suits my purpose to make you my wife. It will silence the stupid rumours which are still current as to my having impersonated the rightful king."

The girl started from her seat, her eyes flashing. "Do you think I am a child or a fool?" she cried angrily. "To be taken in by such words? I will never marry you! You are mad to think it! You brought me here a prisoner, and I suppose you can have your orders obeyed, but they will never be obeyed by me. I will never marry you—never! And one day justice will be done, and Paul Satorys will come to his own."

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"THE OUTSIDER'S CHOICE!"

"He is dead," said Stanton coldly, his eyes fixed on the girl with a strange glitter.

"I do not believe it," said Grace Lang proudly, and stifling the emotion she felt. "If he is dead—dead through some abominable actions of yours—well, there is nothing more for me to live for, and I am prepared to die!"

She sank back into the chair, averting her eyes from her tormentor.

"You say that," said Stanton, "but it is speaking like a child. What is the use of defying me? My power is great. If Paul Satorys were, indeed, alive, he could not save you from your fate. I'm recognised as king, and it is as king that I ask you to consent to be my wife!"

The girl shook her head. There had been no chance of her hearing news. She had been watched over, guarded every minute till she had felt she would go mad, but yet she had kept her courage through it all.

"You cannot make me marry you, I suppose?" she cried suddenly.

Stanton was silent.

She stretched out her hands in a gesture of appeal.

"What can it matter to you? If you have made yourself king, surely you can afford to be merciful, to set me free? I will ask for nothing more. If Paul Satorys is dead, then my life, too, is at an end. You must see that it is impossible, that I am no wife for you!"

Stanton seized her hands, and, with a quick movement, drew her to him; but she repelled him, anger and loathing in her face.

"You a king!" she cried, with intense scorn as she stood before him, her bosom heaving. "You! A thing like you! A man who tried to destroy the life of a girl who never did you any harm! You can make me a captive, for I am alone in the world, but you can do no more. I am ready to die, for there seems to be nothing more to live for, but marry you I will not! And maybe some day Istan will discover its mistake, and drive you out as the scoundrel you are!"

Stanton flinched under her words, but he recovered himself, and gave a contemptuous shrug.

"I would be careful if I were you," he said mockingly. "You have been treated like a princess, but there are other means of subduing you. You will bend to my will. I will give you time to think things over. You see how considerate I am! But think well. Unless you consent to do as I wish, your life here will be very different. Your women will have their orders. Think it over. You are mine; but I wish you to come to me dutiful and obedient, ready to find your pleasure in obeying my will. If not"—he gave a sinister laugh—"well, of course, there are means! You would not like to be made the slave of these women who look after you, to be forced to run and serve them under pain of a whipping, but none the less that will be your fate unless you realise your position. There, I will leave you. But remember what I say, for I mean it, every word."

Stanton turned and walked to the door. The curtains were lifted, and he passed through. The girl heard the rattle of scabbards on the polished floor without as the usurper was saluted by the two aides-de-camp who were on duty outside.

The girl dropped back in her seat, covering her face with her hands. It was easy to talk of death, but such a release from her troubles would, she knew, not be permitted her.

There was a movement behind her. Two of the women who looked after her were there, and one perched herself on a low ottoman at the prisoner's feet, and began to read aloud from a book she had brought under her arm. This reading aloud was part of the daily programme, and till then the girl had submitted to it, as she had submitted to all the other multifarious details of her captivity. It was as if she were to be driven into submission by a kind of dreary routine which killed her spirit. The dull, chanting voice of the Southern woman went on. The blazing heat of the day was waning now. Grace rose, and caught the book from the woman's hand.

"I am going out," she said impatiently.

It gave her a sense of relief to see that for the present, at least, she was obeyed.

There had never been any difficulty put in her way as to visiting the old priest Lara, at the church in the city, and she had made her way there, little knowing that Duvigny was following her, trying to find a favourable moment in which to let her know Paul Satorys had found his way to Istan and was close at hand. The old and white-haired priest had listened to her story before, but she knew that he was sceptical as to what she told him; but despite the fact that only for the few minutes when she was alone with the cleric she could escape the vigilance of her guardians, the girl felt a sense of relief. Perhaps it was the wonder of the edifice, the soft light which was shed through stained glass windows, and the distant music which reached her as she stood at the old man's side.

Duvigny saw her emerge from the building. The priest

raised his hand and murmured words of benediction as his fair visitor stepped into the carriage which was waiting for her at the door. There was no chance of speaking to her then, for one of the equerries took his seat facing the future queen, as she was regarded, and the motor dashed off back to the palace through the sunlit dust of the Grande Place of the city. Duvigny felt maddened at the delay. He thought of hurrying back to Satorys with his message undelivered, but refrained.

As has been seen, it was night during the reception at the palace when he at last had his long-sought-for chance, and he was very far from imagining that Satorys was watching him, as, with a hasty word of warning, he thrust the letter into the girl's hand.

Her words of affrighted amazement did not reach the watcher.

"Paul is here in Istan!" she cried.

"Yes; but speak low. It means the lives of all of us. He is safe. He wants to save you. He will come to you here!"

"But it is madness!" said the girl excitedly. "It would mean his death!"

"I know," said Duvigny gravely.

"You will implore him not to come. We must find a means." She gave a sob. "I—I thought never to see him again. Duvigny, you are true! You will go back to him, you will tell him that I think of him always, always, and that he must fight for the sake of the country, no matter what happens to me!"

"Yes, madam, I will tell him that, and—"

There was a swift movement from out of the dusky garden. The black sentry had marched off once more, and Satorys, followed by Peter, glided to the entrance of the room.

In the Night.

It was Duvigny who seemed to realise the deadly peril which they were all facing. The tramp of the sentry came plainly. Grace had given a faint cry as Satorys caught her to him, the world, the menacing danger, all forgotten. In another second the two strangers would be seen. The little group was on the threshold of the large salon. Duvigny gripped Satorys by the arm.

"Quick, sir! In there! Not a moment to lose!"

He pointed to another door a few paces further down the terrace, an ante-room this, and Satorys hurried the girl in there.

She was panting out something about his dire peril, but Satorys drew her to him.

"It doesn't matter about me. It is you. I am here to save you!"

Peter gave a shrug of his broad shoulders as he looked round the little room where they had taken refuge. He jerked the curtains across the French window, after shutting and locking the entrance, and then he turned to his companions.

"He would do it," he said to Duvigny, who was listening at the inner door which led to the large apartment. "And now we are in as nice and tight a place as ever anyone did see. It was job enough to get here, but as for getting out—well, I am blessed if I know how it is to be done! There, if it isn't just as I thought! They are coming to ask us how we are doing."

From outside was heard the buzz of talk. Duvigny made out the angry voice of Stanton.

"Mademoiselle is in there, sire. No; she is not alone."

It was one of the women in attendance who spoke. Again came the angry murmur, and the door was tried. Peter stood there, revolver in hand.

"I'm no good at fighting, gentlemen, if I may call you that," he said, with a groan; "and I don't know what's going to happen. Oh, if I was only back home at Wapping! Bit of gardening's more in my line."

The old man's words passed unheeded. Duvigny had dashed to the window, to peep through the curtains and see the tall figure of the guard.

Satorys drew back from the seat, where Grace had sunk down. His brows were knit. He had brought things to this pass, but maybe it was better. He dashed the thought aside.

"They will break in," he said hoarsely. "Duvigny, you will try to cover me!" He did not so much as glance at Peter. "I am going to try and cut my way through these scoundrels with the girl."

The door gave to a crashing blow, and Satorys saw as he sprang forward the sinister figure of the man who had supplanted him. Stanton was shouting out furious orders to the soldiers who surrounded him.

"Seize those scoundrels! My palace is not a bear-garden. Grace, my dear—"

He stopped as Satorys faced him, his revolver raised, and the usurper seemed for a second to shrink from the sight as though what he saw were a ghost.

"You!" he cried, in a dazed way

He saw his enemy standing there, and it seemed as if he forgot his own position, the power he held. Paul Satorys confronted him like a spirit of vengeance, and would hurl him from his proud eminence. The next moment fear had left him, and he roared out an order.

There was a savage rush for the door, the air was filled with the crack of revolvers, and Satorys charged forward, trying to reach his rival, firing again and again, seeing everything now in a red mist; thinking, as men do think in dire peril, of those things which seem to matter, thinking also of the girl who was crouching close to him, a look of agony on her fair face. Then he forgot all else, but the need to drive back the men who had forced their way into the apartment. Duvigny on one side of him, old Peter on the other, the three for a time held the foe at bay.

"I aren't used to it, governor," growled the sailor, as, with the perspiration streaming from him, he brought his fists into play. "There, you just take that, you ugly son of evil!" he went on, as he delivered a crashing blow in the face of one of the dark-skinned soldiers who had rushed forward.

Down went the ill-fated infantryman, his body impeding for a moment the movements of his comrades until he was dragged away.

"Plenty more where that came from!" cried Peter. "Ah, so you are here, are you, young fellow-me-lad?" Peter shouted, as a smartly-dressed officer tried to cut down Satorys with his sword.

Satorys flung himself at his assailant, jerking the sword from his hand; and the young officer, as he fell backward into the arms of his men, found his discomfiture completed by a blow from Peter.

"You just take that, with my compliments!" sang out the sailor. "Plenty more where that came from. You get back to your bricks and tops; we can do very nicely without you! Ah, but I believe I am getting my hand in at last! Nothing like a bit of fist-play for the liver, or when one is feeling down. Hallo! If it isn't old Fuzz Buzz, the chap as calls himself king, who is telling of 'em to come on! You just go and do your own dirty work!" roared the sailor, as he dealt smashing blow after blow at the soldiers, who were trying to reach Satorys and Anton Duvigny.

Satorys had seized the sword from the officer, and now his skill in its use was shown. The weapon described a ring of steel which the soldiers found it impossible to break through. Man after man went down, the room was choked with the fallen, and Satorys fought on with the reckless courage of despair.

He heard Stanton yelling out fierce commands; and then, as he was forced to yield a step by sheer weight of numbers, he thought of the fate of the girl. The sword snapped off short, and he was unable to parry a thrust which caused his right arm to drop helpless to his side.

Then came the charge which carried all before it. He saw Duvigny fall. There was a yell of savage triumph from the native soldiery, urged on by their leaders, and with Stanton standing at a safe distance exultant at the fact that the man he feared was within his power at last. Yet he feared Satorys still. Feared him as he saw him fighting like a lion at bay, screening the girl as best he could. It was a brave resistance. Neither Peter nor Satorys knew defeat, and, hemmed in as they were, they still held the enemy in check until, shamed into renewed effort, the blacks dragged them down.

The Tiger's Claws.

It was an hour later. All signs of the tragedy which had been enacted within the palace walls had disappeared, and Stanton, glorying in his victory, was making known his wishes, or, rather, his commands, to the unhappy girl who had been hurried away from the room where she had seen the man she loved cut down before her very eyes.

She shrank back, terror in her eyes, as Stanton caught her hand. Her attendants had drawn away respectfully as the master of that palace and of all the land spoke to their mistress.

"What is the use of holding out any longer, my dear?" he asked. "The game is up for you and for that fool who has placed himself in my hands. There is nothing else for you to do but submit, and it is my will that within the hour you accept me as your husband, of your own free-will, in the chapel here in the palace."

"That I never will!" cried Grace Lang defiantly. "You are mad to ask it. Justice will be done yet."

She burst into tears, but quickly recovered herself as she realised that only she stood between Paul Satorys and his probable fate, for she read, relentless purpose in the other's eyes.

"It is not madness," said Stanton. "I have told you my will. Unless you consent, this fellow who has dared to

enter my palace dies—he and those with him. They need expect no pity from me. There, I will leave you. Think it over. Think well. There is no escape; and then, why should you try to withstand me? It is girlish folly. The man who calls himself Paul Satorys lies helpless in my power. Yet, though I have every reason to desire his death, so that I may be troubled no more by his absurd pretensions, I will spare his life on this one condition. It rests with you!"

Without giving the girl time to reply, Stanton turned and marched out of the room, and Grace sank back a prey to anguish. She was aroused from her state of stupefying misery by a hand being laid on her shoulder, and she started up. For she saw, bending over her, the grave, dignified priest, Lara, the man in whom, during her captivity, she had found a friend. Lara, as one of the powers of the Church, could come and go in the palace as he chose.

"You can save me!" she cried hysterically. "You can tell me what I am to do!"

"My daughter," said the old man sternly, "there is but one thing for you now." Grace gave a start, for the tone in which the words were uttered told her enough. "You must obey," the priest went on. He lowered his voice, and the words did not reach the further end of the room, where the women in attendance were standing. "Listen, I know the truth! I know that the brave man, who is lying wounded in the prison where they have placed him, is the rightful king; but he is alone and helpless, and the time is not yet. It is for you to save him. His life is in your hands."

There was something strange and unearthly in the eyes of the girl, as she raised them to the austere face of the man who spoke as though he did not realise the enormity of the sacrifice, which was being so calmly demanded of her.

"Paul Satorys and I love one another," she said. "I would die to save him, and yet—and yet—"

"This you can do—this you must do, my daughter. The man who has the power in our poor, distracted country is no king. It is of Istan of which I am thinking, of its happiness, and the well-being of the humblest dweller in our dear country in the years which are to come. Will you do this for him—for the country which, through your love for Paul Satorys, is your country as well?"

And at the words, all else, but the salvation of the man she loved faded away.

"I will do this to save his life," said the girl in a faint voice. "Yet it is the end for me, the end of all things, as you must know."

Lara gave a sigh of relief.

"It is what I expected, my dear daughter. You are of those of whom great queens are made. You will marry this man. You will seem to bow to your fate. But I, who have seen through the wicked treachery of the tyrant, will save you, as you will have saved Paul Satorys."

Grace was looking at the speaker wildly, and she seized his hand.

"How can you save me?" she asked. "It will be too late then."



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NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"THE OUTSIDER'S CHOICE!"

Lara drew from his breast a tiny packet and slipped it into the girl's hand.

"Immediately after the ceremony of marriage between yourself and this man who has usurped the throne you will swallow the contents of this paper. You will sink to sleep, but it will not be the sleep of death. It will be thought that you have died, and you will be carried to the Temple of Missa. There my daughter will come back to life, and be safe. For even if your husband were to learn that you lived, he dare not follow you there into the sacred building, where our sainted sisters of our faith live in holiness and retreat."

"I will do this," cried Grace. "Oh, how can I thank you? And if—and if—something happens—if I do not wake again, you will tell Paul that I died for his sake?"

The old priest raised his hand. There was that in his manner which swept aside all the villainess of the plottings of the scoundrel who had brought things to so dread a pass.

"We will hope and pray," he said. "Remember, the time is very short. Rely on me!"

He rose and went slowly out of the girl's presence, and she looked after him, a new light in her eyes. She was prepared for all, and when, shortly after, Stanton came to her, she received him as though she were perfectly resigned to her fate.

It was a part she had to play.

She permitted the usurper to take her hand to congratulate her on her resolve, and when she asked him for a fresh assurance that Paul Satorys should go free, Stanton gave it to her.

"I will send him out of the country," he said. The girl believed his words. She was thinking only of the life of the man she loved. That he might live was all!

When he left her it was that she might be prepared for the hastily-planned ceremony which was to take place so soon.

Between Darkness and Dawn.

Satorys and his two devoted followers had been carried away and placed under double guard in the prison fortress which formed one end of the palace.

It was long ere Paul came back to consciousness, and when he did, it was to see Peter bending over Duvigny.

'At the movement made by Satorys the sailor turned his head.

"That's good, sir," he said softly. "And here's Mister Duvigny coming round. Yes, I know it's a tight hole we are in, but maybe it might be worse. I've got a head which will have to be closed for repairs, but I'm not dead yet, by a long way."

Satorys struggled to his feet, and went across the cell to where the sailor was doing what he could for his unfortunate comrade.

"Beaten!" he muttered savagely.

"Oh, yes, sir, to be sure, we are beaten right enough. But they had something to remember us by, and even if they do cook our goose at sunrise, we—oh, I suppose this is the old chap again," went on the sailor, as there came the sound of footsteps outside. He was here before, but you were asleep then, and he said he would try to drop in again later on."

The door was flung open. There was the rattle of rifles on the stone floor, and then Lara strode into the dim-lit cell.

He remained standing in the entrance till the door was closed, and then he took Satorys' hand.

"I am a friend," he said solemnly. "It is as a friend I am here. I have seen the man who calls himself king. It was decreed that you and your comrades should die, but it will not be so."

Satorys had laid his hand on the priest's shoulder.

"You do not tell me the one thing that I want to know," he said huskily. "It is of Grace Lang I am thinking. She is alone, and at the mercy of that wretch."

Lara shook his head.

"She is not alone, sir, for I am here. I know you to be the real king, and I am here to serve both you and the dear lady who thinks of you."

Satorys bowed over the speaker's hand.

"I owe you all," he said humbly.

Long after the priest had left him he sat there thinking, and the remarks of Peter fell on deaf ears.

There was something about the old man's words which had brought him hope.

"You are not getting resigned to it, are you, sir?" asked the sailor at length.

"No, Peter; nothing of the sort."

"Glad to hear it, sir. Here's Mr. Duvigny coming to, aren't you?"

Peter turned to the wounded man.

"Yes, I'm better," said Duvigny feebly.

"You hear that, sir. I believe we shall make a good thing of it yet."

Satorys gave a nod, and lit a cigarette. As the minutes flew, he was reflecting on what he had just heard, trying to believe that it was true.

Lara moved amidst the lights and flowers of the Royal chapel, whispering instructions to the acolytes in their white robes. The building was already filled.

"I have gained time," mused the priest. "And to-morrow we will see if the people cannot be made to see who is really king."

He was anxious, but his anxiety was concealed under a mask of gravity. Stanton was to spare the life of Paul Satorys if Grace became his wife, and afterwards—well, time would show.

Lara approached the girl as she entered the church, and it was deemed a natural thing that she should stand apart talking to the priest.

"I have your promise," she said gently, "and it is enough; but you will tell Paul later that I am really dead, for I shall be the wife of another, and it is well that Paul should judge me lost." She plucked at the old man's loose sleeve. "Tell me you will do this for me, for it is best. Paul has to pass through many trials before he regains his own. Let him think me dead. I should be in his way; I should hinder his work; and I know what is wise. I know that it will be better for him to think that I am safe—out of the power of anyone to do me harm."

Lara hesitated. Then he saw the wisdom of the girl's resolution. Paul Satorys was to be saved, but there was such work ahead for him ere he could accomplish his destiny as would appal an ordinary man.

"It is best," murmured the girl.

She stood there arrayed as a bride, and her beauty, a rare and wonderful loveliness, seemed to exercise a kind of fascination on those who saw her.

(A long and thrilling instalment of this splendid story will appear in next Wednesday's issue of "THE GEM LIBRARY." Please order your copy in advance. Price One Penny.)



The GIRL FROM GAOL

The life story of a beautiful girl who, forced by her inhuman guardians to consort with rogues and criminals, yet remains honest and true. Made the victim of a cruel plot, she goes to prison for the sin of another, and when released has a hard struggle to maintain her independence. How she foils her enemies and escapes a thousand dangers is the theme of "The Girl From Gaol," which starts in TO-DAY'S

1/2

1/2

FAVORITE COMIC

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 338.

FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE,

is the principal character in one of the complete stories contained in

CHUCKLES, 1/2.

ST. JIM'S JINGLES.

No. 8.—KERR.

With what delight we blazon forth
The manifold attractions
Of this young scholar from the North,
So shrewd in all his actions!
His manly courage and resource
Have won him stout supporters,
And made him quite a fighting force
Within the New House quarters.

He joined the famed and fearless band
With Figgins in the centre,
Which always strives to stay the hand
Of tyrant and tormentor.
They share alike in fights and feeds,
And even men like "Ratty"
Have learned to fear the daring deeds
Of Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty.

A talent few possess at school
In Kerr is made apparent,
And helps him to repress the rule
Of rotters mean and arrant.
The Scots boy seldom fails to be
His comrades' benefactor;
The secret of it, is that he
Is such a splendid actor!

His cool and calculating mind,
And powers of imitation,
Have oft effectively combined
To save the situation.
While all his enterprise and thought,
And neatly-planned disguises,
On friends and foes alike have wrought
A series of surprises.

The primest joke he ever played,
Was an amusing antic
On Ratty, the sedate and staid,
Who fumed and grew quite frantic.
Arrayed in feminine attire—
The most divine of misses—
The Scots boy seized the irate sire
And smothered him with kisses!

The wretched master's soul did yearn
For solace in his study;
His furious countenance in turn
Went pallid, pink, and ruddy.
If safe ensconced behind his door,
He would have given dollars;
But, oh, to be embraced before
A group of grinning scholars!

Long life to you, my bonnie Scott!
And may each boy or master
Who acts unfairly catch it hot,
And meet with dire disaster!
We all revere your noble name
And actions good and clever—
Your doughty deeds a place shall claim
Within our hearts for ever.

"THE GEM" LIBRARY FREE CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE.

The only names and addresses which can be printed in these columns are those of readers living in any of our Colonies who desire Correspondents in Great Britain and Ireland.

Colonists sending in their names and addresses for insertion in the columns of this popular story-book must state what kind of correspondent is required—boy or girl; English, Scotch, Welsh, or Irish.

Would-be correspondents must send with each notice two coupons, one taken from "The Gem," and one from the same week's issue of its companion paper, "The Magnet" Library. Coupons will always be found on page 2 of both papers, and requests for correspondents not containing these two coupons will be absolutely disregarded.

Readers wishing to reply to advertisements appearing in this column must write to the advertisers direct. No correspondence with advertisers can be undertaken through the medium of this office.

All advertisements for insertion in this Free Exchange should be addressed: "The Editor, 'The Gem' Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C."

C. Irvine, 1, Bower Crescent, Dockville, South Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in Hartlepool or Devonshire, age 15-16.

A. Singer, c/o Montreal Business College, 8, Phillips Place, Montreal, Canada, wishes to correspond with girl readers, age 16-18.

Sam Lawson, 26, Patrick Street, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in the British Isles interested in postcards, age 16-17.

A. Mack, 22, St. John Street, Quebec, Canada, wishes to correspond with readers, age 12-15.

W. T. Morris, c/o Messrs. Ross & Glendending, Wellington New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a boy reader interested in postcards, age 14.

F. H. Riley, 131, Trafalgar Street, Stanmore, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers.

Maurice McLaurin, G.P.O., Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers.

A. Sinclair, 340, Ascot Vale Road, Moonee Ponds, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with boy readers interested in hunting, farming, or country life, age 15.

Herbert Mitchell, 269, City Road, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England, age 14-15.

Percy Gander, c/o Mr. G. Lang, View Bank, Beecac, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 15-16.

R. L. Palethorpe, Narrogin, Western Australia, wishes to correspond with readers interested in stamps.

Harry Martin, Manchester Street, Victoria Park, Perth, Western Australia, wishes to correspond with readers living in England or Scotland, age 17-19.

C. G. Wallis, Horsham, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers living in the British Isles or America.

Miss Moore, 43, Derby Street, Collingwood, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with boy readers, age 17-18.

B. J. Hughes, 372, Park Street, South Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a reader living in India or Canada.

Rue Arnold, Wilson Street, Horsham, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers, age 15-16.

F. R. Summers, c/o George Street West Post Office, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with girl readers living in England or America, age 16-17.

D. E. Foley, Strahan, Tasmania, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers interested in stamps.

Miss M. Eggleston, Box 1028, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, wishes to correspond with readers living in Saskatoon.

Next Week:

HERBERT SKIMPOLE.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



THIS WEEK'S CHAT



Whom to Write to —
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For Next Wednesday.

"THE OUTSIDER'S CHOICE!"

By Martin Clifford.

In this splendid complete tale of the chums of St. Jim's the juniors scatter to the four corners of the land for their summer holidays. A select party, however, accompany the hospitable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to his ancestral home, Eastwood House. Jerrold Lumley-Lumley, the reformed Outsider of St. Jim's, is not of the party, but, as luck will have it, the party of choice spirits which he joins find themselves located within a very short distance of the Earl of Eastwood's domain. The proximity of the two holiday-parties, which have widely different ideas of enjoying themselves, causes a certain amount of trouble, in which Tom Morry & Co. are quite able to hold their own.

For certain reasons the Eastwood party decide that Lumley-Lumley must join them, and Arthur Augustus makes a characteristic proposal to ensure the Outsider's acceptance of his kind invitation! A very exciting time follows, but the chums gain their point, though not quite in the way they expect to.

After this experience, there is no doubt as to what will be in future

"THE OUTSIDER'S CHOICE!"

OUR RECORD NEW SERIAL!

In this week's issue of the "Magnet" Library starts a serial story which I verily believe will create a greater sensation among my fiction-loving chums than any other serial previously published.

"THE UNCONQUERABLE!"

By Sidney Drew,

is not only another grand story of Ferrers Lord, Ching-Lung, Thurston, Gan-Waga, Barry O'Rourke, and all the rest of that famous company, which the magic of Sidney Drew's genius has made immortal; that alone would be sufficient recommendation to my chums.

But apart from the fact that it deals with these great characters, "The Unconquerable" possesses an intrinsic merit of its own, as an adventure story of the very first water, which makes it absolutely irresistible to all good story-lovers. I have seldom been moved to speak with such absolute confidence of the attraction of a new serial, but I do think that in securing

"THE UNCONQUERABLE!"

the "Magnet" Library has scored the biggest "coup" of its career.

NOW IS THE TIME!

In the midst of the summer season, when seaside and other holidays are in full swing, it is appropriate that the two original companion papers, the "Gem" and the "Magnet" Libraries should come out with an extra strong programme of contents.

The complete school stories in each paper leave nothing to be desired, while in both grand new serial stories of extraordinarily powerful interest are just commencing. These two magnificent tales, "A Bid For a Throne," by Clive R. Fenn, and "The Unconquerable," by Sidney Drew, are in themselves sufficient to lift the companion papers far above the

common run. Now is the time, then, for my loyal chums of all ages and both sexes to make a little extra effort to obtain new readers for the "Gem" and "Magnet" Libraries.

No one could fail to be impressed by the high quality of their contents, and the value for money given. Then to all of you, my chums, who are kind enough to wish to help me, I say again:

NOW IS THE TIME!

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

R. G. R. L. (Exeter).—The "Daily Graphic" publish a handbook containing photographs of nearly all the professional football teams.

J. Jones (Kingston Hill).—Write to Messrs. A. W. Gamage, of High Holborn, London, W.C., who should be able to supply you with a book dealing with the developing of photographs.

Miss L. Michelson (Australia).—The class of story depends on the paper. Buy a copy of all the journals you think would suit your style of story, and study them. Good luck!

SWIMMING.

Some Tips for Learners.

Rule 1.—Keep the hands and feet well below the surface, and immerse the whole body up to the chin.

Remember that every inch of the body that protrudes above the surface of the water becomes practically a dead weight, pressing the body under water, and rendering it impossible for the swimmer to keep up for any length of time. Learners, on entering the water for the first time, when they fail to find their feet on the bottom, plunge about, and try to lift themselves out of the water. This action is instinctive on their part, but it is wrong.

Rule 2.—Hollow the spine, and throw the head well back on the shoulders. The chief object in this is that it enables the swimmer to keep his nostrils and mouth out of the water.

Rule 3.—Move the limbs quietly.

Learners should watch an expert swimming in the water, and they will at once notice how easily and quietly he moves his limbs, whilst at the same time progressing through the water at a good speed. A learner can always be distinguished by his method of making very short strokes. He never allows his arms and legs to sweep out to their fullest extent, but goes along through the water in short jerks, thus wasting half his energy, and making his work doubly hard.

All learners should cultivate the slow stroke. It is, except, of course, in racing, the surest and best method of cultivating a good style of swimming. Try how far you can go through the water at each stroke, and do not draw back the limbs until the stroke is almost exhausted.

One of the finest methods, recommended by a famous swimmer for familiarising a learner with the buoyant power of the water, is for him, after advancing into the water breast-high, and turning his face to the shallow end of the bath or towards the shore, to throw an egg or some other object into the water, and then dive in and fetch it. By adopting this method he will soon overcome that natural fear of the water which attacks every lad on his first essay at swimming.

(Another Splendid Article

Next Wednesday.)

A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.



LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE

"I DON'T THINK!"

Soldier: "We were walking along the banks of a stream the other day, and the colonel ordered us to fall in."

Friend: "And did you?"

Soldier: "Not likely! I don't belong to the 'Cold Stream' Guards."—Sent in by J. Archer, Tottenham.

BOY'S LOGIC.

Walking through a street the other day, a gentleman was greatly amused at two little boys playing school. He heard one of them say: "Now, if you take two from one it leaves one; and if you take the one from two it leaves two."

He went up to the youngsters and offered the speaker a shilling if he could prove that sum. The boy eagerly accepted the offer, and led him into the house, where the boy's mother sat nursing twins.

"Now, sir," the boy at once said, "if I take mother away from the twins, I shall take one from two, and two will remain; and if I take away the twins from mother, I shall take two from one, and one will remain."

The boy got his shilling.—Sent in by A. Dixon, Westmoreland.

THAT NEEDLE.

The old lady in the knot of spectators who stood watching the junior football match was evidently labouring under great excitement. The ground was slippery, and the way the players slipped to earth seemed to cause the dear old soul a great deal of alarm. At last she could contain herself no longer.

"Johnny boy," she cried loudly, fixing her gaze upon a fiery-haired youth, "if tha tumbles, mind as tha doesn't tumble backwards way. Whin I were mendin' tha knickers last week Ah forgot to tek t' needle awt, and it's there yet."—Sent in by William N. Evans, Staffordshire.

HE MISUNDERSTOOD.

Constable: "Look here, I told you just now that you mustn't play round here. Now you'll have to accompany me."

Fiddler: "Certainly, sir! Wot yer going to sing?"—Sent in by M. Holgate, Surrey.

"OH!"

Wife: "Wretch! Show me that letter!"

Hubby: "What letter?"

Wife: "That letter you have just read. It is a woman's writing, and you turned pale when you read it."

Hubby: "Here it is. It's only your milliner's bill!"—Sent in by Miss M. Connal, Ireland.

NOT LIKELY!

Andrew Kirkcaldy, a smart-looking youth, was out seeing the sights of London. He had made up his mind to go to King's Cross, so he went to the booking-office at the Tube station to get his ticket. He tendered half-a-crown to the booking-clerk.

"Where to?" asked the official.

"King's Cross," answered the young fellow.

"Change at Holborn," informed the booking-clerk.

"None o' yer nonsense!" replied Andrew quickly. "I'll take ma change here and now!"—Sent in by A. Hallott, Bristol.

"MID SHOT AND SHELL.

It was Cohen's first battle, and he felt sick with fear when he heard the bullets whiz past him. Seeing a hole in the ground, he immediately jumped into it. A few minutes later the colonel rode up.

"What are you doing down that hole?" he inquired of Cohen. "Come out of it!"

"No, thanks! I found it first!" Cohen promptly replied.—Sent in by C. Cuddigan, Cardiff.

NOT THIS TIME.

An old lady, being so stout, was obliged to buy two seats every time she visited the theatre, so that she would be able to sit nice and comfortably. One day she went to a matinee, and, as usual, asked for two seats at the booking-office. When she handed the two tickets to the attendant he seemed quite astounded.

"Excuse me, madam," he said nervously, "but where is the party that's going to use this other ticket?"

"There is no other person," she explained. "I am going to occupy both seats myself."

"I'd like to see you, mum!" said the attendant. "The seats are on opposite sides of the gangway!"—Sent in by T. Jennings, Edinburgh.

THEN BOTH DESCENDED.

Pat and Mike were on the roof removing old slates, the former ripping them off with a pick, and the latter tossing them into the street below. Suddenly Mike slipped, and, sliding down the roof, he swept Pat off his feet along with him. As they went over the edge Pat's pick caught in the drainpipe, and there he hung. Meanwhile, Mike had managed to cling to one of Pat's legs, and the two dangled there for some moments, almost too frightened to speak.

"Mike," Pat finally yelled out, "let go of me leg!"

"I will not!" cried Mike.

"Ye will that!" came back from Pat.

"I will not!" muttered Mike.

"Well, then, if you won't leave go," cried Pat, "I'll hit ye with this pick!"—Sent in by Wm. Riley, Marylebone.

UNNECESSARY.

The little minister, walking down the lane one foggy night, fell into a deep hole. He shouted for help, and after a short time a burly labourer heard his cries, and approached.

"Who are ye?" he asked.

"I'm the meenister!" was the agitated reply. "Help me out quickly, my good man!"

"Weel, weel, ye needna make sic a fuss!" said the navvy slowly. "This is only Wednesday night, and ye'll no be needed afore the Sawbath."—Sent in by B. Simpson, near Manchester.

OBVIOUS.

Magistrate: "You are found guilty of knocking down the plaintiff, and robbing him of everything except a gold watch. What have you to say?"

Prisoner: "Had he a gold watch?"

Magistrate: "Certainly!"

Prisoner: "Then I put in a plea of insanity."—Sent in by F. Wills, York.

MONEY PRIZES OFFERED.

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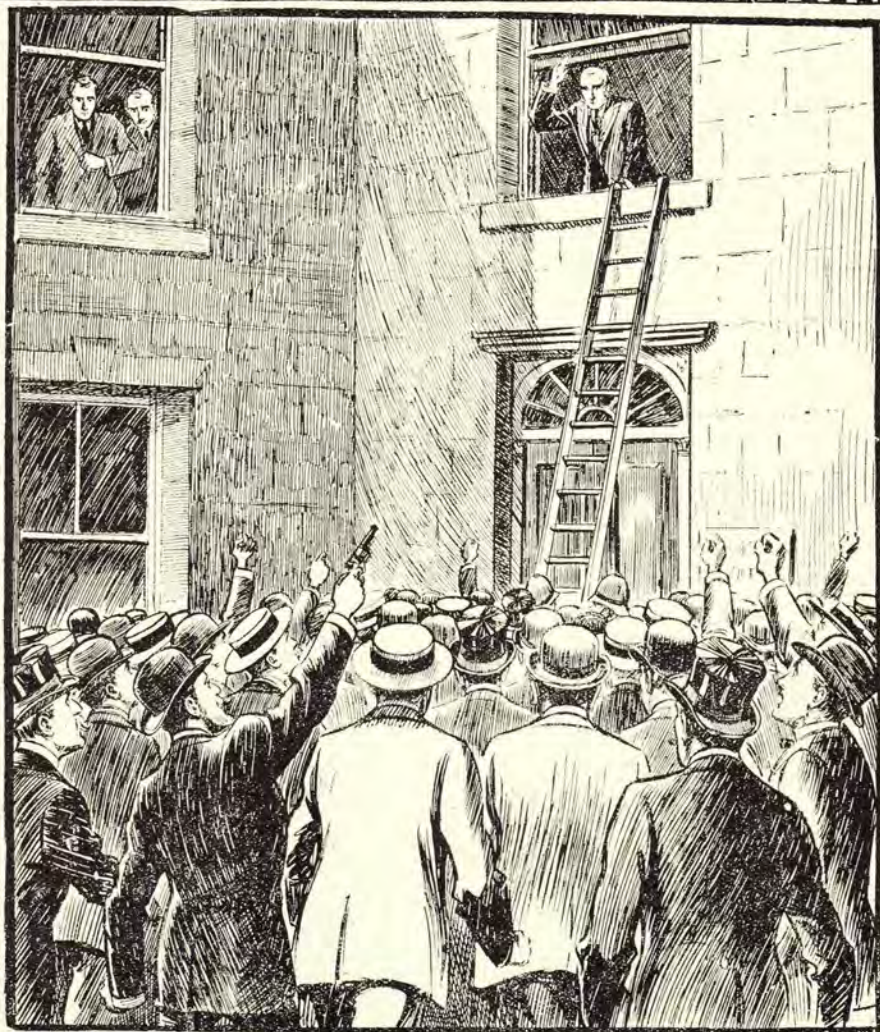
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