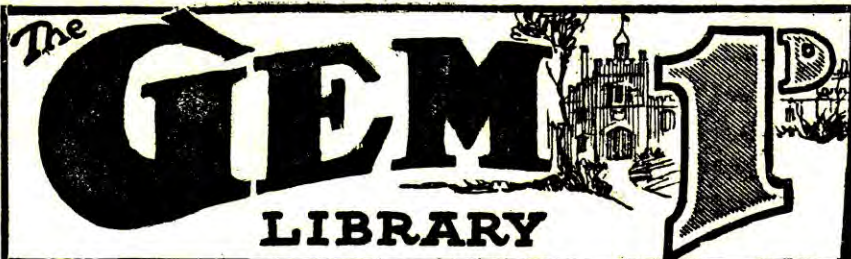


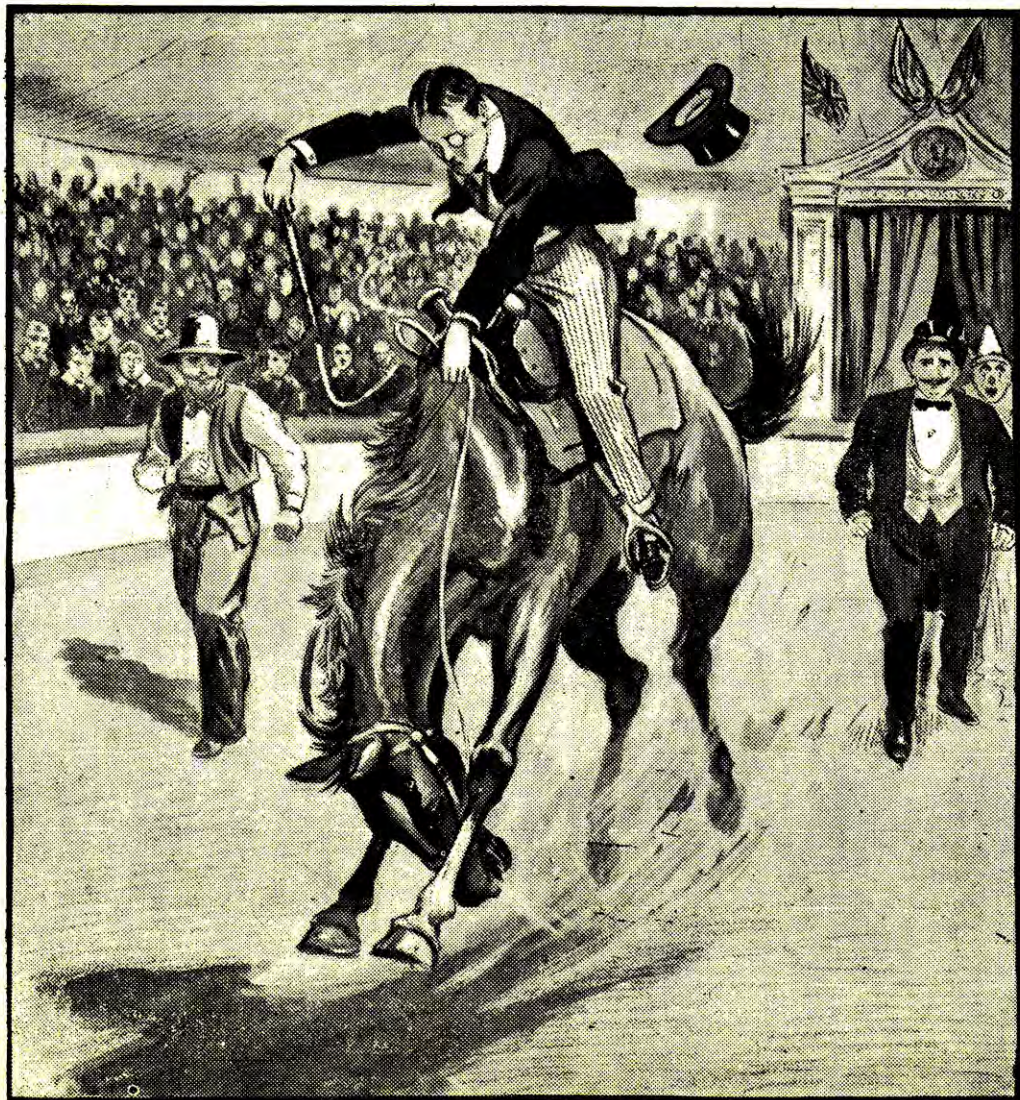
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GUSSY'S HOUSE-PARTY

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By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



Billy Bunter shook a fat fist at the fellows in the punt. Knox made a threatening movement with the pole, and Bunter retreated hastily up the bank, leaving a trail of muddy water behind him. (See Chapter 6.)

CHAPTER I. The Uninvited Guest.

"**C** HUNGUM'S Circus—" "Good-mornin', deah boys!" "Good-mornin', Gussy! Chumgum's Circus, Captain Coke the Lion-Tamer, Texas Bill the Wonderful Barback Rider and Broncho Buster—" "I've had a lotta—" "Aud Tiny Tony the Celebrated Clown and Unequaled Mirth Merchant!" went on Tom Merry, reading from the "Easthorpe Times." "Also the Circus Cricketers. That sounds sounds like a good item, you fellows." "Yes, rather," said Jack Blake. "Any more?" "Sapolio the Serpent Charmer, Rab Rabbi the Indian Juggler, Samsonio the Strongest Man on Earth." "Weally Tom Mewwy—"

"Sounds jolly good," said Monty Lowther. "We'll go, of course."

"You bet!"

"The advertisement says that all the world and his wife will be going," Tom Merry remarked. "So we mustn't be left out."

"I was wemarkin', deah boys—"

"The Circus Cricketers sound very good," remarked Manners.

"Worth seeing!" said Digby.

"I was makin' a remark to you fellows!" roared Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Hallo, were you speaking, Gussy?" asked Jack Blake affably.

"Weally, you silly ass—"

"That's what I like about Gussy," remarked Monty

Next Wednesday:

"HELD BY THE ENEMY!" AND "A BID FOR A THRONE!"

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Lowther enthusiastically. "He's always so jolly polite to his visitors."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ahem! I withdrew that remark, Blake. However, if we were in the study at St. Jim's, instead of undah my patah's woof, pway undahstand that I should wegard you as a silly ass," said Arthur Augustus severely.

Tom Merry & Co. were seated round the breakfast-table at Eastwood House. The Terrible Three, of the Shell at St. Jim's, and the chums of Study No. 6 were spending their vacation under the paternal roof of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth. They were at breakfast now, a rather late breakfast. The rising-bell of St. Jim's no longer awakened them in the early dawn with its iron clang, and the juniors had not come down to breakfast until nine o'clock. The hospitable board of Eastwood House was well spread, and the juniors of St. Jim's were "doing themselves" remarkably well.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, was the last in. Arthur Augustus's morning toilet was a performance that required a good deal of time to arrange to perfection, and he was generally the latest down. He came into the breakfast-room looking as fresh as a daisy and as elegant as an Antinous; in fact, a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. And he held a letter in his hand, and the expression upon his noble countenance showed that the contents of the letter had not pleased him.

But Tom Merry & Co. were looking particularly merry. The announcement in the local paper that Chungum's Circus had come to Easthorpe was good news. They had never heard of Mr. Chungum or his circus before, certainly; but if the advertisement was to be believed it was an extraordinarily attractive show. And they had all decided to go immediately. They were having a good time at Eastwood House, but, as Blake remarked, the more the merrier.

"But wherefore that worried brow, O Gustavus?" asked Monty Lowther. "Has Wally's mongrel been worrying your best silk topper again?"

"Wata!"

"Has your tailor disappointed you in your latest fancy waistcoat, and does it not rival Joseph's coat of many colours as you expected?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as an ass, Lowthah. I—I mean I should wegard you as an ass if we were at St. Jim's. I have had a lettah."

"Oh, I see! I sympathise! The tailor has sent in his bill instead of sending the waistcoat. Hard lines!" said Monty Lowther sympathetically.

"That's all right, Gussy," said Blake encouragingly. "We'll have a whip round, and the waistcoat shall be paid for if it busts me. There's a penny towards it!"

"And here's a ha'penny!"

"And here's twopenny!"

"I'll make it a tanner!"

"Cheer up, Gussy! If it doesn't come to more than eighteenpence we'll rescue you from the Slough of Despond!" said Digby.

"You uttah asses! You know vewy well that it is not a tailah's bill!" shrieked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "And if it were a tailah's bill you're perfectly well awah that I cannot get a waistcoat for eighteenpence. It is somethin' much more sewious than a tailah's bill."

The chums of St. Jim's regarded Arthur Augustus curiously. They were not used to taking the swell of the school very seriously. But really he looked now as if something of an unusually serious nature had occurred.

"Get it off your chest, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "Don't mind our little jokes. For if we can't pull the leg of our noble and esteemed entertainer and host, whose leg can we pull?"

"Echo answers whose?" said Monty Lowther solemnly.

"Wubbish! Echo would answah pull, if echo answahed at all," said Arthur Augustus. "Your knowledge of the laws of acoustics, Lowthah, must be vewy limited, if you do not know

that echo answahs the last word of a sentence. However, that does not mattah. I have had a lettah!"

"Which letter?" asked Lowther.

"Eh?"

"There are twenty-six in the alphabet," explained Lowther. "Which one have you had?"

"If you are goin' to be funnay, Lowthah——"

"Sober as a judge!" protested Lowther. "I'm only asking for information. When pain and anguish wring the brow, as the poet remarks, come to your Uncle Monty. Get it off your chest. Tell us all about it. Who has dared to ruffle the serenity of your noble brow?"

"Pitch it out, Gussy!"

"I have weceived this lettah. You chaps wemembah Gweyfwahs, a school we play at cwicket——"

"And footer!" said Tom Merry. "Yes, we haven't forgotten Greyfriars, Gussy. If you've had a letter from Greyfriars that's nothing to worry about, is it? Some very decent chaps there."

"Yaas, wathah! But there is one chap I weally cannot stand at any pwice, and that is the chap I have had a lettah fwom."

"Then don't read it."

"But I have already wead it."

"Then unread it at once," advised Monty Lowther. "Begin at the end and go back steadily to the beginning, and you will be entitled to regard the letter as unread."

"Ass! The lettah is fwom a chap named Buntah. You wemembah; a chap as fat as Fatty Wynn, or fattah. A chap who wears big spectacles, and is a ventriloquist? I always twy to think as well as possible of people; but I cannot help wegarding this chap Buntah as a wank outsidah. I do not like the chap. But it is vewy awkward, because he feels vewy fwindly towards me."

"Of course, he can't help that, Gussy!" said Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth, with a serious and solemn countenance. "That is what becomes of teing such a fascinatin' chap. Who could help liking Gussy?"

"Nobody!" said Tom Merry, with conviction.

"Yaas; it is vewy flattewin', I know," agreed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, whose kind and simple mind never harboured a suspicion that even a "rank outsider" would display friendship towards him because he was rich and the son of an earl. "I feel vewy vewy gratefule to this chap Buntah for his kind weghards, but the fact weghains that I do not like him personally. And I weally don't want him to come heah."

"Here!" exclaimed Blake.

"Yaas."

"Well, if you don't want him here don't ask him here," said Tom Merry, a little perplexed. "I can't see any difficulty."

"I haven't asked him, deah boy."

"Then everything in the garden is lovely. That being settled, we can now return to the question before the meeting—Chungum's Circus."

"But it isn't settled!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I haven't asked him, but he's comin'."

"Oh, my hat!"

"And, you see, it distwesses my feelin' vewy much, because I can't be inhospitable or wantin' in politeness. But how can I tell a fellah I am glad to see him when I am weally sowwy to see him?" said Arthur Augustus distressfully. "It places me in a vewy awkward posish."

"Tell him you're sorry to see him, then!" suggested Lowther.

"That would hardly be civil, deah boys, when we have been tweated so jolly well by the Gweyfwahs chaps."

"Not by Bunter."

"Well, he is one of them, you know. I feel that I cannot be wude to Buntah; but, you see, he is comin'. It is vewy wotten, but there you are! Pewwaps you had better wead the lettah."

"Perhaps we had," grinned Blake.

And the St. Jim's juniors gathered round to read the letter. They all remembered Billy Bunter, of the Remove Form at Greyfriars School, and they did not think much of him. And certainly they did not welcome the idea of Bunter joining the merry party at Eastwood House. Bunter was a ventriloquist, and Arthur Augustus had once had an ambition to learn that difficult art, and had taken a lesson from Bunter. Since then Bunter had persisted in being D'Arcy's greatest chum, much to the dismay of Arthur Augustus. The letter ran, in a style which hinted that orthography was not a subject in the curriculum at Greyfriars:

"Dear Gussy,—You will be pleased to hear that I have a few days to spair this vac. I am crowded with engagements after the next few days, but I find I can spair a few days to run down and see an old chum. Don't trubble to answer

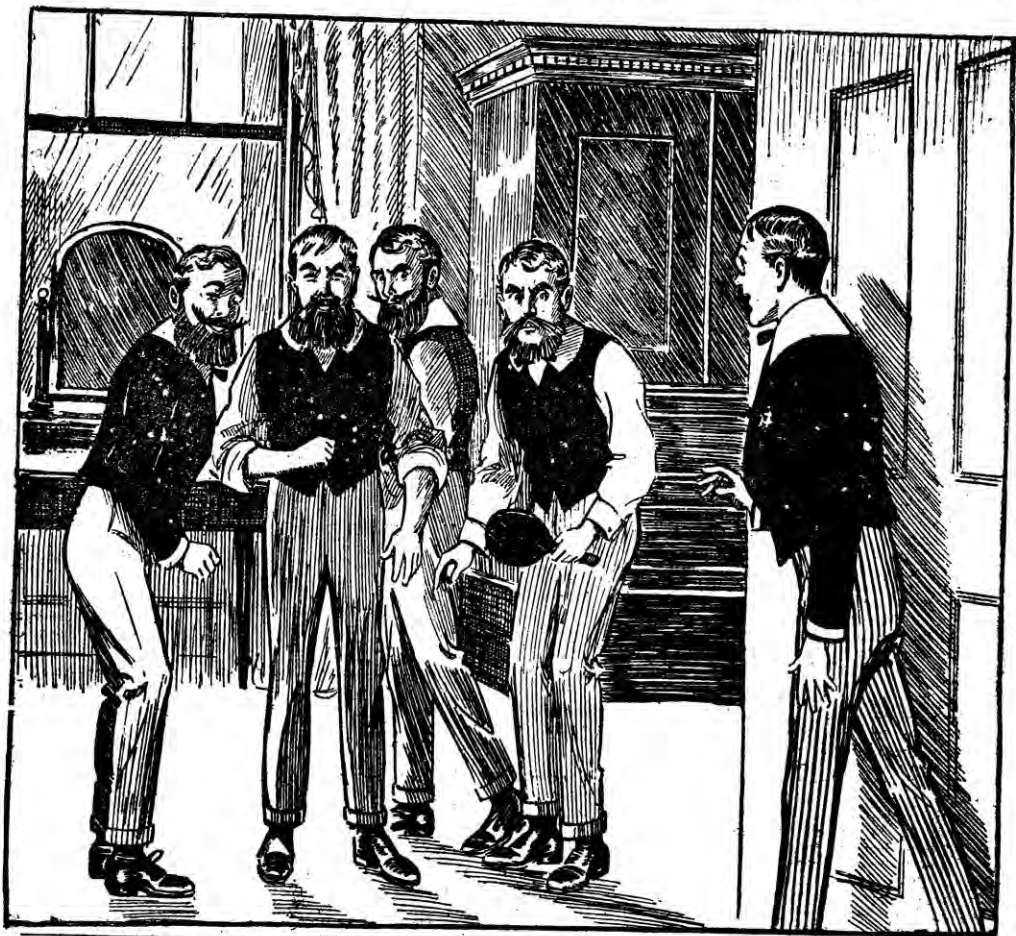
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Tom Merry & Co. presented an extraordinary aspect as they proceeded to disguise themselves. They looked like four particularly villainous Anarchists, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jumped as he came into the room. "Gwreat Scott!" he ejaculated. "What on earth are you doing?" (See Chapter I.)

this letter, as I shall be with you soon after it arrives. I get to Easthorpe by the 11.50. If you care to run down to the station in a car to meet me, I shall take it very kindly. Always your old pal,

BILLY BUNTER.

"And he weally isn't my old pal at all, you know," said Arthur Augustus plaintively. "The Gweyfwiahs chaps themselves can't stand him. And how can I tell my pater I have a friend comin', when I don't weally wegard him as a friend? It places me in a vewy awkward possish."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Weally, I do not see any cause for laughitah. I want you fellows to advise me what to do," said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "And I find you thinkin' of nothin' but some wotton circus or othah—"

"But it isn't a rotten circus!" said Blake warmly. "It's a jolly good circus. There's Texas Bill, the Bareback Rider and Broncho Buster, and—"

"Wats! The question is, what am I goin' to do?"

"Wrong verb!" said Lowther, with a shake of the head. "You want the passive verb, not the active. You're not going to do. You're going to be done."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows, I think you might be sewious—"

"Yes; this isn't a time for being funny, Lowther," said Tom Merry severely. "Keep all that for the next number of the 'Weekly,' when we get back to St. Jim's. Lemme see; it's too late to wire Bunter that you're ill, or dead—he must have started. Looks to me as if he's timed this so that you can't reply that he's not to come."

"Take the car to meet him, and have a smash-up on the road," suggested Lowther. "Break him somewhere, and put him in the cottage hospital. They're starting a new bed there since Lumley made his munificent donation."

"You uttah ass! Suppose I bwoke his neck?"

"Well, there are lots of Bunters," said Lowther argumentatively. "One more or less can't matter much."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

Tom Merry held up his hand.

"Order! You don't want this bounder here, Gussy?"

"Wathah not."

"But you feel that you can't be discourteous—that's a good word—"

"Pwecisely."

"Then there's only one thing to be done. Leave it to us," said Tom Merry. "You can regard yourself as dead in this act. Place the matter in our hands. We'll see you through. Not a word! We'll hold a council of war on the subject, and find ways and means of repelling boarders."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Nuff said. We can take charge of the matter, and relieve you of the entire responsibility. We agree to deal with Bunter, and we promise not to kill him, as it would worry your pater to be bothered with an inquest during the vacation. Not a word. I insist upon your leaving this matter in our hands."

"Hear, hear!"

"But weally—"

"Not a word!" chorused the juniors. "We're running THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 540
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the show, Gussy! You pile into your brekker, and leave it to us."

"Yaas; but—"

"Enough said!"

And, leaving Arthur Augustus, looking a little uneasy, to his solitary breakfast, the juniors of St. Jim's, who had finished theirs, walked out of the French windows upon the terrace, where they held a council of war. And as that council of war was punctuated by incessant chuckles, it was evident that Tom Merry and Co. had thought of some scheme for meeting the difficulty, and that it was a scheme that appealed to their peculiar sense of humour.

CHAPTER 2.

The Anarchists.

"**B**AI Jove! Where are those fellows?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked out on the terrace, his eyeglass screwed into his eye. The swell of St. Jim's had finished his breakfast, and he was curious to know how the council of war was getting on. But Tom Merry & Co. had vanished.

Arthur Augustus sauntered along the terrace, and looked over the wide lawns, and into the tennis-court, and round the stables. In the stables he found his younger brother Wally, with his chum Joe Frayne of the Third Form of St. Jim's. They were discussing the points of a handsome pony, a present to Wally from his eldest brother, Lord Conway. But there was no sign of Tom Merry & Co. there, and Arthur Augustus walked back to the house. The juniors of St. Jim's seemed to have vanished, but they could not yet have gone down to the station to meet Bunter, for it was not much past ten, and Bunter's train was not due till nearly twelve.

"I suppose they are in their quarters," Arthur Augustus murmured. "I wonder what the boundahs are thinkin' of? I should be very glad not to be bothered by Buntah, but I cannot allow anythin' wude to be done. Hallo, Ethel, deah boy—I mean deah girl! Have you seen anythin' of the chaps?"

Cousin Ethel shook her head.

"Not since they went up, Arthur," she replied. "Perhaps they are trying on the costumes. Tom Merry was saying something about the property box."

"Oh, that's all right, then!"

Arthur Augustus went upstairs to the suite of rooms occupied by the juniors of St. Jim's. Four rooms, communicating with one another, were the quarters of Tom Merry & Co. in Eastwood House. The sound of chuckles warned him that the juniors were there. They seemed to have forgotten about Bunter. The Co. were great on amateur theatricals, and they intended to give a performance during the vacation, and so their "props" had been sent from the school. But if they were busy about trying on costumes, apparently they had held a council of war on the subject of Bunter without result.

"Black beards," said Tom Merry's voice, as D'Arcy came in.

"And moustaches," said Blake.

"And darken our eyebrows," said Lowther.

"Regular stage villains!" chuckled Manners. "My hat! The fat boulder certainly won't know us in this rig."

"He mustn't know us, of course."

"No fear!"

"Gweat Scott!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, staring at his chums. "What the dooce—" Words failed the swell of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry, and Lowther, and Manners, and Blake presented an extraordinary aspect. They had adjusted black beards and moustaches to their faces, and were occupied in ruffling and darkening their eyebrows. They looked like four particularly villainous Anarchists, and more than thirty years old, so far as their faces went, and such faces over boyish bodies had a very curious effect.

"Hallo, Gussy!" said Blake affably. "How do you like this?"

"What on earth are you doin'?"

"Disguising ourselves, of course."

"But there are no such chawactals in the play, deah boys—"

"This isn't a play—this is real earnest. We're getting ready for Bunter."

"Buntah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "But—but surely you are not thinkin' of goin' to meet Buntah in a wig like that?"

"We're not going in a wig," said Lowther. "Beards and moustaches are enough, without any wigs."

"Weally, Lowtah, you know very well that I mean wig, not wig."

"You get more lucid every day, Gussy. Better have a touch of red paint on the nose, you fellows."

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"Yes, rather!"

"Now, about the clobber," said Tom Merry. "Some rough old clothes and big boots. These nobby suits we are wearing won't do."

"But what's the little game?" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "Don't ask questions, and we'll tell you no Chancellor-of-the-Exchequerisms!" replied Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I insist upon knowin'—"

"Rats! You've left the matter in our hands—"

"But I did not aggree—"

"Well, we agreed, and that's enough," said Tom Merry, who was changing his clothes as he talked. "All you've got to do is to sit by and look pleased."

"But weally—"

"You can play Lumley-Lumley a hundred up while we're gone."

"I wufuse to play Lumlay-Lumlay a hundved up. I insist upon knowin' what you fellahs are goin' to do in that widiculous wig."

"There! That's about done!" said Lowther. "I think we shall do. Bunter wouldn't know us if he wore a pair of field-glasses instead of specs."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now we're ready!"

And the four disguised juniors walked to the door. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy planted himself in their way.

"You must weally explain. I insist that Buntah shall not be tweated with any wudeness, and I cannot approve of any japin'—"

"Exactly!" said Tom Merry. "That's why you're dead in this act. Buzz off!"

"But—but you cannot go downstairs like that. You will alarm the whole house."

"Oh, that's all right!"

"My deah fellahs, I weally cannot—"

"You fellows collar Gussy and keep him quiet," said Tom Merry, turning to the grinning juniors. "Sit on his head if necessary."

"I wufuse to have my head sat upon— Leggo—yah!"

Herries and Digby seized the swell of St. Jim's, and sat him down forcibly in an armchair. They held him there by main force while Tom Merry and his companions quitted the room. Arthur Augustus wriggled in the grasp of the three juniors.

"Pway welease me, deah boys—"

"I guess not," grinned Lumley-Lumley.

"You must womeembah that we are not at St. Jim's now, you know. I weally cannot permit a chap to be japed—and I know it is some wotten pwactical joke on Buntah—"

"Sit on his head," said Herries.

"You uttah asses— Gwooh—ooh—gwooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. proceeded cheerfully downstairs. A maidservant, who caught sight of the four villainous-looking ruffians, fled with a gasping shriek. In the hall they encountered Chillingham, the stately butler of Eastwood House. Chillingham forgot his professional gravity for once. He staggered back in alarm.

"Goodness gracious!" he stuttered. "Who—who are you? What—"

"Hallo, Chilly! What's the matter?" asked Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Master Merry!" ejaculated the bewildered butler, recognising the voice. "M-M-Master M-M-Merry!"

"Anything wrong, Chilly?"

"I—I did not know you, sir! That—that beard! Those—those moustaches—"

"I've been using rather too much tatcho," Tom Merry explained—"taken an overdose, you know. It's warranted to make the hair grow."

"Oh, Master Merry!"

The four juniors went on their way chuckling, leaving the butler gasping. As they left the house they met Cousin Ethel. The girl gave a start.

"Don't be alarmed!" exclaimed Tom Merry quickly. "It's only us!"

"Why—what—"

"Only a little joke. Mum's the word!"

And, leaving the mystified girl looking after them in astonishment, Tom Merry & Co. walked down the drive.

Lord Conway, the eldest son of the Earl of Eastwood was coming up the drive, with a gun in the hollow of his arm. He jumped at the sight of the four ruffians bearing down upon him.

"Who are you?" Conway exclaimed, planting himself directly in their path, and frowning darkly. "How dare you come in here?"

"Away!" said Tom Merry, with a stage villain bias. "Dare you cross the path of the Brethren of the Black and Gory Hand!"

"What!"

"Beware the vengeance of the Anarchist Brothers of the Gory Paw!" hissed Monty Lowther. Lord Conway stared at them. The juniors did not bear the remotest resemblance to their real selves, and he had not the faintest suspicion of their identity. The viscount pointed to the gates.

"Get out of here!" he said tersely.

And the four ruffians went rather hastily down the drive. Lord Conway seeing them off the premises before he walked away to the house. They chuckled as they came out into the road.

Old Conway didn't know us," grinned Tom Merry, "so it's jolly certain that Bunter won't. He'll take us for what we look like, and if we don't scare him away from this neighbourhood for good you can use my head for a footer!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I don't begin to think we've rather overdone it though!" murmured Blake, as a startled countryman on the road bolted through a gap in the hedge at their approach. "We don't want them to call the police out."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's only one bobby in Easthorpe, and we could eat him!" grinned Tom. "By Jove, though, we do seem to be making rather a sensation!"

In the quiet countryside, where even respectable foreigners were very seldom seen, the sight of four villainous-looking foreign ruffians naturally caused excitement. As the juniors entered the village startled urchins fled before them, and several old persons closed their shop doors hastily and locked them. Tom Merry & Co. did indeed begin to feel that they had rather overdone it. But it was too late to make any alteration now. They had to see the thing through.

The party entered the railway-station, and the booking-clerk turned quite pale as he handed out their tickets. The porter dodged behind a trolley as they went on the platform, and two or three passengers who were there waiting for the train looked very uneasy, and retreated as far away as possible. One old gentleman stood his ground, looking very severely at the ruffians through his gilt-rimmed glasses, till he heard Monty Lowther remark, in a stage-whisper: "Have you got the bomb ready, Brother Marco?" Then the old gentleman beat a hasty retreat, his glasses nearly falling off in his terror.

Fortunately the train came in soon, and, needless to say, the four Anarchistic-looking foreigners had a carriage to themselves. They were glad when the train rolled out of the station. Tom Merry looked at his watch.

"Lots of time!" he announced. "We shall get to Leekford in twenty minutes. Bunter's train stops there three minutes—quite long enough for us to find his carriage and get in. We shall have to wait there ten minutes for his train. All serene."

"If we're not arrested as suspicious characters," grunted Blake. "We've overdone it."

"Can't be helped now."

The juniors left the train at Leekford. That was a much larger station than Easthorpe, and there were a good many people on the platform. They eyed the four foreign-looking ruffians suspiciously, and gave them a wide berth. And when any curious persons came near, Monty Lowther's whispered remarks on the subject of bombs and daggers and automatic pistols caused the curious ones to beat a prompt retreat.

The express came in at last, and stopped. Tom Merry & Co. looked anxiously along the train. This was Bunter's train, which was to arrive at Easthorpe at 11.50. They had three minutes in which to spot Billy Bunter's carriage; but, as it happened, it was quite easy. A fat face, adorned with a pair of large spectacles, looked out of a first-class carriage, and a squeaky voice called to a porter:

"Is this Easthorpe?"

"Next station, sir."

The fat junior grunted, and drew in his head. Tom Merry & Co. exchanged a quick glance, and made for his carriage. And the sight of those four ruffians getting into the carriage caused all the other passengers to get as far away as possible up or down the train.

The fat junior was not alone in the carriage. There were two ladies there, and they turned quite pale at the sight of the four dreadful characters that scrambled in. The fat junior blinked at them through his big spectacles, and the two ladies rose to leave the carriage. Tom Merry & Co. politely made way for them, keeping, at the same time, in Billy Bunter's way so that he could not follow their example. Bunter had risen to his feet with the intention of changing carriages. He had no mind to travel for a quarter of an hour in such dangerous-looking company. Tom Merry shoved him back.

"Vere is your मामा?" he asked, with a French accent. "Vill you get yourself in ze vay of ze ladies, zon?"

"Let me pass!" gasped the fat junior. "I—I want to get out!"

"You let ze ladies get zemselves out first, zen."

As soon as the two ladies had alighted Lowther drew the door of the carriage shut. Bunter tried to shove himself past the other three to get to the door.

"You push me, zen!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in so terrifying a voice that Billy Bunter dropped back upon his seat in alarm.

"No—please—not at all! I—I didn't mean to push you, monsieur!" stuttered Bunter. "I—I want to get out!"

"Vill you push me, zen?"

"No! No! No!"

"Vell, zen, if it is not zat you push me, zen zat is all right. But if it is zat you shall push me, zen—"

"I beg your pardon! I assure you—"

"Zat is enough!" said Tom Merry, as the train started.

He had gained his object in keeping Bunter in the carriage until the train left the station. It was too late for the fat junior to think of changing carriages now. He settled back into his seat with a suppressed groan. There was a non-stop run of a quarter of an hour before him, and in such company Bunter felt the reverse of safe. In his mind's eye he could see the newspapers announcing: "Shocking Outrage on the Railway Line! Respectably-dressed Lad Found Murdered in a Railway-carriage, and Robbed! The Police Have a Clue!" With such terrific thoughts passing through his mind, the fat junior was not likely to pass a happy quarter of an hour.

CHAPTER 3.

Billy Bunter has a Narrow Escape.

BILLY BUNTER screwed himself as small as possible—which was not very small—in his corner of the carriage, and palpitated.

The previous part of his journey had been very comfortable, filled with great anticipations of the great time he was to have at Eastwood House, as the guest of his old pal, D'Arcy.

But those cheery anticipations had vanished now. The more he blinked at the four ruffians the more murderous and deadly they looked. That they would allow him to reach his journey's end without at least robbing him seemed improbable. It was only too likely that they would slaughter him, and pitch him out of the carriage. They looked as if they had been brought up on such deeds.

Billy Bunter palpitated, blinking in ill-concealed uneasiness at his fellow-passengers. Tom Merry looked at him.

"You stare at me, zen?" he demanded.

"No!" gasped Bunter. "Not at all; in fact, I—I was asleep—I mean, I am going to sleep!"

"Sapristi!"

Bunter closed his eyes, keeping one corner open to watch the four ruffians. They took no notice of him for some minutes. Then their leader spoke.

"You are ready, my comrades, for ze deed of blood at Easthorpe?"

"We are ready!" said Blake, in a deep voice.

"Hush!" said Lowther. "He will hear and betray us to the police!"

"Bah! He sleeps!"

"Mayhap he is a spy!"

"Nou nou! He sleeps! Think not of him! We must lay our plans. In ten minutes we shall be in Easthorpe! You have ze dagger, Marco?"

"I have it!"

"You have ze automatic pistol, Pedro?"

"Oui, oui, chief!"

"And you, Carlo, you have ze dynamite bomb?"

"It is here, chief!"

"Good! I have ze ozzer bomb. And ven zat victim, marked out by ze brothers of ze Black Hand, shall be stabbed, shot, and blown to pieces viz ze bombs, he shall be dead!"

"Death to him!" said the other Anarchists solemnly.

"But why does he die, O Chief?"

"He is ze son of a stockbroker in ze City. For zat he nous die! Is it not ze duty of ze Brothers of ze Black Hand to kill all ze rich viz zemselves?"

"It is true, O Chief!"

"Vat is his name?"

"His name is Buntair!"

Billy Bunter gave a violent start as he heard his own name pronounced. His first feeling, as he listened to the talk of the Anarchists, was of relief that they were planning to murder someone else instead of himself. But when he heard his own name he shuddered all over. What would have happened if these fearful ruffians had known that their intended victim was in the same carriage with them? Evidently they did not know him by sight. In that lay the fat junior's safety.

"But how shall we know him, O Chief? We have never seen him?"

"Zat is easy! He arrives at Eastwood House zis day. Zaz

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NEXT WEDNESDAY—**"HELD BY THE ENEMY!"** A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

has been learned by a trusty spy of ze Black Hand. Enrico and Pierre and Jacko are vatching ze house, and sey vill see him arrive. Zey vill tell us, and ren ve sall slay him!"

"But if we cannot find him there—"
"Zen ve sall vatch ze house day and night till ve get ze chance. He cannot escape. Has not ze Brotherhood of ze Black Hand sworn his death?"

"Zat is so!"
"If he remains at Eastwood House—if he ever enters that house—he is dead! He can only escape us by flying. And he knows not his danger, so he vill not fly."

"True, O King—I mean O Chief!"
Billy Bunter's fat face was the hue of chalk. If the Anarchists had looked at him they must have observed that he was not asleep. Fortunately, they did not look at him. Billy Bunter would have given worlds, or whole solar systems, for the train to arrive in Easthorpe Station. Never had minutes seemed so like hours. The Anarchists continued to mutter to one another, till at last the train, to Bunter's great relief, stopped at Easthorpe.

The four Anarchists stepped out of the carriage. Bunter waited till they were well down the platform, and then rolled helplessly out. His knees were knocking together so much that his fat little legs would hardly support him.

He blinked along the platform after the Anarchists. He felt that he had had the escape of his life. But if he went on to Eastwood House it was simply running into the jaws of death. He thought of the police. But he knew that the police force would be very small in a little village like Easthorpe. Besides, there were Anarchists watching the house, whom he had not seen. If he escaped these four it would be only to fall a victim to the daggers, automatic pistols, and bombs of the rest of the gang.

"Oh, crumbs!" groaned Bunter, leaning weakly against an automatic sweet-machine. "Oh, crickey! Who'd have thought it? I—I wish I could explain to them that the pater ain't really rich at all, but they wouldn't believe me! Oh, great pip! What am I going to do? I shall be murdered if I go near Eastwood House! And—and I haven't left myself enough money for a return fare. Oh, crickey!"

He waited till the Anarchists were gone, and then rolled out of the station, in a state of wild trepidation and anxiety. As he came out he heard the voice of the leading Anarchist addressing a porter.

"Vill you tell me vat is ze way to Eastwood House?"
Bunter scuttled back into the station like a scared rabbit. There was no doubt of it; they were going to D'Arcy's place to lie in wait for him.

"I've got to bunk!" murmured Bunter. "I—I'm not going to stay here to be murdered! Ow! The awful beasts! All these beastly foreign Anarchists ought to be hung! Ow! If anybody pointed me out to them they'd come and murder me now! And—and there ain't any police here—only one silly bobby. Oh, crumbs! The chaps at Greyfriars won't believe this when I tell them. They won't even believe that my pater is rich. I wish these foreign beasts didn't believe it. And that beast D'Arcy hasn't come to meet the train, and he must have had my letter this morning. I could have borrowed the return fare of him. He's a beast! Everybody's a beast! Oh, crumbs!"

If Billy Bunter had possessed sufficient ready cash to pay his fare home he would certainly have caught the next train out from Easthorpe, and the object of the Anarchist juniors would have been accomplished.

The hitch in the programme was not due to them; it was only due to William George Bunter's perpetual state of impecuniosity.

To travel without a ticket and without the money to pay his fare was a serious matter. He had depended on D'Arcy for a loan to pay his fare home after his holiday. If D'Arcy had been at the station to meet him it would have been all right. But D'Arcy was not there, and there was no sign of the Eastwood motor-car.

Bunter was in a fix.
To go on to Eastwood House was out of the question. And to depart without the money to pay his fare was not possible. And now that it was too late the Owl of the Remove at Greyfriars sincerely regretted his excessive sharpness in fastening himself upon the good-natured Arthur Augustus for a holiday. But how could he have guessed that he was to run into a fearful danger like this? He felt that he was not to blame.

As he stood with palpitating heart and wrinkled brows in the station vestibule there was a sudden blare of a trumpet in the street. Then there was a shout:

"The circus!"
"Hooray!"

Bunter blinked out of the station. A striking procession was coming up the village street. A huge elephant led the way, with a clown perched on his back, beating a drum and exchanging humorous remarks with the crowd. Next came a

man on a camel, blowing mighty blasts on a trumpet. Then a big van lumbered by, with staring announcements upon it in red and black:

"CHUMGUM'S CELEBRATED CIRCUS!"

SIX DAYS ONLY!

"COME AND SEE THE WONDER OF THE WORLD!
CHUMGUM'S CELEBRATED CIRCUS!"

All the village had turned out to see the procession of the circus. In the crowd before the railway-station Billy Bunter recognised the four Anarchists. Even in his palpitating state of mind he could not help wondering that such villainous and deadly characters should take an interest in so trivial a thing as a circus procession. But they evidently did. They were looking on with as much keenness as the village boys.

After the van came a bearded, bronzed man mounted upon a powerful and savage-looking black horse. It was Texas Bill, the Broncho Buster, a gentleman whose features seemed to hint that he came from a nearer country than Texas—perhaps Tipperary. More vans and animals and striking costumes could be seen in the rear. And suddenly Bunter uttered an exclamation as he saw a lad mounted upon a handsome pony riding abreast of the Texas gentleman. He recognised D'Arcy minor, of St. Jim's—the redoubtable Wally of the Third. The tag of St. Jim's was grinning cheerfully. He had been out riding his new pony when he fell in with the circus procession, and he had calmly joined it, somewhat to the surprise of the circus folk, and causing much laughter among the crowd of onlookers.

"That's D'Arcy's young brother," murmured Bunter. "If I could get at him I could get a loan!"

But he scuttled back into the station doorway as one of the Anarchists turned his head. If he had overheard the remark of that Anarchist he would not have been so much alarmed.

"My, hat!" the Anarchist was muttering. "That cheeky young bouncer Wally! What would Gussy say if he saw him now?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the Anarchists.
Wally glanced at them as he came by. The sight of those four foreign-looking scoundrels in the village street astonished him, as it astonished all others who saw them. But the scamp of the Third Form at St. Jim's was not scared by their villainous looks.

"Hallo, you want a shave!" he remarked, in passing.
And the bystanders grinned. Tom Merry glared at the fag, but did not speak. He did not want Wally to recognise his voice. But Blake gave a sudden shout:

"Look out, Wally!"
Wally started at hearing the familiar voice proceeding from that unfamiliar person. But he took the warning, looking round quickly.

The savage-looking black horse ridden by Texas Bill had made a sudden lunge with his head at the pony, his bared white teeth showing in a snarl. The rider jerked him back at once, and the black horse pranced and bucked; and the pony, startled and scared by the attack, sprang away. There was a wild surging back of the crowd.

"Hold him in, Wally!" yelled Blake.
Wally was gripping the reins hard. But the pony was thoroughly frightened, having already been in a nervous state from the blare of the drum and the trumpet. He fairly bolted, with the bit between his teeth.

In the narrow and crowded village street there was a yell of alarm. The bolting pony would certainly have knocked down half a dozen people at least before they could escape; but, as the animal sprang away, Tom Merry made a leap at him.

The junior's grasp closed on the bit, and his weight dragged the pony's head down.

Texas Bill forced his horse on, but Wally's pony was rearing and struggling wildly; Wally sticking to him grimly, and Tom Merry hanging at his head, with a flustered crowd surging and panting round them!

CHAPTER 4. Not a Success!

"HOLD him!"
"Don't let go!"
"It's one of them furriners!"
"Well done!"

Tom Merry hung on grimly. The pony was a powerful animal, and he dragged the junior clear of the ground twice; and if Tom Merry had let go, he would certainly have fallen to the earth and received the lashing of the trampling hoofs. But he did not let go!

He held on grimly, and the pony's head was dragged down at last; and the animal, subdued, stood trembling, under the control again of his master.

"Thank you!" panted Wally. "That was jolly plucky! But what—what!"

He gasped with astonishment as he looked at his rescuer. And the crowd, surging round, gasped too. They had been astonished at seeing one of the villainous-looking foreigners rush to the aid of the endangered lad. But they were still more astonished to see him as he looked after his struggle with the pony. For in the tussle his beard and moustache had come off, and a smooth, boyish face was revealed, looking queer and comical with the reddened nose and darkened eyebrows.

"Tom Merry!" yelled Wally.

Tom gasped.

"Yes, you young ass! Can you manage now?"

"Yes; but what—"

"Oh, rats! You've spoiled a good jape!" grunted Tom.

"Clear off!"

Wally grinned and rode off with the procession, which was under way again. Tom Merry was the cynosure of all eyes. He had been a good deal in the village during his stay at Eastwood House, and many of the folk in the street recognised him now in spite of his nose and his eyebrows. And there was a general chuckle. Tom Merry looked anxiously towards the station. If Billy Bunter had seen that incident, and saw him now, the juniors had japed that peculiar jape in vain.

And the first thing Tom Merry saw as he looked towards the station was the round face of Billy Bunter, with his eyes almost starting from his head behind his big spectacles.

Bunter was still there!

If Billy Bunter had had any money in his pocket he would have been gone; but he hadn't, and so he was still there. And the unmasking of Tom Merry had taken place under his very eyes.

Bunter blinked at him, his eyes growing as round as saucers. For some moments he could hardly believe his eyes. But he recognised Tom Merry; and slowly a fat grin overspread his plump face.

He came out of the station, all his terrors of the Anarchists vanishing now.

He grinned affably as he joined the St. Jim's juniors.

"Hallo!" he said cheerily. "How do you do, Tom Merry? He, he, he!"

"What are you he-he-heing at?" snapped Tom Merry crossly. He was by no means pleased at that total collapse of the jape.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Bunter. "Of course, I knew whom you were all the time."

"What!"

"In the railway carriage, you know," said Bunter calmly. "You were trying to scare me. I said to myself, these chaps are trying to pull my leg, and I'll let 'em believe I take it in. He, he, he! Fooled you a treat, didn't I?"

The defeated Anarchists glared at Billy Bunter as if they would eat him.

"You—you—Ananias!" roared Blake. "You jolly well know that you were scared out of your wits."

"He, he, he!"

"You hadn't the least idea that it was us!" howled Lowther, greatly incensed.

"He, he, he!"

"You were shaking like a fat jelly!" snorted Manners.

"He, he, he!"

The Co. were intensely exasperated. They knew very well that Billy Bunter had been completely taken in; that he had been scared, and would have been too terrified to put in an appearance at Eastwood House at all, but for that unfortunate incident due to Wally's pony. But now he knew that the supposed Anarchists were only the St. Jim's juniors in stage disguises, all his terror had, of course, vanished, and he coolly declared that he had known all the time. And it was his evident intention to go on to Eastwood House. The Co. had taken the difficult matter into their hands; but they had not succeeded, after all, in rescuing Arthur Augustus D'Arcy from his unwelcome guest.

Tom Merry & Co. were feeling decidedly cross. The villagers round them were staring and laughing, and they were receiving much more attention than they cared for. Now that Tom Merry had been recognised, the onlookers guessed that the other villainous-looking foreigners were also schoolboys "got up" for the occasion, and the four juniors seemed to be even a greater attraction than the circus procession. Grinning urchins thronged round them, making remarks; and one bold "nipper" jerked at Monty Lowther's beard, and pulled it off, and there was a howl of laughter.

"I say, we've got to get out of this," muttered Blake.

"Come on!" said Tom.

"I say, you fellows, if you're going back to Eastwood House, I'll come with you," said Billy Bunter. "I don't mind a joke, bless you. You should see the way I jape the fellows in the Remove at Greyfriars. Quite a dab at it. You didn't take me in, either. I knew it was you fellows all the time."

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

"How is it my old pal Gussy hasn't come to meet me at the station?" asked Bunter.

"Bow-wow!" growled Blake.

"I really expected it of him. However, you fellows can show me the way, to Eastwood House. Gussy will be delighted to see me."

"Will he?" growled Blake.

"You bet! We got pally from our first meeting," said Bunter confidentially. "Just the kind of fellow I can pull with, Gussy is. I've given him lessons in ventriloquism, you know. I'll show you fellows some ventriloquist tricks later on. I'm a dab at it. My hat, this blessed crowd is following us."

The juniors strode down the village street, feeling extremely uncomfortable in their absurd disguises now that they were known.

A grinning and chuckling crowd of villagers followed them. They left the village as quickly as they could, but the more youthful part of the crowd still kept on their track, evidently regarding the four made-up juniors as being as good an entertainment as the circus procession.

Tom Merry & Co. quickened their pace, anxious to get out of sight, but a dozen village urchins persisted in following them down the lane. Billy Bunter was grinning with satisfaction. The juniors had japed him, and he was not at all sorry to see them paying the penalty in this manner.

"I say, you fellows, you do look rather queer," he remarked. "No wonder the blessed kids are following you. He, he, he!"

"Shut up!" roared Blake.

"Ahem! But really, you know—"

"I say, we can't go back to Eastwood like this," said Tom Merry, pausing in the lane. "These blessed kids are following us all the way. They seem to think we're going to give a performance or something."

"He, he, he!"

The St. Jim's juniors glared at Bunter. He was the cause of it all. Had the jape gone well they could have slipped back to Eastwood House quietly; but with the crowd of village urchins following them that was impossible. To walk up the drive with that crowd staring and chuckling after them at the lodge gates was out of the question. They stopped in the lane, and removed their disguises as far as they could; but they could not remove the paint from their faces, or the shadowing from their eyebrows and eyelashes, or the rough clothes they wore. And their aspect now was, in fact, odder then when they had worn the beards and moustaches. And Billy Bunter grinned at them all the time, thoroughly enjoying their perplexity and dismay.

Three well-dressed youths came striding down the lane, and they paused at the sight of Tom Merry & Co. They were Cutts and Gilmore of the Fifth, and Knox of the Sixth, three St. Jim's seniors, who were spending their vacation at Westhorpe, only half a mile from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's home. Tom Merry & Co. were on the most possible terms with them at St. Jim's; and since the vacation had started there had been trouble between the two parties. Cutts & Co. were the very last persons in the world whom the juniors would have wished to see at that moment. Their luck was very much out.

The three seniors stared at them in astonishment for a moment, and then burst into a roar of laughter.

The juniors, in rough clothes suitable for men twice their years, and with red noses and black eyebrows, were barely recognisable, and extremely comic to the view.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Cutts. "Well, this takes the cake! Are you kids going out busking, or what?"

"Find out!" growled Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see you've got a following," grinned Knox. "Are you made up for a Punch and Judy entertainment? Or is it a song and dance? Start in! We'll stand a few coppers."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. glared at their old enemies and tramped on savagely. Billy Bunter followed them with his irritating chuckle. Cutts & Co. looked after them and roared with laughter till they were out of sight. The village boys were still following. One or two of them, in the exuberance of youthful spirits, had begun to throw stones. Billy Bunter roared as a pebble caught him on the back of the head, and his chuckle was silent for a while.

"I say, you fellows, I can't keep along with you if this kind of thing is going on," he said. "I'm not a snob, but I really do bar walking out with fellows who get themselves up in that kind of clobber. You'll excuse me."

"With pleasure!" snapped Blake.

"See you later!" said Bunter. "Ta-ta!"

He rolled on, leaving the juniors halted in the road. They were nearly in sight of the lodge gates of Eastwood now. Tom Merry could have sent a message by Billy Bunter.

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asking Digby and the others to bring out their clothes, and they could have changed in the wood. But he felt that, considering his intentions towards Bunter, it was impossible to ask a favour of him. So the Owl of Greyfriars rolled away and disappeared. And the four juniors looked at one another in dismay.

"Well, what are we going to do?" snorted Blake. "The fat beast has gone to Eastwood after all, and we're landed!"

"What rotten luck!" groaned Manners.

"We'll get down to the river and wash this stuff off our chivvies," said Tom dolefully. "Then if those kids don't clear off we'll charge them and wallop them. Come on!"

They cut down to the river and washed the make-up from their faces in the flowing waters. The village urchins watched them from a distance, occasionally throwing a stone or two. When they had finished the young rascals were still there, evidently prepared to follow them any distance. But Tom Merry & Co. were fed up by this time. They broke off sticks in the thicket and made a sudden charge at the group of urchins.

Whack! Whack! Whack! Whack!

The young rascals yelled and fled. The juniors pursued them some distance till they were in full and panic-stricken flight. Then, somewhat consoled, they took their way to Eastwood House again.

CHAPTER 5.

Gussy's Pal.

"BUNTAH, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was chatting on the terrace with Cousin Ethel when the fat figure of William George Bunter of Greyfriars appeared coming up the drive. Herries and Digby and Lumley-Lumley were there. They were waiting for the return of Tom Merry & Co. The 11.50 train had long been in, and it was close on lunch-time. If the jape had been a success it was time that Tom Merry & Co. returned. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had been held a prisoner in his room until he had given his word as a D'Arcy not to attempt to chip in and interfere with the Co. and their enterprise. But even now he did not know what the enterprise was. But that it had been a failure was evident, as William George Bunter of Greyfriars was seen rolling along the drive.

"Bunter?" repeated Cousin Ethel. "A friend of yours, Arthur?"

"Ahem! An acquaintance," said D'Arcy. "I—I've met the chap. He's a Gweyfwiahs chap—the school we play sometimes, you know. He's a beastly ventwiloquist—I—I mean, a vewy clewah ventwiloquist."

"Bunter, by Joseph!" exclaimed Digby. "Then those asses—"

"I guess they've made a hash of it, after all!" grinned Lumley-Lumley.

"That is what comes of leaving it to the Shell fellows!" grunted Herries. "We should have managed it all right. But those Shell duffers—"

"Shush, deah boys!" murmured Arthur Augustus, as Cousin Ethel turned a puzzled glance upon the juniors. "Pway sweet Buntah politely to oblige me."

Billy Bunter came up puffing. It was a warm morning, and the Owl of Greyfriars was not accustomed to exertion. He raised his hat to Cousin Ethel with a jerk of his fat body, which he was fully persuaded was a graceful bow.

The fat junior's face was beaming with smiles. If there was a little involuntary coldness in D'Arcy's manner Bunter was determined not to notice it.

"Well, here I am, Gussy, old chap!" he said, holding out a fat hand. "How do you do? Jolly warm weather—what?"

"Yas," said Arthur Augustus, accepting the handshake in a very gingerly manner. "How do you do, deah boy?"

"Rather expected to see you at the station," said Bunter. "You had my letter?"

"Ya-a-as!"

Billy Bunter blinked at Cousin Ethel through his big glasses.

Arthur Augustus saw that there was nothing for it but an introduction, and he presented Bunter. The fat junior shook hands with Herries and Digby and Lumley-Lumley in turn. He was determined not to see that his welcome was an icy one. He had come to Eastwood House to please himself; not to please others, as a matter of fact. And so long as he was not actually kicked out Bunter did not mind the rest.

"Have you seen anything of the other chaps, Bunter?" Digby asked, very curious to know what had happened to Tom Merry and his companions.

Bunter chuckled.

"He, he, he! Yes, rather!"

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"Did they—did they meet you at the station?" faltered Arthur Augustus.

"He, he, he! They got into the train at Leckford," grinned Bunter. "They were got up as foreigners, with ridiculous beards and things, and they thought they took me in! It was a jape, I suppose—not quite up to our form at Greyfriars, though. Of course, I knew them at once."

"Bai Jove!"

"They began to talk rot about Anarchists and Black Hands and bombs and things," said Bunter. "I pretended to take it all in. Bet they thought I was scared out of my wits. He, he, he!"

"Dear me!" said Ethel.

"I fooled 'em right to the top of their bent," went on Bunter calmly. "They never knew I knew who they were until we got out at Easthorpe."

"My hat!"

"Then I came part of the way here with them," said Bunter. "But I had to leave them, you know. There was a regular mob following them, owing to their being got up in that idiotic way, and I really couldn't stand it any longer."

"Great Scott!"

"Then—then where are they now, Buntah?"

"Blessed if I know! They were stopping in the lane when I left them," said Bunter. "I dare say they'll come in presently. He, he, he!"

But the others did not laugh. The jape had been an utter and absolute failure, and the laugh was on the side of the Greyfriars junior. Arthur Augustus looked at his watch.

"They'll be late for lunch if they don't come in pretty soon," he remarked. "Weally, I must say you fellows have mucked up the whole bizney!"

"Those Shell bounders have!" growled Herries.

"Bai Jove, here's Winobson, and he's got a note!"

The lodgekeeper came up grinning and touching his hat, and he presented a note to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. It ran: "We're waiting in the lodge. Send our clothes.—T. M."

"Thank you, Winobson! Wait a minute."

A few minutes later the lodgekeeper departed, bearing the clothes of the four juniors in a bundle.

Billy Bunter chuckled gleefully. Whether he suspected the real object of the jape was not to be guessed. But he evidently enjoyed the discomfort of the japers.

"You are stayin' to lunch, Buntah?" asked Arthur Augustus as politely as he could.

Bunter beamed on him.

"Certainly, my dear chap! In fact, I'm going to stay with you a few days. I can put off my other engagements till then. Lord Mauleverer of our Form at Greyfriars was very keen to have me down at his place, but I told him I must spare a few days for you."

"Bai Jove!"

"My bag's going to be sent on from the station," said Bunter. "If you'll let somebody show me to my room—"

"Pway come in, deah boy!" said D'Arcy, almost overcome. Bunter followed him briskly into the house.

"Chillingham, Mistah Buntah is stayin' with me a day or two. Will you show him to a woom, please?"

And the stately butler took Bunter away.

Arthur Augustus's face was a little clouded as he went in to lunch. Bunter was soon down, blinking genially through his glasses, and evidently quite at ease with himself and his surroundings. The St. Jim's fellows thought they had never seen so utter and complete a specimen of a "bounder," but politeness restrained them from saying so.

D'Arcy reluctantly presented Bunter to his father and Lord Conway; and the fat junior sat down at the table in high good-humour. He was lunching with a lord, and that alone was joy for Bunter. And the well-spread board made his little round eyes twinkle with still greater joy.

Tom Merry & Co. were a few minutes late to lunch. When they came in they looked at Bunter as if they could eat him.

Bunter grinned at them genially.

"Got in all right—what?" he asked.

"Yes."

"All serene! I don't bear any malice for a little jape—especially as the laugh is up against you fellows. He, he, he!"

Tom Merry & Co. did not reply. Their feelings were too deep for words. The jape had been a failure—a hopeless failure—and Billy Bunter was securely "planted" at Eastwood House, to stay until he wore out the politeness of his host. And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy being by nature a long-suffering youth in the cause of politeness, it was therefore likely that Bunter's stay would be a long one.

ANSWERS



Billy Bunter palpitated, blinking in ill-concealed uneasiness at his four villainous companions. Tom Merry looked at him. "You stare at me, zen?" he demanded. "No!" gasped Bunter. "Not at all—in fact, I-I was fast asleep—I mean, I am going to sleep!" (See Chapter 3.)

CHAPTER 6.

Bunter's Little Flutter.

"WELL!" The Co. asked the question in chorus, after lunch, when the juniors strolled out of doors. Billy Bunter was reposing in a long cane chair on the terrace. He did not feel inclined to exert himself after a meal. His exertions were made during the meal.

"Well?" said Arthur Augustus. "You appear to have made a ghastly failure of it, deah boys."

"All that blessed Wally's fault," said Tom Merry.

"Weally? How was that?"

Tom Merry explained.

"But Buntah says he knew it was you fellows all the time, from the moment you got into the twain at Leckford."

"That's all rot. I'm afraid Bunter hasn't been brought up on the same lines as George Washington. But it was a failure; that is a cert," admitted Tom Merry.

"And weally, I do not approve of the ideah at all, deah boys. Pewwaps it is just as well."

"Oh, rats!"

"What are you going to do now?" demanded Blake.

"Nothin'."

"Are you going to swallow the bounder whole?"

"Yaas. It is quite imposs for me to show discourtesy to a fellow undah my own woof, or to allow discourtesy to be shown him, deah boys. I have resolved to make Buntah very welcome. I wish all you fellows to do the same."

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders.

"It's your bizney, Gussy. We tried to rescue you. But if you want the chap here, it's your own bizney entirely. Say the word, and we'll duck him in the river!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or jape him black and blue, and make him glad to clear off!"

"Willingly," said Blake heartily.

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"Imposs, deah boys. As he is heah as my guest, it is up to me to be civil, and to like him as much as I can. I shall, therefore, make up my mind to wegard him as a fwiend, if I can. Pway tweat him with gweat politeness, for my sake."

"Gentlemen," said Tom Merry solemnly, "it is up to us to meet Gussy's wishes in this matter. I hereby adopt Bunter as a long-lost brother."

"He shall be as dear to me as a prodigal son newly returned," said Lowther, with equal solemnity.

"I will take him to my bosom and weep over him," said Blake.

"I will fold him to my manly breast," said Manners. "He shall be the apple of my eye, and the delight of my heart."

"Pway don't wot, you fellows. We will now let the subject dwop," said Arthur Augustus. "I am goin' to make it a point to be vewy fwiendly to Buntah, and to tweat him with gweat politeness. I wegard it as bein' up to me."

And, by way of a beginning, Arthur Augustus returned to the terrace, and joined the Owl of Greyfriars. Billy Bunter blinked at him affably through his big spectacles. He was in a state of great comfort, reposing in the shade, after a tremendous lunch.

"Anythin' I can do for you, deah boy?" asked D'Arcy.

Bunter sat up.

"Well, as a matter of fact, now you mention it—" he said. "The fact is, my letters will take some time getting after me here. I'm expecting a postal-order from a titled relation of mine. Would it make any difference to you if you cashed it in advance? I will hand you the postal-order when it comes."

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"Oh!"

"Merely a trifling sum," explained Bunter. "But I happen to be short of money, owing to making Lord Maul-e-ver a loan."

"All right, dear boy. How much?"

"Only a couple of quid," said Bunter carelessly.

Arthur Augustus was the son of an earl, and had a good allowance, but he did not regard two pounds as a trifling sum. Bunter's ideas about money were evidently on a much grander scale, perhaps because he never had any. However, Arthur Augustus extracted two sovereigns from a little russet leather purse, and they disappeared into Billy Bunter's waistcoat-pocket. Bunter smiled with fat satisfaction.

"Thanks awfully, old chap!" he said. "I'll hand you the postal-order immediately—ahem!—it arrives."

"Tight—ho, dear boy."

"What are you chaps doing here?" asked Bunter. "If you're thinking of getting up any cricket matches, you can rely on me. I'm a dab at cricket."

"We have played some cricket," said Arthur Augustus. "We spend a great deal of time on the wivah."

"Good! I'm a splendid carsman. You'll find me right at home there."

"You seem to be able to do a great many things, Buntah."

"I'm rather a dab at a lot of things," said Bunter modestly. "I don't want to swank, but I may say I'm the best junior cricketer at Greyfriars both at batting and bowling and about the best oar on the river. At running I can beat all the Remove. At jumping there isn't a chap in the Lower School to beat me. I'm a topping cyclist, and have won a lot of pots and things. At amateur theatricals I'm the leading member of the Remove Dramatic Society. Wharton—Wharton's the captain of our Form at Greyfriars—sometimes begs me with tears in his eyes to take a part like Hamlet or Macbeth. But I don't always have time with so many irons in the fire."

"Bai Jove!"

"If you're getting up any private theatricals here, you can depend on me to play the title-role. I'd do more than that to oblige a pal."

"Bai Jove!"

"By the way, I see there's a circus near here," went on Bunter. "I suppose you are thinking of taking your party—what?"

"Yaas."

"I'll come with you, of course. Get any seat you like for me. I'm not particular, so long as it's comfy, and not among common people. If you take any refreshments along with you, I prefer jam-tarts. But don't mind me. Currant buns would do."

"Oh!"

"You'll find me an entertaining chap, too," said Bunter. "You know what a topping ventriloquist I am. If you'll like me to scare your pater out of his wits by making a savage dog growl under his chair—"

"Weally, Buntah—"

"Or if you'll be amused by seeing a row started between your pater, say, and your elder brother, I could work it quite easily by imitating their voices. I've often made chaps quarrel like that, you know, and it's awful fun!" chuckled Bunter.

"You uttah young wascal—"

"Eh?"

"I—I mean—I beg your pardon, Buntah, but I must request you not to play any twicks on my pater or old Conway."

"Just as you like, old chap. Shall I get up a row between Tom Merry and one of the others?"

"No!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, all right! Only I want to entertain you, you know. By the way, what a ripping girl your cousin is!"

"Yaas."

"She seems rather to like me—don't you think so?" said Bunter, with a simper.

Arthur Augustus regarded him sternly. But the Owl of Greyfriars was too short-sighted to note his expression.

"I dare say the other chaps won't like it," he said. "But it's really not my fault. It's always so. Some chaps are born with a fascinating way with them. Girls always take to me like ducks to water. Bob Cherry often gets ratty because Marjorie and Clara prefer me. They always brighten up when I come along. Now, speaking of your cousin—"

"I should pwefer, Buntah, that you do not speak of my cousin," said Arthur Augustus, with such a note of sternness in his voice that Billy Bunter scented danger, and promptly sheered off the subject.

"Ripping fine afternoon, ain't it?" said Bunter calmly. "I'll come out for a stroll with you fellows, if you like. You can show me round the place. You've got quite a nice

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little place here. I should like you to see my pater's place in Surrey—deer-parks and things, you know; our own golf course, and all that. The pater does things in rather a topping style. Yes, I'm ready, old chap."

Bunter put on his straw hat, and strolled off the terrace with D'Arcy. He made an attempt to take Arthur Augustus's arm; but that was past the limit, and Arthur Augustus contrived to dodge him. Bunter was in high good-humour, and was very pleased with the excellent impression he had made on the swell of St. Jim's.

The juniors strolled down by the sunny river. At some distance from Eastwood House, along the river, was the lodge, the place where Cutts & Co. were staying for their holiday. The juniors frequently saw Cutts and his companions on the river, and sometimes "slanging" remarks were exchanged between the two parties. As the juniors strolled along the grassy bank they caught sight of a punt moored in a shady spot under the trees, with Cutts and Knox sitting in it, playing cards and smoking cigarettes.

The two seniors of St. Jim's glanced at the boys on the bank, and frowned at them. Billy Bunter blinked at the punt.

"Those fellows who passed you on the road, when you were looking such guys," said Bunter pleasantly. "Do you know them?"

"They belong to St. Jim's," said Tom Merry shortly. "They're not friends of ours."

"We don't allow that kind of thing at Greyfriars," remarked Bunter, with a nod indicating the cards and the cigarettes.

"It's not allowed at St. Jim's, either," growled Blake. "The fellows can do as they like on a vacation."

"I guess they'd get into trouble, though, if any St. Jim's master happened to be in this neighbourhood, and spotted them," remarked Lumley-Lumley.

"Yaas, wathah! And serve them wight."

"I say, you fellows, I'm rather a dab at nap," said Bunter thoughtfully. "After all, we're on a vacation, you know. Why shouldn't we please ourselves?"

"I object, Buntah!"

"Well, a little game of nap," suggested Bunter, blinking hungrily at the glimmer of several gold and silver coins on the seat in the punt beside Cutts. "I'll play you—"

"You won't!" said Tom Merry.

"Gamblin' is wotten bad form, Buntah, and my patah would be vewy watty, too."

"But your pater won't know," suggested Bunter.

"If I did anythin' I should not care to mention to my patah, Buntah, I should wogard myself as a wotten cad!" said Arthur Augustus deliberately.

"Oh, all right!" said Bunter, with a grunt, and they walked on.

"I'm tired," announced Bunter, a hundred yards further on. "I think I'll rest a bit. Don't you fellows stop for me. I'll have a nap here in the grass."

"Just as you like, dear boy."

Tom Merry & Co. were not, as a matter of fact, sorry to drop the fat junior. They walked on, and disappeared round the winding bank of the river. Billy Bunter blinked after them, and grinned. He did not take that nap he had mentioned. It was quite another kind of nap he was thinking of. Bunter regarded himself as "a dab" at many things, the game of nap among others. As soon as the St. Jim's juniors were out of sight, the Owl of the Remove hurried back towards the punt. Cutts and Knox stared at him as he halted.

"I say, you fellows—" began Bunter.

"Oh, clear off!" said Cutts.

"But, I say—"

"Do you belong to the circus?" asked Knox.

"The circus! No, of course not. Why?"

"Oh, I thought you might be the Champion Fat Man, or something of that sort!"

Bunter glared at him.

"Look here—"

"Thanks! I'd rather not! You're not pretty to look at! Buzz off before I give you a clout with the punt-pole," said Knox.

"I say, you fellows, there's nothing to be ratty about. Look here, I can play nap, and I'll join you with pleasure," said Bunter.

Cutts and Knox exchanged a quick glance. Bunter was casting avid glances at the coins beside Cutts. The two rascals of St. Jim's had no objection whatever to interrupting their game for a time while they "skinned" the fat duffer who had come to them looking for trouble. Their manners changed at once.

"Oh, all right!" said Cutts, quite cordially. "Jump in! You're very welcome."

"Certainly," said Knox. "I can see you are a sport, youngster. Take a hand, with pleasure."

Bunter stepped into the punt, and sat down. In his egregious conceit and stupidity, he fully intended to "skin" the two St. Jim's seniors. He might as well have attempted to pare the claws of a tiger in the jungle.

Cutts and Knox were very polite all at once. They welcomed the fat junior into the game. Cutts changed a sovereign for him cordially, and they played. In a quarter of an hour the sovereign was about equally divided between Cutts and Knox. Bunter was looking a little blue by this time. He changed his second sovereign, and it ten minutes it had followed the first one. Bunter ran his hands through his pockets, and extracted a couple of shillings, which were quickly added to the possessions of Cutts and Knox. Then Billy Bunter turned a feeble grin upon the two cool sharpers.

"Of course, you don't mind if I play on I.O.U.'s now?" he remarked.

"Cash all gone?" asked Cutts.

"Yes."

"Good-bye, then?"

"Oh, I say! My I.O.U.—"

"Thanks! We're not collectors of wastepaper," said Cutts.

"Good-afternoon!"

"I—I say. Of—of course this is only a game," stammered Bunter. "We were not really playing for money, were we?"

"I fancy so!"

"I mean you're going to give me my two quid back."

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Cutts. "If you get some more cash we'll give you your revenge, with pleasure. But we don't play for wastepaper. Good-bye!"

Billy Bunter blinked at the two seniors of St. Jim's. He sincerely wished that he had not yielded to that greedy desire to "skin" them. The two sovereigns he had extracted from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy were gone now. Bunter had lost them, and deserved to lose them; but he was not satisfied.

"I say, you fellows, you jolly well know that this is against the law!" he exclaimed. "If a bobby saw you chaps playing for money he'd run you in!"

"Go home!"

"Well, you hand me those two quids back," said Bunter. "You know it's against the law to gamble. I'm not going to break the law."

Cutts and Knox laughed. The latter picked up the punt-pole.

"I give you one second to clear off!" he said.

"Look here! Yaroooh!" roared Bunter, as the pole clumped upon his ribs. "Yow-ow! All right! I'm going! Yaroooh!"

He made a bound for the bank. The pole smote him behind as he went, and he stumbled and squashed down in the reeds, and there was a splash. The two seniors roared with laughter as the hapless Bunter, smothered with mud, crawled out of the reeds up the bank.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Grooh-hoooh!"

Billy Bunter shook a fat fist at the two fellows in the punt. Knox made a threatening motion with the pole, and Bunter retreated hastily, tramping away along the bank, and leaving a trail of muddy water behind him. And Cutts and Knox, chuckling, settled down to their game again.

CHAPTER 7.

Two Rascals Ragged!

"**B**AI Jove! What's the mattah with Buntah?"

"Looks wet?"

"And muddy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. were returning from their walk, and they suddenly came in sight of Billy Bunter on the grassy bank, engaged in furiously scraping mud from his clothes and boots. He was rubbing off the mud with handfuls of grass, and was crimson with exertion, and in a great state of perspiration.

He blinked round as the juniors came up. Tom Merry & Co. tried not to smile, but it was difficult.

"Taken a tumble, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus sympathetically.

Billy Bunter snorted with fury.

"I've been chucked into the mud," he growled. "I've been swindled out of two quids, and then chucked out of a punt."

The juniors looked serious at once.

"Do you mean to say that you've been playing cards with those fellows in the punt?" asked Tom Merry quietly.

"Well, they pressed me to have a little game," said Bunter. "Almost begged of me. I did it out of pity, really. They were as set on it. And I know jolly well that they swindled me. I'm a dab at nap, and I expected to—them!—I—I mean—"

"You expected to win their money, and they won yours instead," said Blake. "Serve you jolly well right! You shouldn't have played."

"I'll pay 'em out somehow," snarled Bunter. "I'm not going to be robbed and have my clothes spoiled like this. They actually shoved me out with a punt-pole, simply because I asked for my money back. Of course, I was really only playing for fun. I never intended to let them keep my money."

"Did you intend to keep theirs?"

"Of course—I mean, of course not! I don't gamble. I call it low. Things like that may be done by St. Jim's chaps, but we don't do it at Greyfriars."

"Weally, Buntah—"

"I think you fellows ought to chip in, and help me get my money back," said Bunter.

"I'm not going to, for one," said Tom Merry. "I think you deserved to lose it. You have no right to do a rotten thing like that while you are here as D'Arcy's guest."

"All the same, I think we ought to wag those wottahs!" said D'Arcy. "They knew that Buntah was a sillay ass. I beg your pardon, Buntah. I mean, they knew that he was a duffah—them!—I mean, a simple chap, and they ought not to have let a kid play cards with them. They are disgraceful wottahs, and we ought to make an example of them. But as for takin' the money back, that is all wot."

"Of course it is."

"Look here, it's my money!" roared Bunter. "You can let them have your money if you like, but you're not going to give them mine."

"That's all right, deah boy. We'll say no more about your handin' me that postal-ordah, and then it will weally be my money you have lost, and I will allow them to keep it," said Arthur Augustus pacifically.

"My hat!" murmured Blake. "He's been getting money out of Gussy already. The fat pig! Poor old Gussy was born to be looted!"

"My opinion is—" began Bunter.

"Come on!" interrupted Tom Merry.

"But I say, you fellows—" But the fellows did not listen. They hurried along the bank towards the spot where the punt was moored. It was still there, and the two seniors of St. Jim's were still at cards. Cutts was smiling serenely, and Knox was scowling. So it was pretty evident that luck was on the side of the dandy of the Fifth. Perhaps Cutts was assisting luck by "ways that are dark," as Lumley-Lumley, at least, knew very well was a trick not unknown to the Fifth-Former of St. Jim's.

"Hallo! Still going strong—what?" asked Jack Blake cheerily.

Cutts looked round.

"Clear off!" he said tersely. "Don't hang about here, or we'll serve you as we've served your fat friend!"

"My dear chap, that's exactly what we're going to do to you!" said Tom Merry. "Pile in, School House!"

"Yaas, watah!"

Cutts and Knox started to their feet as the juniors made a rush for the punt. Tom Merry & Co. leaped on board in a body, and the punt rocked under their weight as they landed in it. Billy Bunter stood on the bank, grinning. He was glad to see the two seniors handled, but he was not a man of war himself.

"Get out!" roared Knox, grasping the punt-pole.

Cutts hit out savagely, and Horries roared, and dropped in the bottom of the punt. Digby rolled over him, caught on the chin by Gerald Cutts's left. But then the Terrible Three were upon Cutts all at once, and he was whirled over, and hurled out of the punt into the mud beside the river.

Blake and Lumley-Lumley had caught hold of Knox's punt-pole, and prevented him from using it. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy piled on him, and yanked him over. Lumley-Lumley and Blake threw themselves upon the Sixth-Former as he stumbled, and he was pinned down in the bottom of the punt.

"All together!" gasped Blake.

"Chuck him out, deah boys!"

"Leggo!" roared Knox. "You checky fags! You young villains! You—you—Yaroooh!"

Knox was raised bodily, and pitched over the side. He joined Cutts, who was wallowing in shallow water and mud. The juniors grinned down at them from the punt. Horries was holding his nose, and Digby clapping his chin with both hands, but the other fellows had not been hurt. And all were grinning. On the bank Billy Bunter cackled as if he were trying to imitate a cheap alarm-clock.

"He, he, he! He, he, he!"

"Grooh!"

"Yow-owp!"

"Don't get in again!" said Tom Merry, gently poking Knox with the pole, as the Sixth-Former grasped the punt.

"Outside, please!"

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"Groogh! You young scoundrel! Yah!"

"Let 'em have their cards!" said Tom.

Blake grinned, and gathered up the scattered cards in the punt, and threw them in a shower over the two seniors in the water. Then the juniors jumped ashore, laughing.

Cutts and Knox crawled into the punt as soon as it was empty, dripping with water and covered with mud. They shook their fists furiously at the juniors.

Blake kissed his hand to them as the party walked away. They looked back from a distance, and saw Cutts poling home to the Lodge, dripping with water, and almost unrecognisable from the mud that caked his visage. What could be seen of his face was red with rage.

"Bai Jove, I considah that we have given those wottahs a lesson!" grinned Arthur Augustus. "Pewwaps they will leave our party alone afiah this."

"We haven't got my money back!" grunted Bunter.

"That's all wight, Buntah. You needn't give me the postal-order, and we will call it square."

"I am afraid that's impossible, Gussy. You see, I couldn't possibly accept the money from you. But I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll leave it over till next term. I shall be coming over to St. Jim's to see you some time then, and I'll bring it with me."

"Vewy well, deah boy."

"That's settled, then," said Bunter. "I'll make a note of it. Now, the postal-order, when it comes, will be mine, won't it?"

"Yeas."

"Good! Always better to have these little things on a business footing," said Bunter. "The postal-order will be here to-morrow morning. I suppose you won't mind cashing it for me?"

"Not at all, deah boy."

"As I'm rather short of cash, I suppose it's all the same to you if you cash it now?" suggested Bunter. "Then I'll hand you the postal-order immediately it comes."

"Ya-a-a-s," said Arthur Augustus slowly.

"Thanks!" said Bunter, as he pocketed two sovereigns. "I'll remember this. If I forget, just remind me when the post comes in to-morrow morning, won't you?"

Arthur Augustus did not reply. He had now cashed Bunter's postal-order twice, and, without being over-suspicious, he could not help having some inward doubts as to whether a postal-order was really coming. The other juniors had no doubts at all. They were quite sure that it wasn't coming.

The juniors returned to Eastwood House in time for tea, and joined Lady Eastwood and Cousin Ethel at tea on the lawn. Bunter hurried away to clean off the mud, and came down with a flower in his jacket and a fat smile upon his face, and made himself very agreeable, as he firmly believed, to Cousin Ethel. And when it was arranged that the party should go to the circus that evening, Bunter promised Cousin Ethel that he would look after her, a generous promise that Cousin Ethel did not seem to hear. Indeed, Cousin Ethel's manner to the fat junior was the reverse of chummy, somewhat to Bunter's surprise at first, till he realised, on reflection, that the young lady was probably very coy, and was trying to conceal the great impression that Bunter's manifold fascinations had made upon her.

CHAPTER 8. Rough on Cutts!

"WALK up, gentlemen!"

"Pom, pom, pom!"

"Ladies and gentlemen, this way to Chumgum's Celebrated Circus!"

"Pom, pom, pom, pom, pom!"

"Come and see Samsonio, the Strongest Man on Earth! Come and see Tiny Tony, the Funniest Mirth-Merchant in the Universe! Come and see Texas Bill, the Broncho Buster, ride the wildest horse in the solar system! Walk up! Walk up!"

A little fat man in clown's attire, thumping on a drum outside the entrance to Chumgum's Circus, thus addressed the multitude. The circus was pitched on Easthorpe Common, just outside the village, and there was a flare of naphtha lights in the dusk of the summer evening. Crowds of country folk and villagers were passing into the tent, some of them exchanging badinage with Tiny Tony as they went in. Tiny Tony was certainly tiny, so far as height went, but, as Jack Blake remarked, he made up for it sideways.

"Pom, pom, pom! Thump!"

"Gentlemen, walk up! Roll up! This is Chumgum's Celebrated Circus, which has performed to all the crowned heads in Europe, not to mention a still larger number of uncrowned heads! Young gentlemen, walk in! A few of the best seats still vacant!"

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This was addressed to Tom Merry & Co. as they came up to the entrance of the big tent. Tiny Tim swept off his cocked cap in graceful salute to Cousin Ethel.

"Chance of a lifetime, ladies and gentlemen! Biggdest show on earth! Littlest clown on earth—and the best! Tiny Tony will make you roar! Tiny Tony will make you yell! Tiny Tony will make you shriek! I'm Tiny Tony, so I know!"

"Bai Jove, that chap knows how to blow his own trumpet!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Cheek, I call it!" said Bunter loftily. "Here, not so much of your gas, my man!"

Tiny Tony looked at him.

"Other entrance for you, sir," he said.

"Here, hold on, you fellows!" called out Bunter. The fellow says it's the other entrance for the best seats!"

"Not at all!" said Tiny Tony calmly. "Keep right on, gentlemen! Other entrance for this young person. Stage entrance at the back. Artists don't enter with the general public. Go right round—"

"What do you mean?" roared Bunter. "Do you think I belong to your rotten circus, you silly ass?"

"Ain't you the Fattest Boy on Earth?" asked Tiny Tony, looking astonished. "Ain't you Gig-Lamps, the Celebrated Fat Boy, warranted to weigh twenty stone?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you cheeky rotter—" howled Bunter.

"Walk up, gents—walk up! Chumgum's Celebrated Circus—"

"Look here, you cheeky beast! What do you mean by insulting a gentleman?" roared Bunter, greatly incensed by the clown's little joke, which had caused a general giggle among the Easthorpe folk crowding up to the entrance.

"Never done such a thing in my life, sir," said Tiny Tony. "Haven't insulted anybody but you, sir. Walk up—walk up!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

Tom Merry grasped Bunter's arm, and marched him into the tent. Billy Bunter was blinking with rage. He had had the worst of his little encounter with the circus clown, as he deserved. He confided to Tom Merry that, but for the fact that there was a lady in the party, he would have returned and mopped up the earth with Tiny Tony. Perhaps, however, prudential considerations had something to do with his leaving Tiny Tony alone and the earth unmopped.

The juniors walked into the tent, which was already growing crowded. Circuses did not often come to Easthorpe, so Chumgum's Celebrated Circus was likely to be well patronised during its stay. Tiny Tony's cheery voice could still be heard outside:

"Walk up, gents! Come and see Tiny Tony, the Smallest and Wonderfulest Clown on Earth! Come and see the Circus Cricketers! M.C.C. and I Zingari beaten at their own game! Walk up—walk up!"

The juniors were shown into their seats. Arthur Augustus booked the best seats in the place, but Chumgum's Circus was not palatial, and the seats were hard. They were in the front row, however, and all were satisfied, with the exception of Bunter. The St. Jim's juniors had already discovered that Billy Bunter was very seldom satisfied.

"Not what I call comfy, Gussy!" said Billy Bunter, who had seated himself next to the swell of St. Jim's. No one was anxious to sit next to Bunter, so the kind and obliging Gussy had fallen the sacrifice, as it were. "Ain't there any better seats than these?"

"There do not appear to be, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "Sowwy!"

"I suppose they didn't know any decent people were coming," grumbled Bunter. "Hallo! Here are those cardsharps from your school again!"

Cutts & Co. had entered the tent, and were coming along to the front seats. Bunter being at the end of the row of juniors, and the next seats unoccupied, Cutts sat down next to him, and Knox and Gilmore came next. Cutts & Co. scowled at the juniors, but did not speak. Billy Bunter blinked at them vengefully. He had not forgotten the way he had been poled out of the punt, and he had not forgotten the loss of his two sovereigns. True, he had replaced the two quids at D'Arcy's expense, but that made no difference! Before his visit to Eastwood House terminated, Billy Bunter intended to squeeze out a considerably larger amount of Arthur Augustus's spare cash. The second two sovereigns might have been his, anyway; and but for Gerald Cutts, he might have had four. That was how Bunter looked at it, and he was decidedly resentful and indignant. A fat grin overpread his face as a scheme came into his mind for making Cutts & Co. "sit up."

A circus attendant was passing along behind the row of seats, showing some new-comers to their places. A gruff voice behind Cutts's head exclaimed:

"Get out of there! You're in the wrong seats!"

Cutts turned his head, angry at being addressed in so gruff a manner.

"Are you speaking to me?" he demanded.

"Get out, I tell you!"

The juniors looked round too, surprised that an attendant should adopt such a tone towards occupiers of the most expensive seats. The circus man was passing on without looking at Cutts.

"Keep a civil tongue in your head, my man!" said Cutts angrily.

The man paused and stared at him.

"What, sir?"

"Be civil, or you'll get into trouble."

"What's the matter? I ain't spoken to you, sir."

"Don't tell lies!" said Cutts angrily. "You told me we were in the wrong seats."

"Don't you be so quick to call a man a liar, young gentleman. I ain't spoken a word to you."

"That's enough!" growled Cutts, turning back, and settling himself in his seat again.

"Get out of it, I tell you, you young rascal! Your sort ain't wanted in these seats. They're for the gentry."

"What!" yelled Cutts, turning crimson, and swinging round. "You impertinent scoundrel!"

The man had passed on, and he did not look back. Several people in the second row were grinning. Cutts scowled at them. A fat gentleman, the landlord of the Easthorpe Arms, was sitting just behind Cutts, with a stout lady beside him, evidently the partner of his joys and woes. He sympathised with Cutts.

"Cheek I call it, sir," he said.

Cutts nodded shortly, and resumed his seat, extremely irritated and angry. If he had known that the fat junior beside him was a ventriloquist, he would probably have fallen upon Billy Bunter and smitten him hip and thigh. But he did not know it, and he did not connect Bunter in his mind with the incident at all, so he had to bottle up his wrath.

The performance was about to begin, and two or three horses had been sent galloping round the ring for a start. Cutts sat frowning at the arena, when a voice spoke behind his head, which was either the stout publican's voice, or else an exact imitation of it.

"Put your 'ead to one side, please. I can't see through your 'ead!"

Cutts jerked his head round.

"I'll sit how I like!" he exclaimed, glaring at the astonished man behind him.

"Certainly, sir; I don't mind, I'm sure."

"Then don't speak to me!" growled Cutts, as he resettled himself.

"Will you put your silly 'ead out of the light?"

Cutts jumped up.

"Look here, I don't want any of your cheek!" he shouted. "What's that? Looks to me as if you've been drinking, young gentleman. I advise you to keep quiet," said the stout publican soothingly. "I ain't spoken a word to you. I 'eard somebody speak, I did, but I ain't said a word."

Cutts glared along the row, as if in search of a victim. Several people were grinning. They believed, as Cutts did, that the innkeeper had spoken, and the ragging of Cutts amused them. Cutts had a lofty and somewhat "swanking" manner, which sometimes had an irritating effect even upon strangers, and they were not sorry to see him taken down a peg. Cutts's scowls were met with grins, and he sat down again, consuming his wrath.

"Queer 'ow that fellow will shove 'is silly 'ead in a man's light!" went on the voice. "I know there's nothing in it, but I can't see through it, for all that! Thinks a lot of 'isself, he does. Wonder if he's paid for them clothes?"

Cutts sat quivering with rage. It was miles below his dignity to enter into a "row" with a publican at a circus, but it was very hard to endure such remarks patiently. And the remarks were not finished yet.

"I've seen 'im before. 'E's a card-sharper—a professional, you know. Gets young gentlemen to play cards, and swindles 'em. I shouldn't wonder if the perlice are looking for him this very minute. Young scoundrel, I call 'im!"

"My hat!" murmured Knox. "They seem to know you here, Cutts, old man!" And Gilmore giggled.

Cutts seemed to breathe with difficulty.

"And them other two, they're just as bad," went on the voice. "Young swindlers—both! The feller with the long boko is the son of a tailor in 'Ounds-ditch!"

Knox turned scarlet. Tom Merry & Co. could not help grinning at that description of the bully of the Sixth.

"And the other young reprobate is a boy from a reformatory. Mind your pockets, ladies and gentlemen! He was sent to a reformatory for pickin' pockets!"

Gilmore grew as scarlet as Knox. Cutts looked at them with a sneer.

"You're getting some of it now," he remarked.

"I—I—I'll smash him!" panted Knox, jumping up. "Look here, you fat blackguard, hold your tongue! Do you hear?"

"Which I ain't said a word!" gasped the astonished publican. "And who was a-saying them things is more than I know on."

"You lying cad!"

"Which they're probably werry true, all the same!" exclaimed the publican, getting angry himself. "You look like it, I do say."

"Are you going to hold your tongue?" shouted Cutts.

"Not at your orders, my fine feller!" said the innkeeper independently. "Who are you?"

"He ain't paid for them clothes," said a voice that seemed to proceed from a white-whiskered gentleman next to the innkeeper. This was the local grocer, who happened to be very deaf, and had not heard a word. "He's a young swindler, he is! I know how he let his poor old father go to the workus!"

"Shame!" said several voices.

Cutts was almost dancing with rage. He shook his fist in the face of the grocer, who started back in astonishment and alarm.

"Here, what are you at?" he demanded.

"Hold your tongue, you old fool!" bawled Cutts.

The deaf gentleman put his hand to his ear.

"Eh?"

And then a voice went on, as if continuing: "Don't you talk to me, you young rascal. Ain't I seed you cast off your poor old father, and allow him to perish in the workus? Shame on you!"

That was too much for Cutts. He grasped the deaf gentleman's nose and tweaked it. As the unfortunate man was quite unconscious of having given offence, Cutts's action naturally infuriated him. He gasped in amazement for a moment, and then he hit out, and Cutts caught a knobby fist with his nose, and sprawled down by the seat. The surrounding seats were almost in an uproar by this time, and there were shouts:

"Sit down!"

"Put them out!"

Cutts leaped up, almost foaming with rage. He simply hurled himself at the grocer. The old gentleman would probably have been hurt, but Tom Merry had jumped up, and he grasped the Fifth-Former in time and dragged him back.

"Hold on, Cutts!" he said quietly. "You're not going to hit an old man."

"Let go!" yelled Cutts. "You heard what he said. Let go, or I'll knock you flying!"

"Shame! Attacking an old man! Letting your poor old father go to the workhouse! Shame! Put him out!"

"It's all lies!" yelled Cutts. "I tell you, I—I——"

"Sit down in front!"

"Shut up!"

"Order!"

Two or three circus attendants hurried up, and Mr. Chumgum, who had come into the ring resplendent in evening-clothes, with an orchid in his buttonhole, and a whip in his hand, hurried to the side of the arena.

"Gentlemen—gentlemen!" he implored. "Order! Gentlemen—gentlemen!"

"Shut up, you old fool!" Cutts did not say that, but the words certainly seemed to proceed from Cutts, and Mr. Chumgum turned purple with wrath. He pointed to Cutts with his whip.

"Put that feller out!" he said.

"What?" shouted Cutts. "Don't you dare——"

"Put him out! Give him his money back at the pay-box! I'll have no hooligans disturbin' the peace in my circus! Ladies and gentlemen," continued Mr. Chumgum, as Cutts, struggling wildly, with his tie torn out, was hustled away by three or four rough hands—"ladies and gentlemen, I apologise for this 'ere disgraceful scene, which has never occurred before in the history of Chumgum's Celebrated Circus! Now that young 'ooligan is ejected, ladies and gentlemen, I beg you to take your seats."

The ladies and gentlemen took their seats. Knox and Gilmore, who did not want to follow Cutts, and leave the circus "on their necks," settled down quietly. Billy Bunter grinned ecstatically. He felt that he was quite even with Gerald Cutts now. Tom Merry & Co. were puzzled by the occurrence—till they caught the grin on Bunter's face. Then they comprehended.

"Oh, bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "Buntah! Was—was that you, with your wotten, beastly ventwiloquist?"

Bunter gave a fat chuckle.

"I rather think I'm even with him now—what?" he murmured.

"Bai Jove! What a wotten twick! Ahem! If you play

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any more twicks like that, Buntah, I shall have to wequest you to wotire from the circus!"

Outside the circus, Cutts of the Fifth, dusty and dishevelled, with his collar and tie gone, was almost raving with rage. But he did not venture to re-enter, and the performance proceeded without the assistance of Cutts of the Fifth.

CHAPTER 9.

Arthur Augustus Distinguishes Himself.

"JOLLY good show, deah boys!"

"Yes, rather!"

Tom Merry & Co. and Cousin Ethel were having a good time. There had been several turns, and all of them were good. Samsonio, the Strongest Man on Earth, might not really have been the strongest man upon the globe, but he was certainly very strong, and the weights he lifted were marvellous, and Tiny Tony's efforts to lift the same weights made the audience shout with laughter. Sapolio, the Serpent Charmer, was very good, and Rab Rabbi, the Indian juggler, wonderful. The audience were satisfied that they were getting their money's worth, and all were in high good-humour.

"Texas Bill next," remarked Jack Blake.

"That's a regular savage brute of a horse he rides," said Wally. "You saw the way he tried to bite my pony in the procession? This buck-jumping bizney is genuine—the real, genuine article, you bet!"

There was a cheer as Texas Bill—of Tipperary—rode into the arena, mounted upon the black horse.

The horseman was a good rider, that was evident, and he sat his steed well and kept him in control. But the juniors, who were very close as he rode round the ring, could see that the black horse's nostrils were quivering and his eyes gleaming. The brute was in a savage humour.

Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle into his eye, and watched the black mustang attentively. Arthur Augustus was a great lover of horseflesh, and a good judge of it.

"Bai Jove," he remarked, "that is a weally beautiful creature, deah boys! I should like to wide that horse."

"He'd eat you!" said Blake.

"Wats! I could wide him—and that's more than Texas Bill seems to be able to do, as a mattah of fact," retorted Arthur Augustus.

Texas Bill was giving the buck-jumping exhibition now. There was no doubt that the performance was genuine. The horse was making every effort to unseat his rider, rising on his hind-legs, and coming down with a crash, making sudden springs and bounds, and once or twice snapping savagely round with his teeth.

The audience gazed on almost spellbound.

The rider was holding the horse in check so far, but there was a hard and strained look upon his face. Possibly he was not in his usual health—a circumstance which could not be allowed to interfere with his usual appearance in the ring. The Broncho Buster was billed to appear, and appear he must.

There was a sudden yell from the front seats.

Texas Bill was seen to pitch heavily into the tan, and the black mustang threw up his heels and dashed off round the ring, the reins trailing beside him.

People jumped up and crowded back against the second and third rows, for the barrier between the seats and the ring was of the slightest, and a single spring of the savage horse would have carried him into the midst of the affrighted people. And in that close crowd the lashing hoofs would have scattered death on all sides.

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Texas Bill staggered to his feet, and then sank down again. He was evidently hurt by his fall. Tiny Tony swung himself upon a trapeze out of the way with great promptitude. Mr Chungum scudded out of reach of the savage horse as it careered round the ring, tossing its head and thick black mane. There was a roar of alarm in the circus.

Tom Merry and Blake jumped in front of Cousin Ethel instinctively lest the horse should rush in that direction. Billy Bunter sat frozen to his seat, white with terror. Over the barrier into the ring leaped a graceful form—the form of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with his lips set in a tight line and his eyeglass gleaming in his eye.

There was a yell from his comrades:

"Gussy! Come back!"

Arthur Augustus did not even turn his head. He was running for the horse. The mustang was careering by, and D'Arcy, with a quick spring, caught the trailing reins. Then, with marvellous agility the swell of St. Jim's swung himself into the saddle.

"Arthur! He will be killed!" panted Cousin Ethel.

The juniors watched their chum with thumping hearts. They had not been prepared for D'Arcy's action, or they would have held him back. They knew he was a splendid rider, but what chance had he with a horse that had unseated the professional circus performer? Every instant they expected to see him hurled into the tan and trampled upon by the cruel hoofs, and their hearts sickened within them at the thought.

The mustang had stopped stock-still as he felt a rider on his back. Then he made a sudden spring into the air, and came down upon his four feet, with his head low, with a shock that would have unseated most riders on the instant.

But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was clinging to the saddle like a limpet to a rock. The brute's head came twisting round, with bared teeth gleaming horribly, but Arthur Augustus's hand was like iron on the rein. The horse shot suddenly forward, making a desperate rush right for the crowded seats. With shrieks of terror the onlookers crowded back. But the mustang did not reach the seats. A wrist of iron turned him, and he was driven round the ring, breaking into a terrific gallop.

Texas Bill had staggered up again, and he was clinging to the centre pole, his face pale, his eyes staring. He had expected some terrific damage to be done by the horse now that it was uncontrolled. He stared with amazement at the sight of a schoolboy in the saddle, riding the brute like a master.

Round and round the ring the mustang tore, as if seeking by sheer speed to get rid of the bold rider. And Arthur Augustus was well content to allow him to exhaust his savage strength with futile galloping.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Gussy's done it! Gussy can handle him! Bravo, Gussy!"

"Hurrah!"

"I—I—I say, you fellows," stuttered Billy Bunter, "let's get out of this! I—I say, make room! I want to pass! Oh, crumbs!"

But no one listened to Bunter, or looked at him. All eyes were upon the horse and its young rider.

The mustang came to a sudden halt, with its forefeet planted on the earth, and for a second it seemed that D'Arcy must shoot forward over its head.

But he did not!

He sat in the saddle and drove the mustang on, and the brute began to buck-jump—rearing on his hind-legs, and even falling backwards, with the intention of crushing his rider. But as he crashed down D'Arcy slipped to the tan, only to leap into the saddle again as the horse struggled up.

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Gran



Cousin Ethel was running for the ball. It was a difficult catch—and the eyes of the field were upon her. A slim hand was raised—two steady eyes were fixed on the ball as it came down—click! "Bravo!" roared the juniors. "Oh, well caught!" (See Chapter 14.)

And when the black brute was upon his feet again Arthur Augustus was on his back safe and sound.

A thunderous cheer rang through the circus. The mustang was conquered now. He galloped round the ring again, but evidently under firm control. And Arthur Augustus, the grim look on his face relaxing, put him through evolutions, the horse obedient to every turn of his hand.

"Hurrah!"

"Bravo, St. Jim's!" roared Blake. "Hurrah for Study No. Six!"

"Hurrah!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rode the mustang to where Texas Bill was standing, and halted. The horse stood trembling, and as quiet as a lamb. He was completely beaten, and he recognised his master. D'Arcy jumped down.

"Heah you are, deah boy!" he said gracefully.

"Howly Mother av Moses!" exclaimed Texas Bill, with an accent that was certainly not that of Texas. "Tare an' 'ounds! Young gentleman, you roide loike an angel, and it's me, Bill Flaherty, that says so! You've saved some lives 'ere this blessed noight, me bhoy!"

"Vewy happy to be of service, I'm suah!" said Arthur Augustus, handing the reins to Texas Bill, who led the mustang, quiet enough now, from the arena.

Mr. Chumgum rushed across the tan, and grasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy by both hands.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed. "Splendid! Goodness knows what that brute would have done! Young gentleman, if you are ever in want of a job, you jest walk right into Chumgum's Circus, and there's room for you. Your name, please?"

Arthur Augustus smiled. It was not really likely that the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the son of Lord Eastwood, would ever be in want of a job in a circus. But he gave his name cheerily enough.

"I'll remember that name," said Mr. Chumgum, "and if you ever want a friend, jest you remember Charley Chumgum!"

"Yass, wathab! Thank you vewy much, my deah sir!" said D'Arcy modestly.

And the swell of St. Jim's returned to his place, his ears tingling a little at the loud cheers from the audience. The juniors received him with open arms. They shook his hands, and thumped him upon the shoulders, and almost hugged him.

"Oh, you duffer!" gasped Blake. "You might have been killed! If you'd been killed, you ass, I—I—I'd have punched your silly head!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Jolly good!" said Billy Bunter, who had recovered now from his fright, and was trying to look as if he had not been frightened at all. "I was just going for the brute when you collared him, Gussy."

"Bui Jove! Were you weally, Buntah?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at!" said Bunter, blinking peevishly at the juniors. "I'm rather a dab at riding, and I should have handled him all right. I was just going to spring upon him, you know, when you chipped in, Gussy."

"Oh, cheese it!" said Tom Merry unceremoniously. "Gussy, old man, it was splendid of you. Ripping! Top

hole! And you can call Study No. Six top study in the School House, if you like—till next term! It was topping!"

"Oh, wats! Any fellow would have done it, only—I happened to do it, you know."

"I don't know about that," said Billy Bupnter, with a shake of the head. "I'd have done it, of course, but lots of fellows wouldn't."

"Bow-wow!" said Blake rudely.

"Oh, really, Blake—"

"Don't gas; it doesn't suit you," growled Blake.

Billy Bunter snorted and sat down, but he said no more. The politeness of the St. Jim's juniors seemed to be failing a little under the strain Billy Bunter put upon it.

The mustang having been taken from the ring, the audience settled down in their places again, and the juniors of St. Jim's looked on keenly, for the next item on the programme was the Circus Cricketers, and Tom Merry & Co., who were great cricketers at St. Jim's, were very curious to see what the unique turn was like.

CHAPTER 10.

The Chumgum Challenge.

MR. CHARLEY CHUMGUM advanced into the ring, his great expanse of shirt front and his big diamond gleaming in the light.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we are about to present to you the Circus Cricketers; a wonderful and unique turn, which positively appears only in Chumgum's Celebrated Circus. Before their appearance I have to make an announcement which will interest all cricket lovers and sportsmen in the audience."

"Bai Jove! This is gettin' interestin'!"

"The Chumgum cricket eleven is a first-class team. Owing to limitations of space, the Chumgummers cannot fully display their powers within the circus. But the eleven are open to accept challenges from local teams for matches to be played on any days when matinee performances are not given."

"Bai Jove!"

"The Chumgum team has met many famous elevens, and has challenged the M.C.C., the Zingari, and many other celebrated teams."

"Bravo!"

Tom Merry grinned. Mr. Chumgum did not say that the Chumgummers had played those great clubs. Mr. Chumgum's idea of playing a circus cricket team against local elevens was, of course, with an eye to the advertisement obtained thereby. And it was certainly a striking kind of advertisement. Tom Merry had no doubt that the circus team might have played many local elevens in towns and villages where Mr. Chumgum had pitched his tent, and such matches would be more useful as advertisements than yards of print in the local papers. But it was not really likely that the Chumgummers' challenges to famous clubs would be accepted. However, it was probable enough that Mr. Chumgum had sent the challenges. That would not cost him anything.

"Many famous teams have not cared to risk their laurels by meeting the Chumgummers," the circus-master went on, "otherwise the Chumgummers would have won great victories at Lord's and at the Oval. But we know Easthorpe—we know that we are in a sporting town."

"Hear, hear!"

"And I repeat that the Chumgum eleven is ready to meet any local team, on the local ground, asking only a fair field and no favour," said Mr. Chumgum. "I pause for a reply."

Up jumped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I accept the challenge, Mr. Chumgum!"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Blake, dragging at D'Arcy's sleeve. "What are you talking about, Gussy? You're not in the local team."

"Wats! We'll play him with a St. Jim's team."

"My hat!"

Mr. Chumgum looked at the swell of St. Jim's, and bowed. There was a cheer from the audience. D'Arcy was known to most present as the son of the greatest local land-owner, and he had attracted general attention by his mastery of the black mustang.

"Master D'Arcy, you do me proud," said Mr. Chumgum. "May I ask if you are the captain of the local eleven—as I am sure you ought to be."

"I'll play you with a school eleven," explained Arthur Augustus. "I dare say you have heard of St. Jim's."

Mr. Chumgum had never heard of St. Jim's, but he guessed from Arthur Augustus's remark that it was a school eleven, and he bowed again.

"Who has not?" he replied urbanely.

"Very well. I'll play your team with a St. Jim's eleven, when and where you like, my deah man."

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"The challenge is accepted," said Mr. Chumgum. "We'll play you on the local groud, to-morrow, if you like."

"Agreed."

"Stumps pitched as earlay as you like."

"Shall we say ten o'clock?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The Chumgum eleven will be ready," said Mr. Chumgum; "and I trust that all sporting members of the present audience will be there to see this great match."

"Bravo!"

"There will be no gate-money," continued Mr. Chumgum. "The Chumgummers play for the honour of the great game, and not for lucre."

"Bravo!"

"Gentlemen—Ladies and gentlemen,—the Chumgummers' challenge having been accepted the performance will now proceed."

Mr. Chumgum retired amid cheers, and Arthur Augustus sat down, looking very satisfied.

"This is wathah a stwoke of luck, deah boys," he remarked. "We have already whacked the local team twice, and I was feelin' like Julius Cæsar, you know—we wanted some fswesh worlds to conqah."

"Eh! Wasn't that Alexander the Great who wanted fswesh worlds to conquer?" asked Lumley-Lumley, with a grin.

"Weally, it is not vewy important whethah it was Julius Cæsar or Alexandah the Gweat. The important thing is that we have found a fswesh world to conqah. I wathah wegard it as a stwoke of luck. We have enough chaps at Eastwood to make up an eleven. There are ten of us, anyway, includin' Wally and young Fwayne. We can pick up an eleventh man somewhah."

"I'm quite at your service, Gussy, old man," said Billy Bunter at once.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass dubiously upon the fat junior of Greyfriars.

"Can you play cricket, Buntah?" he asked.

"I'm a dab at it."

"Ahem! You play at Gweyfwhahs?"

"Oh, yes; whenever there is a match that's worth the trouble of exerting myself in," explained Bunter. "Of course, it wouldn't be quite cricket to play a fellow of my form against any team. But in specially tough matches I'm always to the fore. I find it rather a bore a times, you know. I have so many engagements that I can't always find the time. But when Wharton comes to me, almost with tears in his eyes, to beg me to play, it's difficult for a chap to decline."

"Yaas, I—I suppose so."

"I'll play for you with pleasure," said Bunter. "Of course, considering my form, I suppose you'll leave it to me to captain the team."

"Bai Jove!"

"I'm generally accustomed to taking the lead," Bunter explained modestly.

"As a mattah of fact, Tom Mewwy is our skippah," said Arthur Augustus. "and we are not weally lookin' out for a new one."

"Oh, I'll arrange that with Merry! Under the circumstances, Merry, of course you wouldn't mind standing down on this occasion."

Tom Merry glared at the fat junior.

"Your mistake," he said. "I should!"

"But under the circumstances—"

"Oh, rats!"

"Ahem! Of course, I don't insist," said Bunter hastily.

"I let Wharton captain the Form team at Greyfriars sometimes; I'm not a greedy chap. I'll play for you, anyway. Only give me plenty of bowling. I'm a dab at bowling."

"Well, that makes up the eleven, anyway," said Herries. "There's us four—Study No. 6—and you three Shell chaps, and Lumley-Lumley, and Wally and Frayne, and Bunter. That makes up an eleven—of sorts."

"I expect the circus team will be an eleven of sorts, too," said Tom Merry, laughing. "You don't know yet what you've let us in for, Gussy."

"Anyway, it will be a game, deah boy."

"Probably a very funny game," said Tom. "But I don't mind. We sha'n't be playing it at St. Jim's, anyway."

Certainly the preparations that were going on in the ring did not look as if the circus team took cricket very seriously. The Chumgummers eleven might be a very good eleven when they met teams outside the circus. But in the circus it was evident that cricket was played from a humorous point of view.

Tiny Tony captained one side, and Texas Bill the other, and the sides consisted only of six players. Wickets were set up, and players in odd-looking costumes came in. Some

of the audience looked a little nervous at first at the idea of a cricket ball being knocked about in the ring. A hard ball clumping among the onlookers from the bat would certainly have done damage. But their anxiety was relieved when they discovered that the circus cricketers played with a rubber ball—or, rather, with a good many rubber balls, Tiny Tony bringing in a whole basketful for the game.

Texas Bill and Sapolio, the Serpent Charnier, took the wickets, armed with tennis-rackets instead of bats. Tiny Tony went on to bowl. The fieldsmen stood round, and Tiny Tony sent down the rubber ball. Sapolio snote it, and sent it bouncing along the tan, and the clown pursued it in a series of somersaults, amid yells of laughter from the audience. And after Tiny Tony went all the fieldsmen, also somersaulting.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "Oh, Gussy, you've done it this time! That's the kind of team we're going to meet."

"Bai Jove! I didn't know—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter snorted.

"I'm afraid I shall have to withdraw my offer," he remarked. "I couldn't let them know at Greyfriars that a player of my class met a team like that."

"But—but Mr. Chumgum says they meet local teams," said Arthur Augustus. "I suppose they won't play like that in a real game."

"My hat, I hope not!" grinned Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all right, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, recovering himself. "This foolin' is only to enthrall the audience, you know. They couldn't play a real game in heah without hurtin' somebody. It will be quite diffrent when we meet them on the ground."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

That cricket-match lasted half an hour, on the same lines, the audience being kept in a roar of laughter all the time. The Chumgum cricketers retired at last amid cheers. Tom Merry wiped the tears from his eyes.

"Oh, Gussy, if they play us like that!"

"It would be wathin' widiculous, deah boy; but it's all right."

"Well, I hope it will be all right. Anyway, it was a jolly funny show. Bravo!"

And the juniors of St. Jim's went out with the crowd very well satisfied with the entertainment provided by Chumgum's Celebrated Circus.

CHAPTER 11.

High Words!

"WAKE up!"

Billy Bunter opened his eyes slowly, and yawned. The juniors had slept soundly that night, especially Billy Bunter. Bunter could do with a great deal of sleep. After the return from the circus he had polished off a supper that would have been far beyond the powers of Fatty Wynn of St. Jim's. Then he had rolled off to bed in a very contented frame of mind, and as he said good-night to Arthur Augustus, he assured him affectionately that he would put off some of his many engagements for the vacation, in order to make a good long stay at Eastwood House, an affectionate assurance which D'Arcy received with polite dismay.

Bunter's room adjoined that occupied by Arthur Augustus, and if that noble youth had not been sleeping the sleep of perfect health, the rumbling sounds that proceeded from Bunter's apartment would certainly have kept him awake most of the night. When Arthur Augustus awoke in the morning he was surprised and a little alarmed by a rumble like distant thunder, until he discovered that it was only a sonorous snore proceeding from Bunter's room.

The juniors were up at an early hour. They were to meet the circus cricketers at ten o'clock on the village green, and Tom Merry intended to put his team through a little early practice. They had not had much cricket since breaking-up at St. Jim's; and though Tom did not think that Tiny Tony's eleven would be very dangerous, he did not mean to leave anything to chance. Also he was curious to see how Bunter would shape, not having much belief in the fat junior's powers as a cricketer.

Bunter blinked at Tom Merry as he awoke. The captain of the Shell at St. Jim's was shaking him by the shoulder. The early sunlight was glimmering in at the window.

"Yaw-aw-aw!" murmured Bunter. "Lemme alone! Taint risin'-bell."

"Up with you!"

"Groo! Lemme alone!"

Tom Merry gave the Owl of the Remove another vigorous shake, and Bunter came quite out of the land of dreams. He glared at Tom Merry.

"Look here, you chawk it!" he exclaimed. "'Taint time to get up. What's the time?"

"Six!" said Tom.

"Six!" howled Bunter. "Why, we don't get up at six at Greyfriars. Do you think I'm going to get up earlier on vacation than we do at school? If so, you're jolly well mistaken. Lemme alone! I'm not getting up for hours yet."

"We're meeting the circus team this morning, Bunter."

"Well, that ain't till ten o'clock. I'll get up at half-past nine."

"Too late!"

"Well, nine, then! Lemme alone."

"We're going to have some early practice," explained Tom. "Now, jump up! All the other fellows are up already."

Bunter rubbed his sleepy eyes and grunted.

"That's all right," he said. "You fellows go out and get some practice. I dare say you need it. I don't. I'm a dab at cricket, and I'm always in topping form. I don't need any practice."

"Oh, rats! Get up!"

"I won't get up!" roared Bunter. Being awakened early in the morning always made Billy Bunter ferocious. "Let me alone, confound you!"

Tom Merry looked at him. He was greatly inclined to take the fat junior bodily, and yank him out of bed, and bump him on the floor. If Bunter had been a St. Jim's fellow, he would certainly have done it. He restrained himself with difficulty.

"Now, look here, Bunter," he said quietly. "You've had enough sleep. If you're going to play in the match, you've got to get up and practise. Otherwise, I shall refuse to play you at all."

"Rot! Pretty show you'd make if I didn't help you!" said Bunter contemptuously. "I shall insist upon playing. And I don't need any practice. Our form at Greyfriars is very different from yours at St. Jim's. We've licked you often enough for you to know that. Just you let me alone. I'll get up at nine."

"Then you won't play!" said Tom determinedly.

Bunter blinked at him angrily. He was determined to play, and he was determined not to get up. But Tom Merry was determined too.

"Let Buntah alone, Mewwy, you wottah! I insist upon my guest not bein' disturbed."

Tom Merry turned round in astonishment towards the open doorway into D'Arcy's room. He was very much surprised at Arthur Augustus addressing him in that tone.

"What!" he exclaimed.

"Let Buntah alone! He is a vewy good playah, bettah than you any day! I wufuse to allow him to be bothahed; and if you don't like it, you can lump it, bai Jove!"

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed. The St. Jim's juniors generally addressed one another in an extremely unceremonious manner; but there were limits. Tom Merry did not intend to be spoken to like that by anybody, nor to say under the roof of a host who allowed himself such liberties. He left Bunter—who was grinning now—and strode into Arthur Augustus's room. D'Arcy was putting on a tie before the glass.

"That's enough, D'Arcy," said Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus turned round innocently.

"What's enough, deah boy?" he asked.

"What you've said. As soon as this match is over, I shall clear off. I won't trouble your hospitality any longer."

Arthur Augustus gazed at him in amazement.

"What on earth's the mattah, Tom Mewwy? What have I done?"

"You know vewy well what you've done!" almost shouted Tom, his eyes blazing. "Do you think I'm a fellow like Bunter to be talked to like that?"

"Gweat Scott!"

"That's all I need say," Tom Merry turned on his heel. Arthur Augustus made a jump after him, and caught him by the shoulder.

"Tom Mewwy, you ass, I insist upon your explainin' yourself. If you are undah the impression that I have done anythin'—"

"You know what you said, I suppose?"

"Wha-a-t I said!" stammered D'Arcy. "But—but I didn't say anythin', deah boy. Has some silly ass told you I've said somethin'?"

The surprise and distress in D'Arcy's face made Tom Merry stare. He could not understand the swell of St. Jim's at all.

"Are you dotty?" he exclaimed.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"I'm referring to what you called out to me just now when I was telling Bunter to get up!" exclaimed Tom angrily.

"Gweat pip! But I didn't call out anythin', deah boy. I didn't know you were wakin' Buntah. I was tyin' my tie."

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NEXT WEDNESDAY—**"HELD BY THE ENEMY!"** A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

said Arthur Augustus in bewilderment. "I suppose I should not be likely to be givin' attention to extwaneous mattahs at a time like that?"

"You called out to me!"

"I didn't!"

"Look here, Gussy—"

"Look here, Tom Mewwy—"

"What the dickens is the row?" exclaimed Blake, coming in, surprised by the excited voices. "You don't mean to say you two fellows are having a row!"

"Tom Mewwy seems to want to have a wow," said D'Arcy. "But I uttaly wufuse to have a wow with a fellow who is a guest undah my woof."

"I shan't be jolly long under your roof, anyway!" exclaimed the exasperated Shell fellow. "I'm getting off as soon as we've played this match. I must stop for that."

"Bai Jove!"

"Hold on, hold on!" said Blake soothingly. "Easy does it! You can't really have anything to quarrel about, you two. Now, what's the matter? Tell your Uncle Blake."

"D'Arcy called out to me!"

"I didn't!"

"In an insulting way!"

"Gwast Scott, I insist upon your withdwawin' that remark, Tom Mewwy. If you imply that I am capable of speakin' in an insultin' mannah to a guest undah my woof—"

"Well, you did!"

"Wubbish! And if you do not wetwact that statement, Tom Mewwy, I shall give you a feahful thwashin' when we get back to St. Jim's."

"Cheese it, cheese it!" said Monty Lowther, coming in with the other fellows, all of them having heard the raised voices by this time. "No rags here. Tommy, my son, keep your temper. Don't look at Gussy as if you'd like to eat him. He's warranted quite harmless."

"Weally Lowthah—"

"Let's get to the rights of this," said Blake, holding up his hand. "Tom Merry says that Gussy called out to him, and Gussy says he didn't."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He did!" roared Tom Merry.

"Shush! Shush! Tom Merry says that Gussy called to him, and every gentleman present knows that Tom Merry is a giddy man of his word!" said Blake solemnly. "Gussy says that he didn't call out, and we all know that Gussy beats George Washington in his own special line of business. Therefore, it is quite clear that both are right."

"Bai Jove!"

"Tom Merry, therefore, heard somebody address him, and supposed it was Gussy, but it wasn't!" said Blake. "That's the explanation! And if you'd asked your Uncle Blake before you started ragging one another—"

"I suppose I know D'Arcy's voice, don't I?" shouted Tom Merry. "Do you think I could mistake anybody else's voice for his? It isn't a voice you hear every day, for the matter of that. They don't grow D'Arcy's accent on every bush."

"Weally, you wotah—"

"Exactly!" said Blake coolly. "Have you forgotten that jape on Cutts last night? You mistook the voice for Gussy's because it was exactly like Gussy's, and you are too howling a fathead to remember that there is a ventriloquist in the next room."

"Tom Merry jumped.

"A—a—a ventriloquist!"

"Yes, you ass! You ought to have known that Gussy wouldn't speak rudely to a guest," said Blake severely. "You ought not to have believed your own ears if they told you such a thing! You're in the wrong."

"Bunter!" gasped Tom Merry

"Yes, Bunter, of course."

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Buntah, the ventriloquist, that uttah wascal!"

"Oh!" said Tom Merry, between his teeth. "I—I understand! The rotten cad was imitating Gussy's voice. I—I—I beg your pardon, Gussy!"

D'Arcy waved his hand gracefully.

"Don't mench, deah boy. Fwom one gentleman to anothah an apology is quite suffish to set any mattah wight."

"But—but I really ought to have known better," said Tom, very repentant. "I was an ass! I—I was awfully surprised that you should speak to me like that! I didn't think for a moment of that beastly cad imitating your voice."

"It's all wight, deah boy. It was weally my fault for havin' such an unspeakable boundah undah my woof. Where are you goin', Tom Mewwy?"

Tom gritted his teeth. The callousness of the fat junior, in risking a quarrel which might be permanent between the two chums, for the sake of a trick, excited Tom Merry's rage to the point of fury. He strode into Bunter's room with his fists

clenched. There was no question of politeness any longer. Politeness was wasted on a rascal who would play a trick like that.

"Tom Mewwy, deah boy, pway don't be watty. Aftah him, you fellows. He must weally not hurt Buntah!"

The juniors rushed after Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 12.

Bunter Pays the Piper.

S NOR-R-R-R-R-R-R!

That sound was proceeding from Billy Bunter's bed. The fat junior had calmly settled down to sleep again. Whether Tom Merry and D'Arcy quarrelled, whether they parted on bad terms or not Billy Bunter did not care two-pence. He did not even give the matter a thought. As soon as Tom Merry was gone he snugged his head into the pillow again, closed his eyes, and dropped back into dreamland.

But he did not remain there long. A heavy hand fell upon his shoulder, and he was dragged simultaneously out of bed and out of dreamland.

Bump!

"Yow-oh! Yah-oh!"

Billy Bunter came down with a mighty concussion on the floor. He awakened with a vengeance then. He sat up dizzily, blinking round him with fury.

"Ow! Ow! Wharrer you at? Lemme alone! Ow! You've broken my leg, you beast! Wharton, you rotter! I mean, Tom Merry, you beast! Yaroooh! Help! Murder! Fire!"

Bump, bump, bump!

Tom Merry had not let go. He proceeded to bump Billy Bunter on the floor, as if he were trying to knock him through into the room beneath. Bunter's yells rang far and wide. He struggled, but his struggles did not make much difference to the sturdy Shell fellow of St. Jim's. Tom Merry bumped him harder and harder.

"You rotten cad! You confounded blackguard! Take that, and that, and THAT!"

"Gwast Scott! Let him go, Tom Mewwy, deah boy!"

"Hold on, Tommy!"

"Chuck it!"

Bump, bump, bump, bump—bang!

"Yaroooh! Help! Murder!"

The juniors rushed upon Tom Merry, and dragged him off by sheer force. If they had not rescued him, Billy Bunter would probably have been very much hurt. He felt quite sufficiently hurt already. He lay on the floor and bellowed.

"Yow-ow-ow! Yaroooh! Help! Fire! Murder! Yah! Oh! Ow, ow, ow!"

"My only hat!" ejaculated Blake. "Talk about old Stentor! Why, Stentor was a whispering cherub to that chap."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pray shut up, Buntah! You will bring the servants up hoah with that waw."

"Yaroooh! My leg's broken! Two ribs broken, too. Yaroooh! And my backbone busted. Groo! Help! Send for a doctor! Ow!"

"Wats! You couldn't make that waw if your back was broken, Buntah."

"Ow, ow, ow! Keep him off! Yah! Oh!"

"My deah Buntah—"

"Let me give him some more," growled Tom Merry. "If he's going to make that thundering row, let him have something to make it for."

"Shush! You mustn't knock Gussy's pals about in that way," grinned Lowther.

"He is no pal of mine," said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I should wufuse to wecognise as a pal any fellow who would play such a wotten trick. Howevah, he is my guest, and I weally wequest you not to bump him any more, Tom Mewwy."

"Right-ho! But make him shut up somehow, for goodness' sake. My ear-drum's goin' to go soon."

"Yaroooh! Ow, ow, ow! My leg's broken. Groo! My back's busted. Yow-ow! My neck's dislocated. Gerroooh!"

"Cold water's the cure for all that," said Monty Lowther. "Cheer up, Bunter! I'll give you something for it. Half a tick!"

Monty Lowther rushed for a water-jug. As he rushed back with the jug in his hands Bunter sat up hastily, and ceased yelling.

"It's all right," he panted. "I—I— Oh, you beast! Grooo! Ow! Guguguguguggg!"

Splash!

Monty Lowther apparently did not believe in such a sudden recovery. At all events, he administered the cold water all the same. He inverted the jug over Bunter, and the water came down with a mighty swoop. Billy Bunter sprawled under it,

drenched to the skin, and puffing and blowing like a grampus.

"Gug-gug-gug-gug! Gerrooff!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Feel better, Bunter?" asked Lowther, with friendly solicitude.

"Yow-ow-ow! No, I don't. I'm worse!" shrieked Bunter. "You silly beast; I shall catch cold! I'm lots worse. Ow, ow, ow!"

"Never mind. I'll get another jug of water."

"I—I say, it's all right. I'm better now!" gasped Bunter, springing to his feet. "Don't you bring any water near me, you beast! Keep off! Yah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter sat on the edge of his bed, and glowered at the juniors. They were laughing loudly. Lowther's cold water cure had not cured him, but the threat of a second dose had cured him at once. The water ran down Bunter's fat limbs and collected in a pool at his feet, and his pyjamas clung limply to him.

"Ow! You beasts! You rotters!" he stuttered.

"Weally, Buntah—"

"If this is the way you allow your guests to be treated, D'Arcy, you can't expect me to remain under your roof any longer."

"If you feel bound to go away, Buntah, of course I should not like to stand in your way, dear boy. You are free to please yourself in every way."

"Ahem! Of course I'm not going to leave an old pal because a thundering ass has drenched me with water," said Bunter. "I expect Tom Merry to apologise."

"You can go on expecting, then!" growled Tom. "You played a rotten, dirty trick. You nearly made me quarrel with D'Arcy by your beastly, caddish ventriloquism."

Bunter grinned a little.

"Well, you wouldn't let me sleep," he said. "I had to make you sheer off somehow. Why can't you let a fellow alone? I don't need cricker practice like you St. Jim's chaps. We know how to play cricket at Greyfriars. If Tom Merry doesn't apologise, D'Arcy, I really don't see how I can remain here," added Bunter loftily.

"Well, I shan't apologise," said Tom, "and I'll do the same again if you play another rotten trick on me like that."

"Very well. For D'Arcy's sake I will pass over the matter," said Bunter, in a very lofty manner. "I shall not mention it again."

And Bunter turned away to towel himself down and dress. After that drenching even Billy Bunter did not feel very sleepy. Tom Merry & Co. returned to their rooms to finish their toilet. Tom Merry was breathing hard, and Manners and Lowther were grinning. It was very seldom that their cheery, good-natured chum lost his temper, but Tom Merry had certainly let himself go that time.

"What a nice, lovable chap!" Lowther remarked. "His schoolfellows at Greyfriars must simply adore him, I should say."

"Blessed if I know how they stand him at all," said Tom Merry. "If we had him at St. Jim's I think we should scalp him regularly every day!"

"Only it's rather rough on poor old Gussy if we rag him here," said Manners. "If it wasn't for that—"

"Perhaps I oughtn't to have lost my temper," said Tom, colouring. "But—wasn't it a rotten trick? I jolly nearly had a row with Gussy. And I'm certainly not going to tell the fat brute I'm sorry, because I'm not sorry, and I'd do it again. I hope the bouncer will keep clear of me, that's all. I want to keep the peace, so as not to bother Gussy; but that fat toad gets on my nerves awfully."

Tom Merry's nerves were not the only ones that were troubled by the "fat toad." Arthur Augustus's nerves were in the same state. But Billy Bunter was planted at Eastwood now, and, without positive rudeness, he was not to be got rid of. So the long-suffering Gussy had to grin and bear it.

CHAPTER 13.

The Eleventh Man.

RIPPIN' mornin' for some cwicket, deah boys!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked as the St. Jim's juniors came downstairs.

They were very early birds. Only early housemaids were down so far, with the exception of the stately Mr. Chillingham, who was not in his usual state of exquisite finish when the juniors caught sight of him. Wally and Joe Frayne were already out, and the barking of Pongo could be heard on the lawn.

"What about brekker?" asked Bunter.

"We're goin' to pwactice before brekkah, deah boy."

"Practice before brekker?" exclaimed Bunter, in astonish-

ment. "I certainly couldn't! Why, I'm frightfully hungry!"

"Bai Jove!"

"You fellows go out and get the wickets up, and I'll join you later," said Bunter. "I don't want to be a trouble, of course, Gussy, but I must have something to eat now I'm down. I suppose some of the servants can look after me?"

"I—I suppose so."

"If I kept a tribe of servants like you do, Gussy, I'd make 'em work," said Bunter. "It's all right. You fellows clear off, and I'll find something to eat."

"Buck up, then!" said Tom Merry shortly. "If you're going to play in the match, you've got to show us what your cricket is like."

"My cricket's all right—a cut above what you're accustomed to at your school, anyway," said Bunter. "No need to worry about that."

Tom Merry made an effort, and restrained the reply that rose to his lips. It was really hard upon the St. Jim's juniors that they were called upon to be incessantly civil to Bunter, when the Owl of Greyfriars did not seem to have the slightest idea of being civil to anybody. But, as Arthur Augustus explained, it was up to a decent chap to be decent, whatever a bouncer might do.

The juniors went out, and Bunter remained indoors, to seek for provender. At that early hour in the morning it was not easy to get a meal, even in so stately a residence as Eastwood House. But Billy Bunter could be trusted to provide for himself when he was hungry, and there was food within reach.

The St. Jim's juniors intended to put in a couple of hours' practice before breakfast. Wally and Frayne had entered into the idea heartily, being elated at the prospect of playing as members of Tom Merry's team, which was quite beyond their reach when they were at St. Jim's. Wally and Frayne were very good players for fags of the Third, and Tom Merry was more satisfied with them than he expected to be with Bunter. Indeed, Tom had the pick of the junior school House eleven with him, though he would have been glad to have also a bowler like Fatty Wynn of the Now House, and a hard hitter at the wickets like Kangaroo of the Shell. But the players were all good, at all events, with the exception of the eleventh member of the team. What Bunter was like, they did not know, but they were pretty certain that he was no good at all. But, as Tom remarked, they might as well play him as play a man short.

Lord Conway, certainly, was a good cricketer, and the eldest son and heir of the Earl of Eastwood was not likely to consent to play against a circus team on the village green. It was Bunter or nobody.

In the keen morning air, the juniors piled into cricket practice with a will, and they almost forgot Bunter. The fat junior of Greyfriars did not appear in sight. Probably he had found something to eat. Tom Merry was in great form at the wicket, and Jack Blake was at the top of his form as a bowler. But at eight, when the juniors were thinking of going in for breakfast, Tom remembered Bunter.

"Where's that fat bouncer?" he exclaimed. "We've really got to see what he can do, you know. If he can't play at all, I'd rather play a man short."

"Heah he comes."

Cousin Ethel had just come out of the house, and Billy Bunter appeared with her. The fat junior was smiling his most agreeable smile. Bunter never believed that any girl could see him without falling a victim to his fascinating looks. Cousin Ethel's coyness, as he regarded it, certainly seemed to be lasting. But Bunter's view was that she needed to be encouraged, so he was proceeding to encourage her, little dreaming how much Miss Cleveland's nerves suffered from his oily smiles and smirks.

"I saw you from the window," said Ethel, as she came up. "You are out early to practice."

"Yaes, wathah, deah gal! We want to see what form we're in befoah we meet those Chungum chaps," said Arthur Augustus. "We're waitin' for you, Buntah."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Bunter, with a wave of his fat hand. "I'm not going to practice. I'm looking after Miss Ethel."

"Thank you; but I do not need looking after!" said Ethel coldly. "You had better practice."

"You see, I don't require it," said Bunter. "These chaps do, of course. I've been looking at them, and I don't see much to make a fuss of in their cricket. Rather feeble, I should say, compared with our form at Greyfriars. I don't quite like the way you stand at the wicket, Merry."

"Don't you?" said Tom, his eyes burning.

"No. Rather clumsy, in fact! And the way you deliver the ball, Blake—that won't do, you know," said Bunter, with a shake of the head.

"Won't it?" gasped Blake.

"Not if you're going to play the match seriously. I say, THE GEM LIBRARY—No. 340."

you fellows, I'll tell you what I'll do," said Bunter generously. "No need for me to practise; I'm all right. But I'll coach you chaps."

"You'll what?" yelled Blake.

"I'll coach you! You see, with my thorough grasp of the game, I make a ripping coach. You fellows get going again, and I'll point out to you where you go wrong."

The St. Jim's juniors glared speechlessly at the fat fellow from Greyfriars. Billy Bunter's cool cheek simply took their breath away. For Tom Merry & Co., the champion junior cricketer of St. Jim's, to be coached by that fat, clumsy, unwieldy "boulder," was a suggestion that required some getting used to.

Cousin Ethel turned away her head to hide a smile. Cousin Ethel could play cricket herself, and she did not require telling that Bunter was no cricketer.

"Well," gasped Blake at last, "if that doesn't take the cake—if it doesn't prance off with the whole blessed biscuit—"

"I mean it," said Bunter briskly. "All I know about the game, I'm willing to place at your service, to oblige my pal Gussy. Now, about your bowling, Blake—"

"Let my bowling alone!"

"I can't coach you without criticising your bowling, of course. I take it you are a bowler. Now, the very way you take the ball—"

"If you start coaching me," said Blake deliberately, "there will be a flattened porpoise lying about here soon afterwards!"

"Ahem! Now, Merry, I'm not satisfied with your batting. Your position at the wicket—"

"I am satisfied with it," said Tom Merry; "and when I want your opinion on the subject, Bunter, I'll ask you for it."

"Herries, too," said Bunter. "You, Herries—"

"What?" growled Herries, in a tone that considerably resembled the voice of his own bulldog Towser.

"When you field, you mustn't stand like a stuffed dummy!" explained Bunter. "You—"

"A—a—what?"

"You should stand like this," said Bunter, assuming what he supposed to be at once a graceful and a vigilant attitude. "Like this—"

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

"Stand like that!" roared Herries. "I couldn't stand like that, without being a fat, clumsy, blinking fathead!"

"Oh, really, Herries—"

"The fact is, Bunter, dear boy, we're not lookin' for a coach," said Arthur Augustus mildly. "And Tom Mewwy insists, as skipkall, that if you want to play in the match, you must go through some pwactice. Will you bat or bowl?"

"It's not really necessary," said Bunter. "But they say example is better than precept, so perhaps I had better show you how we play cricket at Greyfriars. Give me the ball!"

D'Arcy tossed the ball to Bunter, who caught it clumsily, and Tom Merry went to the wicket. Bunter blinked along the pitch, and grasped the ball in his fat fingers, and took a little rolling run. The ball flew, and there was a yell of alarm from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as he caught Ethel by the arm and dragged her out of danger. As Ethel was level with the bowler's wicket, she ought not to have been in danger, certainly; but Billy Bunter was a bowler of unusual powers.

"You uttah ass!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "What are you throwin' that ball at Ethel for?"

"M-m-my hat! Where's that ball?" gasped Bunter. "I—I think it left my hand a little too soon—or, rather, a little too late. Chuck it over here!"

Jack Blake had picked up the ball, but he did not return it to the Owl of Greyfriars. He gave him a withering glare instead.

"You're not going to touch this ball again, you jay!" he growled. "You're not going to brain Miss Cleveland, and you're not going to brain us! That's your first and last shot."

"Oh, really, Blake—"

"For goodness' sake, keep that ball away from him!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Bunter, you can come and try the willow, if you like. You're not going to bowl, under any circumstances whatever."

"I'm a bit out of practice, perhaps," said Bunter; "but I'm a regular dab with the bat. Just you see if you can touch my wicket, that's all!"

Bunter took the bat, and stood at the wicket. He leaned on the bat, with his big feet planted far apart, blinking along the pitch through his big spectacles towards the bowler.

Jack Blake took the ball, grinning. Bunter's attitude at the Greyfriars.—No. 340.

the wicket was quite enough to tell him that the fat junior would never be able to stop the ball, unless it was lobbed down to him by a child. Blake sent it down like a bullet, and the wicket fell to pieces before Bunter knew what was happening.

"How's that?" chuckled Blake.

Bunter blinked down at the wicket.

"That was a trial ball, of course," he said. "I wasn't expecting that. Just you try again."

"Oh, all right! Stick up the wicket, Digby."

Billy Bunter blinked along very carefully for the next ball. He slashed at it ferociously with his bat, and there was a crash. The willow swept the wicket to pieces, and Digby gave a howl as one of the flying stumps caught him on the side of the head. Billy Bunter was evidently as dangerous at the wicket as he was at the bowler's crease.

"Ow, ow, ow!" roared Digby.

"Hallo! That's not out!" exclaimed Bunter. "That ball never touched the wicket."

"The wicket wasn't there when it came!" gasped Tom Merry, with tears of laughter in his eyes. "You knocked it to smithereens first. Ha, ha, ha! Hit-wicket, you ass!"

"That's all very well, but you try again—"

"Take that bat away from him!" yelled Digby. "If he bats again I'll brain him with a stump. He's banged a stump against my napper! Ow, ow, ow! He's dangerous!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Put that bat down, you fat idiot!"

"Oh, really, look here!"

"Put it down, or I'll larrup you with this stump!" roared the infuriated Dig. "My hat! I'll larrup you, anyway! You fat idiot!"

Dig rushed at Billy Bunter, flourishing the stump. That stump, swept out of the ground by the bat in Bunter's hands, had raised a big lump on Dig's head, and he was naturally wrathful. Bunter blinked at him in alarm, and dropped the bat and fled. Digby pursued him furiously, lunging at him with the business end of the stump, eliciting a wild yell from Bunter at every prod. The two, pursued and pursuer, disappeared in the distance towards the house, leaving the rest of the juniors almost hysterical with laughter.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Blake, wiping his eyes. "If that's how they play cricket at Greyfriars— Ha, ha, ha!"

"The fat idiot can't play for toffee," said Tom Merry. "I know very well he doesn't play for his Form; we've played them. We can't put such an idiot in our team, even to meet a circus eleven. He would be funnier than Tiny Tony."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We shall have to play a man short, unless there's some kid about the estate Gussy can rope in for the match."

"I've got an ideah, dear boys."

"Whose?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Weasly, Lowthah, I wish you would not be so funny. We want another membah of the eleven, Tom Mewwy. It would be wotten to play a man short. And I've got my eye on the vewy person. I wondah it did not occur to me befoah. Ethel, dear gal, will you oblige us by playin' in the team to-day?"

"Ethel!" exclaimed all the juniors together.

"Yass, watah! I pwesume Ethel will play a bettah game than Bunter."

"I don't think I can play a worse," said Cousin Ethel, smiling. "But—"

"No buts!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "It's a ripping ideah, and I ought to have thought of it. If you don't mind, Ethel—"

"Of course, I should be very pleased," said Ethel. "If you really think I am good enough—"

"Oh, that's all right, dear gal! I shall make a centuwry, anyway, and I intend to perform the hat twick, too. So that will make the match safe."

Cousin Ethel laughed.

"Very well; count on me," she said cheerily.

And the juniors went in to breakfast in high good-humour. The eleventh man had been found for the team; and though the eleventh man was a girl, it was pretty certain that she would put up a much better game than Billy Bunter. The juniors found Bunter at the breakfast-table, looking very red and sulky, and glaring at Digby.

"Sorry I couldn't put in some more practice, Gussy," he said. "But it's all right. I don't need practice. You'll see what kind of a game I shall play."

"We can imagine that," grinned Tom Merry. "We don't need to see it. We shall not be playing you in the match, Bunter."

"What!"

"You won't be wanted in the eleven."

"Why not?" demanded Bunter angrily.

"Because you can't play cricket," said Tom calmly.

"Why, you—you—I could play your head off!" howled Bunter.

"I dare say you could—if I were within range when you were handling the ball," conceded Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, Gussy, I insist upon playing. I can't tell the Greyfriars chaps there was a match here, with me left out of it. I insist!"

"You must speak to Tom Mewwy, deah boy. Tom Mewwy's skippah."

"Well, look here, Merry—"

"Nuff said!" said Tom Merry tersely. "I'd rather play a man short than play you, Bunter. I'd rather play two or three men short, as a matter of fact. Nuff said!"

And Billy Bunter grunted, and went on with his breakfast in a very sulky humour. But Tom Merry meant what he said, and Bunter could see that he meant it, so there was nothing more to be said on the subject. Billy Bunter was to miss that chance of displaying his tremendous powers as a budding Hayward or Grace.

CHAPTER 14.

The Winning Catch!

"**H**EAH we are, deah boys!"

It wanted a quarter to ten when Tom Merry's eleven arrived upon the village green. The news of the match between the Eastwood House team and the Chumgummers had spread, and there was already a gathering of village urchins, with some of the elders, to see it. Tom Merry's team was the first on the ground, but the Chumgummers were not long in putting in an appearance.

The St. Jim's juniors could not help grinning as they saw them. As Mr. Charley Chumgum arranged these matches for the purpose of advertisement, it was his object to make the circus team as striking as possible in appearance. Tiny Tony, who captained the team, wore his clown's clothes, and had his face made up as when in the ring. Texas Bill, alias Billy Flaherty, wore a cowboy costume, as when he rode the black mustang in the circus. Signor Sapolio was in tights and spangles, and Rab Rabbi wore loose white garments and a turban.

The rest were in flannels, but their flannels were adorned with broad red stripes, so that they presented a peculiar zebra-like appearance. There was a chuckle from the gathering crowd at their appearance, and Tom Merry & Co. laughed.

Only Arthur Augustus looked a little solemn. Arthur Augustus's most precious possession was his personal dignity, and he was more than a little afraid that his personal dignity might be a little bit compromised by playing a match with so curious a team. He was fervently glad that all St. Jim's was not there to see them.

"Bai Jove, wathah a tag-and-bobtail c'rowd, Ethel!" he remarked to his cousin, as Tiny Tony shook hands with Tom Mewwy. "Penwaps I was wathah too hastay in acceptin' Mr. Chumgum's challenge. It's wathah widiculous."

"Not at all," said Cousin Ethel, laughing. "Awful rough old lot," snorted Billy Bunter, who had come down with the cricketers. "On second thoughts, I should refuse to play such a crowd, myself."

"Vewy good," said Arthur Augustus. "Then it's all wight about your bein' left out, Buntah. I suppose we're fairly in for it now."

"By the way, Gussy, I want to speak to you," said Bunter, lowering his voice. Cousin Ethel politely moved away. "I haven't received that postal-order this morning. There's been some delay in the post."

"All wight, deah boy; don't mench."

"I've got another postal-order coming to-morrow," continued Bunter. "It will be for three pounds. I suppose you won't mind cashing it?"

"Certainly, deah boy! Hand it to me diwectly it comes—"

"Ahem! I mean, I should like to have it cashed in advance," Bunter explained. "Of course, I shall hand you—"

"Excuse me, deah boy, Tom Mewwy's callin' me," said D'Arcy hurriedly, and he hastened away.

"Look here, Gussy—rotter!" murmured Bunter, as D'Arcy did not look back. "Mean beast! If he can't make me a little loan now and then, I'm blessed if I'm going to stay here much longer. I'm fed up with those bouders, anyway."

And Bunter rolled away discontentedly.

Tiny Tony and Tom Merry tossed for choice of innings, and Tom Merry won and elected to bat. The circus eleven went into the field.

The clown went on to bowl. Round the cricket-pitch, the villagers were gathering in larger numbers, to watch that curious match. Tom Merry opened the innings with Blake. The clown's contortions, as he went to the bowler's wicket, caused the spectators to roar. And Tiny Tony's manner of delivering the ball was unique. Instead of taking a run, he turned a somersault, and then the ball came whizzing down,

somewhat to the surprise of the batsman. There was a clack, and Tom Merry's wicket went to pieces.

"How's that?" demanded Tiny Tony, with a grimace that made the crowd shriek.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Hout!" said the landlord of the Easthorpe Arms, who was umpiring at the batting end.

It was out, there was no doubt about that. Tom Merry looked a little lugubrious as he went out. The bowler's weird contortions had certainly put him off. Still, there was no known law against a bowler's turning somersaults, if he wanted to, so no reasonable objection could be raised. "Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, as he prepared to follow Tom Merry to the wicket. "I have weally nevah seen bowlin' like that befoah. This does weally take the cake!"

But Arthur Augustus was on his guard at the wicket, and his sticks did not go down so soon. But in the next over, delivered by Signor Sapolio, Blake was caught out by Samsonio the Strong Man. The Strongest Man on Earth tossed the ball into the air, and caught it again, and chirruped "How's that?"

"My hat!" said Lumley-Lumley. "We shall have to play up if we are going to beat those circus bouders!"

"We shall, indeed!" said Cousin Ethel. "They are very funny, but they can play!"

Ethel was right. The circus fielding was very good. There were several good catches. Mr. Chumgum, who umpired at one end, gave strictly fair decisions. The fat gentleman with the diamond was a sportsman.

Tom Merry & Co. did their best; but the innings ended for a total of 55 runs, less than they were accustomed to knocking up in an innings against the New House at St. Jim's. Cousin Ethel had placed ten on the score, and Arthur Augustus congratulated her warmly. Arthur Augustus's century had not come off—in fact, he had scored only 4, but he promised wonders for the next innings.

There was an adjournment to the Easthorpe Arms for lunch, and then the circus innings commenced.

It was an eye-opener to Tom Merry & Co. Funny the circus eleven might be, but they knew the great game of cricket inside out. The hitting of Samsonio was terrific—the Strongest Man on Earth drove the ball past the boundary a good many times with the greatest of ease, and gave the juniors plenty of leather-hunting. Tiny Tony, though he would turn a somersault while the bowler was preparing to deliver the ball, was always "there" when he was wanted, and his wicket defied the bowlers for a long time. He was caught out at last by Lumley-Lumley, turning a somersault once too often, and then knocking the ball right into the fieldsman's hands.

But the total for the innings was 100; and Tom Merry & Co. were looking very serious when they prepared to bat for a second time.

Billy Bunter looked on with a scornful eye. He confided to everyone who would listen to him that this was not cricket as he was accustomed to play it. And in his inmost heart he rejoiced in the prospect of a licking for the St. Jim's team.

But St. Jim's were not beaten yet. The second innings panned out better than the first.

Tom Merry was not caught napping a second time, and he scored 50 before Signor Sapolio caught him out. The rest of the wickets went down for a fair average of runs. Cousin Ethel was last "man" in, joining her Cousin Arthur at the wickets. Arthur Augustus gave her an anxious word of advice as she passed him:

"Play up like anythin', dear gal! You see, I've made only 9, and I weally want to make it a centwuy this time. Don't take any wicks—leave the battin' to me, like a good gal."

Cousin Ethel smiled, and went to her wicket. She took 6 for the over, and the score was now 120. Then the bowling came to Arthur Augustus, who breathed a sigh of relief as Ethel lived through the over. Now there was a chance for the mighty hitting that Arthur Augustus had promised to his comrades.

His first hit was a mighty hit indeed, and the swing of the bat almost spun him round, but unfortunately the willow did not come into contact with the elusive leather. There was a clack! And Tiny Tony chortled:

"How's that?"

"Out!" said Mr. Chumgum.

"Bai Jove!"

There was no doubt that it was "out." The St. Jim's second innings terminated for 120. Cousin Ethel was not out.

Mr. Chumgum "stood" tea in the inn garden. The gorgeous gentleman evidently was accustomed to doing things in style. All Easthorpe and most of the neighbourhood had gathered round the green during the afternoon, and Mr. Chumgum was getting a tremendous advertisement for his circus, and he was in great spirits.

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"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus remarked, as he sat down to tea. "We shall have to pile in, deah boys. I didn't make that century afiah all—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see anythin' to cackle at, deah boys. Those boundabs have 100 for their first innings, and we have only 175 for both innings. You had better let me do most of the bowlin', Tom Mewwy, when they bat again, or we weally sha'n't have an earthy!"

"Perhaps you wish you'd played me now!" grunted Billy Bunter. Bunter was making a great innings at tea, if not at cricket.

"Perhaps!" grinned Tom Merry. "But it's a jolly big 'perhaps,' Bunter!"

And Bunter snorted.

Tom Merry & Co. exerted themselves in the circus second innings. Blake performed the hat trick amid great applause. Samsonio's mighty hitting was cut short by a catch from Cousin Ethel, and Tiny Tony was stumped by Digby. The St. Jim's team looked more cheerful when the score stood at eight down for 50.

But before another wicket fell the score had jumped to 70; and when Rab Rabbi went in, last man, the circus wanted 5 to tie, 6 to win.

"Get that brown boulder out, Blake, old man!" said Tom Merry, as he tossed the ball to the Fourth-Former.

"Not so jolly easy!" said Blake.

It wasn't easy. Rab Rabbi knocked away the ball for 4, and got safely home. Another hit like that would be the finish. Blake looked very serious as he grasped the ball again. It would never do for a St. Jim's team to be beaten by that happy crowd of mirth merchants, but it looked very much like it now.

Blake sent the ball down, and Rab Rabbi swept it away. The batsmen were running. Arthur Augustus gave a yell.

"Go it, Ethel!"

Cousin Ethel was running for the ball. It was a difficult catch, and the eyes of the field were upon her. A slim hand was raised, two steady eyes were on the ball as it floated down.

Click!

"Bravo!"

"Well caught!"

Cousin Ethel, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, held up the ball. There was a roar from the crowd and from the cricketers. Cousin Ethel had made the winning catch! Rab Rabbi was out, and St. Jim's had won the circus match.

"I take off my 'at to you, miss!" said Mr. Chumgum, sweeping off his big white topper. "That was a splendid catch; and Chumgum's Eleven are proud to be beaten by such fair hands!"

"Ear, 'ear!" chirruped Tiny Tony.

And Tom Merry & Co. marched off the field victorious, and warmly congratulated Cousin Ethel on the catch that had won the match—the catch of the season, as Blake put it.

A few days later Billy Bunter announced that he really couldn't keep his many friends waiting for his desired presence any longer. Arthur Augustus having steadily declined to cash any more postal-orders in advance, and the post—doubtless owing to some mismanagement at headquarters—having failed to deliver any postal-orders to be cashed, there was a perceptible cooling in Bunter's great friendship for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The courtesy of the swell of St. Jim's was almost at breaking-point, but he preserved it to the very last, and even contrived to suppress a gasp of relief when the Owl of Greyfriars announced at last that he was going.

He saw Bunter off at the station, bought his first-class ticket, and made him a loan of several pounds, to be repaid at some future date—perhaps in time to take the place of an old age pension.

And before the train rolled away Bunter shook hands with him from the carriage window, and assured him that he would look him up as often as possible when the new term commenced at St. Jim's.

Billy Bunter was not missed. Indeed, merry as they were at Eastwood House all the time, there was no doubt that Tom Merry & Co. found a decided improvement after the departure of Gussy's pal.

THE END.

(Another Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's next Wednesday, entitled "HELD BY THE ENEMY!" 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' fiancée, 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 Duvigny, 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.

They are discovered and captured, however, and Stanton tells Grace that unless she promises to marry him he will kill Satorys and his companion. A friendly priest advises Grace to fall in with Stanton's demands, and gives her a powder to take immediately after the ceremony. She is married, and takes the powder, which brings on a state of coma, so that to all appearances she is dead. The priest, Lara, summons an escort, and takes Grace in a carriage to his temple. But on the way they are attacked by a tribe of natives, who, maddened at the tyrannical acts of the new Government, massacre the priests and carry off Grace. In their camp, however, she regains consciousness, and steps out of the carriage. The natives regard her as a goddess, bowing to the ground at her feet. Meanwhile, Satorys and his companions succeed in escaping, and without any definite idea as to where they are going, set out across country.

(Now go on with the story.)

The Alarm.

"Not another step, sir, till the morning," said Peter, as he collapsed on the marshy ground.

Satorys would have gone on, but he saw that his comrades were done.

He, too, sank to the ground. Peter murmured something about their being quite safe now, for they would be thought to have perished.

Before then lay the wilds, the practically unknown territories which were only nominally part of the Istan Empire.

Satorys lay back thinking, and the shadowy trees became a part of the dreams that shaped themselves. With an effort of will he drove out the thought of despair.

He must have slept. He sat up and looked about him.

A Bid for a Throne.

A Thrilling Tale of Adventure and International Intrigue.

By CLIVE R. FENN.

The sun was up, and the forest was green and gold. Satorys jumped up and shook Peter, who was sleeping a few steps away.

"Here," cried Satorys, "we ought to be getting on."

Peter sat up and rubbed his ear.

"Oh, to be sure, I remember it all now," he said. "But the first thing is breakfast, and then we must set about getting back the throne—"

Satorys gave an angry gesture and turned to Duvigny, who stirred.

"Throne! Fiddlesticks!" he cried testily. "The thing is to keep alive, I suppose, and we shall have our work cut out to do that."

Peter did not mention the subject again. He gave a nod which might have meant a score of things, and then resumed his normal self, proving himself to be a hero through all the trials that came.

It was Satorys who made his way to a stream which was tumbling over rocks, and managed to secure one of the large fish—a sort of salmon trout—which had risen to the surface in a little bywater. Peter kindled a fire and cooked it, and, refreshed, the three fugitives pressed on.

As for himself, Satorys had no faith in the idea that his rival would relinquish pursuit until there was forthcoming tangible evidence that the three had perished. There was too much at stake for him to leave anything to chance.

The country was wonderful, a land of mountains and ravines, thickly wooded gorges, and rivers which flashed on their way in the tropic sunlight.

That first day was the replica of many that followed, and Peter recovered his spirits.

"I should not mind it so much, sir," he said, "if we had only been able to keep our arms. It is poor sport, catching fishes, at the best, and but for that bird you knocked down yesterday, we'd have had nothing else."

"We shall have to put up with worse things than that, Peter," he said. "I was trying to calculate the distance we were from the coast."

"And if we get there, you will take ship back home and then see about getting your country back again, sir. I see. And as for me, I don't blame you. For as my brother Tom always used to say, 'Take what belongs to you, Peter, before anybody else has a chance.' That's the style, sir."

Satorys shook his head.

"I am a long way off all that, Peter," he said. "The main thing, I suppose, is to keep alive and hope for better things."

"I know, sir, I know; but we know, don't we," the sailor went on, looking at Duvigny, who gave a nod, "that Mister Satorys will win in the end? You've led us, sir, and shown us what stuff you're made of, and you'll get your own back. But what's wrong, sir?"

Satorys had suddenly risen to his feet and was hurrying towards a clump of bushes a dozen paces away.

The Messenger.

The three had been resting after a long and toilsome march. Satorys had been listening idly to the old sailor's chatter when

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A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD

WEDNESDAY—**"HELD BY THE ENEMY!"**

Next

a curious sound had struck his ears, a faint rustling, and as he hastened towards the spot whence the sound came, it occurred to him that they had been tracked down after all.

That his surmise was wrong, soon showed. As Peter and Duvinvy followed him, they saw their chief bending down over the prostrate figure of an old man.

Saturns recognised the poor wanderer at once, despite his changed condition, his matted beard, and his shreds of clothes. It was Lara, the priest, and Saturns saw that the poor old fellow was at his last gasp.

He tenderly raised the sufferer and bore him to the stream by which the camp had been pitched, and, at last, the old man opened his eyes. There was a gleam of understanding in them as he gazed at Saturns.

"Too late!" he muttered. "All lost. I wished to tell you, but she is dead. My fault; I did my best, but it was no use."

"What do you mean?" asked Saturns gently, as he took the other's hand. "Miss Lang is dead, I know," he continued, his voice husky and strange, "but you—why are you wandering in the wilds like this? You had nothing to fear."

Lara's eyes closed. There was a deep sigh, and Saturns saw that his weakness had overcome the old man again.

He did what he could for the victim of privation, and the others ably seconded him, but their resources were nil.

"Does he know anything, sir?" asked Peter.

"How can I tell?"

There was a misty idea forming in Saturns's mind, but he dared not give it shape. He knew that Miss Lang had died. He had heard the tolling of the city bells. Ah, no, there was no hope there, but as he gazed down at the priest he felt that there was something else which he should learn.

Lara lay in a state which so closely resembled death that Saturns more than once thought the end had come, but hours later as he crouched there watching, the priest opened his eyes, and his wasted hand clutched feverishly at Saturns's arm.

"You have something to tell me?" said Saturns.

"Yes, yes, but I can't remember. It is all gone. They came at us, and I was cut down, and I knew no more."

The old man sank back. Hours passed. Saturns watched by him, telling the others to sleep. Lara roused up once more. Now his mind was plainly gone, and, yet there was one point clear. He wanted to tell Saturns something, but his brain was confused. He murmured something about meaning it all for the best. Then he seemed in imagination to be back amidst the groves which surrounded the Temple of Missa. He spoke in a wild, tremulous delirium of strange things he had seen, and soon afterwards came the end, just as the dawn showed over the hills.

"It won't come," muttered the sufferer. "I thought—I thought—" His speech failed him, and his head fell sideways. Saturns saw he was dead.

Through the Wilderness.

Long after, as he tramped on with his two companions, Saturns tried to make something of the old priest's words, but he could not. It never struck him that Grace Lang lived, that the priest had been a party to a ruse to save her from a hated marriage.

As the days slipped away, with the hope of finding a route to the coast receding, Saturns was roused from his spell of grave reserve by the old sailor.

"Perhaps it is all just for the best, sir, after all said and done. I could do with a new suit of clothes, of course, and so could Master Duvinvy, but we are safer where we are, and I should say old Stick-in-the-Mud yonder has about given up looking for us. He would never find us now, and we are having a nice walk."

"Yes; it's a nice walk, Peter," said Saturns. "But this isn't what I came out to Istan for. We ought to be nearing Carlia, which is on the coast. There we might pass unrecognised, and it is our best chance."

"And if we get there, sir," the sailor went on, as he lay back on the soft ferns in the glade where they had made their camp for the evening, "I suppose we shall give up eating fish and greenstuff, same as we do now, and take ship back to England where you will be able to find those ready to help you get back your crown?"

"My crown!" said Saturns sardonically.

"He is in the right of it!" chimed in Duvinvy.

"Yes, sir, I am right! Not as if I was gentleman like you, I should bother myself about a crown so long as I had got half a one in my pocket to spend. It's enough if you come to that; it will get you a nice cut from the joint and two eggs, and bread ad lib., and all that. So long as one gets plenty to eat and drink one ought to be satisfied, and as for being a king, I don't believe it's much catch nowadays, with folks waiting for you round every corner with a bomb."

"No, sir, if the Pope of Rome and the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Lord Kitchener thrown in, went down on their knees to me and said: 'Please take a crown, for our sake, I should just thank them very kindly, and say I was otherwise engaged, and would prefer the other fellow had the job.'"

"You've got the wisdom of the ancients, Peter," said Saturns drowsily, as he looked up at the sky which was darkening now.

But they did not talk much during those times. Duvinvy respected the silence of the man who had been dealt so many hard blows by Fate, and, as a rule, Peter followed the example set and maintained, for him, an unwanted reserve.

And Saturns, despite his seeming acquiescence in the new spoils of banishment which had been allotted to him, was forming new schemes. The country was against him, he knew, or, rather, it was tacit in its acceptance of the new ruler. He, the real king, was a wanderer on the face of the earth.

He had only the roughest idea of where they were, but it seemed to him that the Port of Carlia must lie south-west, and in that direction they made their way.

"Nada Shall Decide."

It was long after, one night of purple darkness, Saturns tried to start up, but found his arms and legs were bound. Around him he dimly made out a myriad of forms.

"We are done in this time," sang out Peter from a distance. "Here am I trussed up like a chicken. Are you there, sir?"

Saturns shouted out a reply.

"And you Mister Duvinvy?"

There came an answering feeble hail.

They had been surprised in their sleep.

It had been a long day's march. Saturns lay there unable to stir. He had exchanged one captivity for another. These people were of the teeming native race, and the three companions had been tracked down and seized.

There was an excited colloquy, and then one of the leaders stalked to where Saturns lay. He said something, and the prisoner was raised to his feet, and the bonds which held his ankles removed.

"You are white men, and shall die; but it is Nada who shall decide," said the man. "I, Pomar, the chief, say this. Nada, the great princess, who returned to the world to drive out the tyrant away there." The speaker made a gesture.

"She shall say whether you shall die or live."

Saturns shrugged his shoulders. It was nothing to him what Nada might say or not say. He saw that, for the moment at any rate, escape was out of the question, and he had to resign himself to being forced along. For the march to the headquarters of the blacks began.

The others were near him, and all around were the well-armed natives, splendid types of men, broad-shouldered, and of grand physique.

"Too many of 'em, sir," growled out Peter, "and my arms are growing into my sides I should say, they have fastened me up so tight, but one mustn't grumble. Perhaps this lady—Nada—they are so fond of talking about, will see what fine fellows we are, and tell them to set us free."

There was a halt in the gray of the morning. The prisoners were given food and water, and then their bonds were replaced. Saturns, despite his position, could not help but wonder at the marvels of the country which they traversed. The real Istan was a land of Nature's wonders, and the so-called government which existed on the coast and for a short distance inland had no cognisance of the vast realms of natural wealth which lay beyond the mighty rivers far away in regions which, so far, the most intrepid explorers had left untouched.

He was learning much, and as they marched on the manner of his captors changed. Saturns and his two friends were guarded night and day. Around them was the jungle, and far ahead in the deep fastnesses of the country lived this mighty princess called Nada, in whose hands their fate rested.

For the chief Pomar talked. He told his captives of the wonder of the goddess, for so the natives regarded her. Her will was law. She ruled as one who was born to the highest place, and her face was never seen.

It was one night a week later, so far as Saturns could remember, that he thought the chance of escape had come, and he turned over on his side to look at the shadowy figure of the black sentry. Then he nudged Peter.

"Are you ready?" he whispered. "Tell Duvinvy. I am going to down the guard and try for liberty."

Peter rose. They had been accorded more freedom, but the guards were more numerous than before.

Saturns glided towards the sentry, and then sprang at him as the man turned round. Peter was at the side of his superior. Saturns had gripped the man's rifle and it exploded



HOW THE FUGITIVES ESCAPED!

As the sentry came into the zone of light from behind the parapet, Satorys sprang on him from behind, jerking him to the ground.

in the struggle. There was a rush from all sides. Duvigny, who had dashed forward, was sent staggering back, and the next second Satorys himself saw the futility of his attempt. He was borne back, and Pomar stood there confronting him, angry words on his lips.

"You are mad!" he cried. "You are foolish to fight those who serve Nada, the queen!"

The Whisper in the Night.

Word was brought to the girl who lived far up-country as a queen of the capture of three of the hated whites.

Since she had come back to life Grace Lang had lived in a strange dream. The black people who had borne her away called her Nada. They worshipped her; and in the ancient, half-ruined city where they had taken her—a city which was a relic of a bygone civilisation—she reigned supreme. She saw as time passed that she was regarded as the princess of the old legend—the girl who was to return and bring happiness to the land—and, despite herself, she found herself obeying the wishes of those who had her in their power.

In the old temple where she received her new subjects she

was expected to be veiled. A change had come over the black race. They had done penance for their attack on those with her, and she had bowed to her fate. She could do no other. Ruler, and supreme as she might be, yet she knew she was a prisoner; that her regiments of guards watched her, and her women, docile and obedient as they were, would never have permitted her to attempt to leave.

Nada heard of the prisoners without great interest, for there had been many rumours reaching her during the weeks which had elapsed, reports of the tyranny of the new king a thousand miles away. She was told that he had caused to be murdered the man who had threatened his throne, and as this intelligence was repeated she felt sure at last that it was true.

She walked in the gardens of the temple—a place which was a temple and palace in one—and thought of the past. It was all she had; and of the future which contained nothing to give her hope.

And then came the time of amazement. It was night, and she sat on the dais, Pomar and other chiefs standing at her side. There was music—wonderful music which thrilled her soul—and suddenly she saw approaching her under guard

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 340.

NEXT WEDNESDAY—**"HELD BY THE ENEMY!"** A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

the man she loved—the man she imagined done to death by the orders of Stanton.

Paul Satorys advanced proudly to the steps of the throne, accompanied by Peter, the sailor, and Duvinny. Satorys saw a girl robed in white. A veil hid her features, and he never recognised in her the girl who had suffered that he might live.

But Nada knew him in a second, changed by hardship as he was. Had she obeyed the first prompting of her soul she would have risen and gone to him, throwing her arms about his neck, telling him that all should be well; but something caused her to restrain herself. He did not know her. Probably he thought her dead, as she, on her side, had deemed that he had perished, the victim of the rage of Stanton. Moreover, she was not free.

She thought of the wedding which had had such a tragic ending. She was the wife of the man who had dispossessed Satorys, and that fact separated her for ever from happiness. Yet as she leaned slightly forward, her chin resting in her hand, there came a sense of pleasure. Fate had placed Satorys in her hands. They could be nothing to one another, and perhaps it was wise to withhold the truth from him as to who and what she really was; but her face flushed as she realised that she could help him.

Paul gazed in wonderment at the gracious vision far from him at the end of the hall. He felt thrilled, though he could not have explained the why and the wherefore. He smiled slightly as a thought struck him. He had called himself a king, but it seemed to him as he looked about him that it was this strange people far away in the wilderness who had a truer understanding of these things, who comprehended the worth of kingship and governance.

"These black gentry might ask us to sit down!" grumbled Peter. "Why don't you ask that black fellow there—*he seems to be a bit of a personage—to bring a chair?*" grumbled Peter.

Satorys did not heed his follower's words. He was gazing at the wondrous woman who sat enthroned amidst the shadows of the vast hall, whose roof was lost in the filmy clouds of translucent light—*at there, truly a great queen, palmbearers right and left, guards whose drawn swords caught the reflections from the lanterns. He felt proud to be there—proud to be allowed to see her, for she seemed, indeed, a queen.*

Nada shivered, despite herself; for all of a sudden the music ceased, and one of her counsellors advanced and bowed his knee.

"These are enemies," he said, "and they have been brought before you, great lady from the other worlds, so that you may decide on their fate. They have merited death, as have all those who live beyond the mountains. Many there are even among their own kind who deplore the actions of the higher ones in their country. But these"—the speaker looked in the direction of the prisoners—"these have ventured into your land, O queen. For that the punishment is death!"

Again there came to Nada the wish to make herself known to the man who stood down there far below her so proud of men. But she held back, and gazed at him through her veil, as though half curious, half reluctant, partly in doubt, eager to know more before she gave the signal for him and his companions to be put to death.

There was a shout from the multitudes who thronged the hall.

"Death! Death! Death!" was the cry.

Satorys was calm, indifferent, as it seemed. He appeared to be trying to remember something—something which was elusive and faded away the moment he was near to realisation, like the mist of a summer morn. And Peter, unlike the others, was loquacious even then.

"I believe they mean it, sir," he muttered to Satorys. Then, as Paul took no notice, the sailor turned to Duvinny. "For my part, I am not a bit surprised that they hate the whites. Pretty sort of a life we have led them! But they are not going to do me in without a struggle, no matter what that pretty girl may say."

"Death! Death! Death!" was shouted again.

The entire hall seemed filled with that hideous cry. Satorys looked about him as though roused suddenly from a dream. Nada had raised her hand, and there was a hush over all the vast crowd—the hundreds of armed men, and the people who looked on.

Nada half-raised herself, and then sank back on the cushions of the divan where she sat enthroned, the arbiter of life and death. She had come to love these people, for they had worshipped her; and her rule had changed the land. But at that moment she thought of Paul, the man she loved—Paul, an exile, proscribed, a fugitive, with the certainty that if he returned to Istan city it would be to his death. He would never know it was she, the girl he had been plighted

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to, who had stood between him and a tragic end! He would never see her again; for though he was so near to her, yet there were wide gulfs between.

But of a sudden she did realise her power. She saw her guards. They would go to death for her. Her slightest word was law; and Paul was standing there a prisoner—standing at the foot of her throne! She could help him!

She gazed down, and her eyes rested on the gold embroidery of her shoe. She had armies who would fight for her, die for her without question or demur; and her bosom heaved, a strange thrill passing through her as she rose to her feet.

There was a shout of gladness then as the people saw, standing there in the blaze of light about the throne, the princess they revered.

Her voice was soft—soft and wondrously musical; but as he heard her speak Satorys did not recognise in it the sound which of old he had loved to hear.

"You are strangers," she said, as she looked down at the captives. "Tell me why you have passed the mountains and come into my land."

And it came to her even then that if she wished to serve the man before her she must hide herself—never let him come within the frontiers of her life.

Satorys replied calmly:

"I and my friends meant no harm," he said, with grave dignity. A sense of overmastering pride forbade him asking for mercy from a girl—or from anyone, no matter whosoever it might be. "We sought sanctuary from enemies who seek our lives. If we have merited death"—he folded his arms—"well, we are prepared. But it is an ill thing to condemn those who have not offended, except unwittingly."

Nada dropped back; and Satorys saw her turn and speak to the white-haired counsellor who had spoken before.

She bowed her head.

"You speak so proudly, stranger. Are you indifferent then to death?"

Peter pushed forward a step.

"Look here, young woman," he sang out. "If my friend here does not mind what happens to him and the other gentleman, it is not a bit so with yours truly. I want to get back to Wapping, if you have no objection!"

Nada smiled, and tears started to her eyes. She was very fond of Peter, for the old man had stood between her and danger in the days that had gone.

"And you," she said, looking at Satorys again. "You must have reasons which urge you to live, for it is the duty of a man to live if he can serve others and do so with honour to himself."

Satorys did not reply. He was once more trying to recall something that was not, something gone beyond recall.

Then Nada spoke again.

"It is not for us, my people," she said calmly, "to sentence these poor strangers to death; for, as they say, they have sought our help. I, who know many things, know this." She was standing, and her arm with its draperies of filmy sheen was extended, her finger pointing at the prisoners.

"These are no enemies. They are our friends. And he who stands there is one who should be great in the land. He is by rights our ally, our equal in the land beyond the mountains. My people, I have spoken. These gentlemen are our friends, and it is our duty to help them, and send them refreshed on their way."

The thronging crowds had not yearned for death. That much was evident as another shout now rent the air.

Satorys started as a hand was laid on his arm. He had been listening to what seemed to be a whisper in the night. It was swept away as one of the officials bade him follow him.

"You and your friends will sup, sir," he said.

How did she know? Was this princess really one who was gifted more than the rest of the world? She had told him that he was a king, or had hinted as much.

Satorys as he sat at supper with Peter and Duvinny, tried to think out the truth, but he was baffled and astonished, driven back into himself.

Peter laughed and joked as the servants waited on the wanderers in a handsome apartment lit by many-coloured lamps.

Later, as cigars were brought, and Peter swung round in his chair to look at the musicians, who were playing at the far end of the chamber, Satorys rose, for the old counsellor approached him.

"Please come with me, sir," said the old man.

(A long and thrilling instalment of this splendid story will appear in next Wednesday's issue of "THE GEM LIBRARY." Please order your copy now. Price One Penny.)

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ST. JIM'S JINGLES.

No. 10.—ERNEST LEVISON.

A brilliant band the Fourth can claim
Of heroes strong and clever,
Whose practice is to play the game
With resolute endeavour;
Who stand together, one and all,
In manner meritorious,
To battle—and, if need be, fall—
For what is good and glorious.

But, like a viper in the grass,
His way discreetly feeling,
Appears a cad whom few surpass
In cuto and crafty dealing.
Tis Levison who mars our view—
The worst of Lathom's pupils—
A hardened, reckless rascal, who
Is quite devoid of scruples.

The many fine and fearless feats
Performed in recreation,
This blighted type of boyhood treats
With keen abomination;
Preferring to peruse with greed
The "tips" for "chase and welter,"
While sucking an unhealthy "weed"
Within the wood-shed's shelter.

By night he stealthily repairs
To low resorts in Rylcombe,
Regardless of impending cares,
Which, should he blunder, will come
And in an atmosphere made foul
By many a savage smoker,
He sits, with a determined scowl,
To try his luck at "poker."

'Tis joy to Joliffe and his pards,
Whose efforts are unceasing
In matters such as marking cards,
And crafty, wholesale fleecing.
Their victim mutters, with a pang,
"My luck will alter, maybe."
But in the grip of such a gang
He's helpless as a baby.

No prying prefect from the school
Disturbs his dissipation;
And as he plays, his eyes are full
Of eager expectation.
His manlier schoolmates slumber on,
And soon, despaired of winning,
He stops, to find his money gone,
And Joliffe gently grinning.

Then let us bid a prompt adieu
To such a skunk as this is,
And send him squirming from our view
With hearty hoots and hisses.
Depart with speed, detested cur,
Your shady schemes to nourish!
The boys of Britain much prefer
That right and truth shall flourish.

Next Week:

PERCY MELLISH.

"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."

Miss Lucy Sinclair, Waterview, Pearson Street, Balmain, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers living in Scotland, age 15-16.

Archie Porter, 158, Close Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with readers, age 15-18.

T. M. Kean, and G. Stephen, 428, 24th Avenue, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in Australia, age 14-16.

F. W. Howse, 361, Ossington Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England, age 16-18.

Frank I. Hartley, 41, Prince Albert Road, Musselburgh, Dunedin, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with girl readers living in the British Isles, age 14-17.

V. Pattison, c/o A. Wilkinson, Gt. King Street, Dunedin, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in Scotland interested in photography, age 17-18.

R. Furphy, 245, Mount Alexander Road, Ascot Vale, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers living in the United States of America.

E. G. Gibson, 20, Rose Road, Grey Lynn, Auckland, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with readers living in England or Canada, age 15.

Miss Emily Keegan, 12, Lower Hepburn Street, Ponsonby, Auckland, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with boy readers attending "St. James' Collegiate" (Sussex).

Miss J. Ritson, 52, Hope Street, Brunswick, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader, age 19.

B. Summerfield, 82, Arnold Street, North Carlton, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with girl readers living in the British Isles or Canada, age 15-16.

E. Doyle, 94, Victoria Street, Lewisham, Sydney, Australia, wishes to correspond with girl readers.

Rex. P. Jefferies, 245, Bridport Street, Albert Park, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers interested in postcards, age 17-20.

C. Anstiss, 3, Cameron Street, Balmain, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England, age 14-15.

George H. Allen, c/o G.P.O., Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in the British Isles or South Africa, age 18-24.

Arthur Smith, 18, Lyell Street, South Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers living in America interested in stamps.

Miss A. E. Todd, 52, Angus Street, City Adelaide, South Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader living in Canada or England, age 16-17.

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 —
EDITOR "THE GEM" LIBRARY.
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For Next Wednesday,

"HELD BY THE ENEMY!"
 By Martin Clifford.

In this grand long complete story Tom Merry & Co.'s pleasant holiday as the guests of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy comes to an end at last. It is true that a scheme of Monty Lowther's succeeds in prolonging the holiday for a short period, but, as it happens, the extra time spent at Eastwood House is hardly of the pleasantest. When they do finally arrive at St. Jim's for the new term Jack Blake & Co. make a dreadful discovery. The famous study in the Fourth Form passage which has so long been their stronghold has passed into other hands! Jack Blake goes on the warpath without wasting any time, but his efforts are futile. It is finally left to Monty Lowther to win back by guile the famous apartment which was so obstinately

"HELD BY THE ENEMY!"

PREJUDICE VERSUS FACTS!

"I had no idea a coloured picture paper could be so entertaining, much less one that only costs one halfpenny."

This remark was made recently by a friend to whom I had handed the latest copy of our companion journal, "Chuckles," and it made me realise, with perhaps a little surprise, I confess, that a certain amount of prejudice still probably exists against the halfpenny picture paper in general.

There is no doubt that until quite recently this prejudice was pretty well justified. So-called "coloured comics" were badly printed in crude colours, their jokes were either feeble or vulgar, while their fiction was of the lurid and sensational type. There is no excuse whatever for publications of this sort in the present day, though, unfortunately, they are still to be found offered for sale. The good sense of the public, however, is well able to discriminate between such trash and a coloured journal of the best type, such as "Chuckles."

The front page of "Chuckles" is drawn every week by no less an artist than Mr. Tom Wilkinson, whose drawings for such high-class papers as "Punch" and "Golf Illustrated" are famous. Mr. Wilkinson's sketches are beautifully drawn, uproariously funny, and without a trace of vulgarity. The colour-work which gives "Chuckles" its distinctive brightness is a triumph of the colour-printers' art. The jokes are second to none, the work of the cleverest artists only being accepted, while the stories in "Chuckles" are of the same high standard as those which appear in this very paper.

No one need feel ashamed of reading "Chuckles" while such famous authors as Arthur S. Hardy, Frank Richards, and the anonymous, but none the less famous, writer of the Ferrers Locke tales divide the honours in its pages. It is true that the price of "Chuckles" is very low, being only one halfpenny. But in these days of the penny "Times" the keynote of success is to give the public the best quality at the lowest price. This is exactly what "Chuckles" gives you, so if you have not seen the latest number, you should lose no time in procuring it, if only to test the soundness of my little homily, which my friend's remark, quoted above, has led me to inflict on you.

REPLY IN BRIEF.

O. L. S. Paley (Palmer's Green).—Very many thanks for pointing out error.

A GRAND SUMMER NUMBER.

This week's issue of our companion paper, "The Magnet" Library, which is now on sale all over the country, is a

GRAND SUMMER NUMBER

which easily surpasses in quality and value any single number previously published.

To begin with, the specially-drawn cover is a masterpiece of the colour-printer's art, carried out on special paper of fine quality. But the great thing, I know, to the majority of my chums, will be the extra long complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co., which forms the principal item in the list of contents. The title of this story is

"HARRY WHARTON & CO.'S HOLIDAY."

By FRANK RICHARDS.

and when I say that this story is written in the famous author's most typical style, and that it is nearly

50,000 WORDS LONG!

I know that I have said quite enough to convince you that there is a very special treat in store for you.

Of the other contents of this record issue of "The Magnet" Library I will say nothing, being assured that the success of the season will be scored by this

SPECIAL SUMMER NUMBER.

JACK ASHORE AND AFLOAT.

Sidelights on the Life of our Merchant Seamen.

THE "DEAD HORSE"

However good a pay-day the sailor may have touched when he got ashore, by the time he joins the next ship it is very doubtful if much of his money remains. He is lucky if he has retained the worn kit he brought back with him, and luckier still if he has replenished his stores of clothing and sea-gear with which his chest ought to be furnished. I believe that, on "wind-jammers," at any rate, there still remains the custom of "burning the old dead horse." The writer saw this ceremony take place a few years since on a barque bound from London River to Fremantle, W.A. As has been already stated, the sailor—or his representative—receives a month's wages in advance, and, when his first month on blue water is passed, he can feel that he is really beginning to earn money again. To celebrate this, on the occasion I spoke of, the fo'c's'le rigged up their "dead horse" in the shape of an old tar-barrel, which was clad in a ragged suit so as to resemble a human form. This was hoisted up to one of the yards and set alight, while the sailors sang a fitting melancholy chant to show their joy at "letting the dead horse die," and thus speeding the departing guest, who represented three or four pounds, of which, most likely, the shipping-master had received the bulk.

THE "SLOP CHEST"

But though, after the "dead horse" has perished miserably, the sailorman begins to feel that "more days more dollars" is now true of his existence, there are other calls upon his pocket, and this despite the fact that he may be thousands of miles from the nearest shop or saloon.

(Another Splendid Article

Next Wednesday.)

The Editor

A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.



Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE

HIS GREAT NEED.

Bearded Stranger: "Madam, you may not recognise me, but years ago, when but a little child, I lived next door, and one day, in my childish romps, I lost a button from my coat. I had no mother, as you know, and shall I ever forget, madam, that you took me in and sewed another button on for me? Ah, madam"—brushing away a tear—"through all these years I have treasured that little button as a sacred relic, and here it is."

Kind Lady: "Well, my good man, what can I do for you now?"

Bearded Stranger: "All I need is another coat."—Sent in by T. Quinn, Sheffield.

TOOK IT FOR GRANTED.

Solly and Joe had both been to a wedding-party over night, and were talking about all they had seen.

"Joe," said Solly, "did you notice that all the knives and forks were made of silver?"

"No," replied Joe doubtfully. "I don't believe it. Show me!"—Sent in by Geo. Adamson, Camberwell.

BOTH WAYS.

The new system of memory training was being discussed, and the professor was becoming enthusiastic.

"You see," he said, addressing the bright pupil, "in order to fix a thing in your mind you should conjure up some sort of picture in your mind's eye representing what you want to bear in mind."

"Yes, sir," said the bright pupil, "it sounds very nice, and I've no doubt the advice is excellent if you would tell me what it means."

"Well, for instance," said the professor, "supposing you want to remember the name of a poet—Bobby Burns. Fix in your mind's eye a picture of a policeman in flames. See—Bobby Burns!"

"Yes, I see, sir," said the bright pupil. "But how is one to know that it does not represent Robert Browning?"—Sent in by Fred. Rayner, Shoreditch.

DENSE!

One day the teacher asked her class to write an essay on London, about which they had been reading. When examining their papers later she was surprised to read the following:

"The people of London are noted for their stupidity."
"Where did you get that from?" asked the teacher of the child.

"Please, miss, it's all in the book. It says, 'The population of London is very dense.'"—Sent in by D. Grieve, Tufnell Park, N.

NOT SUCH A FOOL.

It is said of a certain village "dunce" in Scotland that if he was offered two pieces of money he would choose the coin of smaller value.

"Why do you always take the penny instead of the sixpence?" he was asked one day. "Don't you know the difference in value?"

"Ay!" answered the supposed fool. "But if I took the silver they would never try me again."—Sent in by James Duthie, Scotland.

GRASPING THE MORAL.

The street orator had gathered round him a group of urchins. Why they listened so attentively he didn't understand, nor probably did they know themselves. But the orator took full advantage of his opportunity, and delivered an improving lecture on the value of kindness to dumb animals. At the end he sought out for some illustration to adorn the tale. Happily it was at hand. Across the way walked a lady, leading two dogs in leash. One of the dogs was white and the other black.

"Now," exclaimed the tub-thumper, "after what I have said, supposing those two dear little dogs were to start fighting, what would be the first thing you would do?"

No answer came at first, but one little arab turned to look at the dogs critically and thoughtfully.

"Well, guv'nor," he answered at last, "I fink I'd 'ave tuppence on the little black 'un!"—Sent in by F. Feather stone, Hull.

HAVE YOU SEEN THIS?

If the B mt put :

If the B. putting :

Explanation: If the grate be (B) empty (mt) put coal on (:).

If the grate be (B) full stop (.) putting coal on (:).—Sent in by J. Morpeth, Northumberland.

DON'T JUDGE BY LOOKS.

Tramp: "Ave yer a copper to spare, lady?"

Lady: "No! I shall not give you anything. You look able enough to work for a living."

Tramp: "Shouldn't judge people by their looks, mum. I took yer for a generous, kind-hearted lady; but yer ain't!"—Sent in by Fred Page, Anerley, S.E.

A NATURAL QUESTION.

Jimmy giggled when the teacher read the story of the Roman who swam across the Tiber three times before breakfast.

"You do not doubt that a trained swimmer could do that, do you, Jimmy?"

"No, sir," said Jimmy; "but I wondered why he didn't make it four, and get back to the side his clothes were on."—Sent in by H. Bailey, Urnston.

HAZARDOUS BEHAVIOUR.

A sporting man, bulky and burly, entered a railway carriage, and not only occupied another person's seat, but sat on an old gentleman's silk hat. He offered no apology, but stormed at the victim's carelessness for putting his hat on the seat. At the next station the sporting gent left. The other old gentleman called a porter.

"Please run after that man," he said, as the porter came up, "and tell him he has left something behind."

The porter did as he was bade, and returned with the man.

"What have I left?" he asked.

"Two bad impressions," answered the other—"one on me, and the other on my hat."—Sent in by E. Appleton, Kent.

MONEY PRIZES OFFERED.

Readers are invited to send ON A POSTCARD Storyettes or Short Interesting Paragraphs for this page. For every contribution used the sender will receive a Money Prize.

ALL POSTCARDS MUST BE ADDRESSED—The Editor, "The Gem" Library, Gough House, Gough Square, Fleet Street, London, E.C.

THIS OFFER IS OPEN TO READERS IN ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD.

No correspondence can be entered into with regard to this competition, and all contributions enclosed in letters, or sent in otherwise than on postcards, will be disregarded.

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ONE HALFPENNY. EVERY SATURDAY.