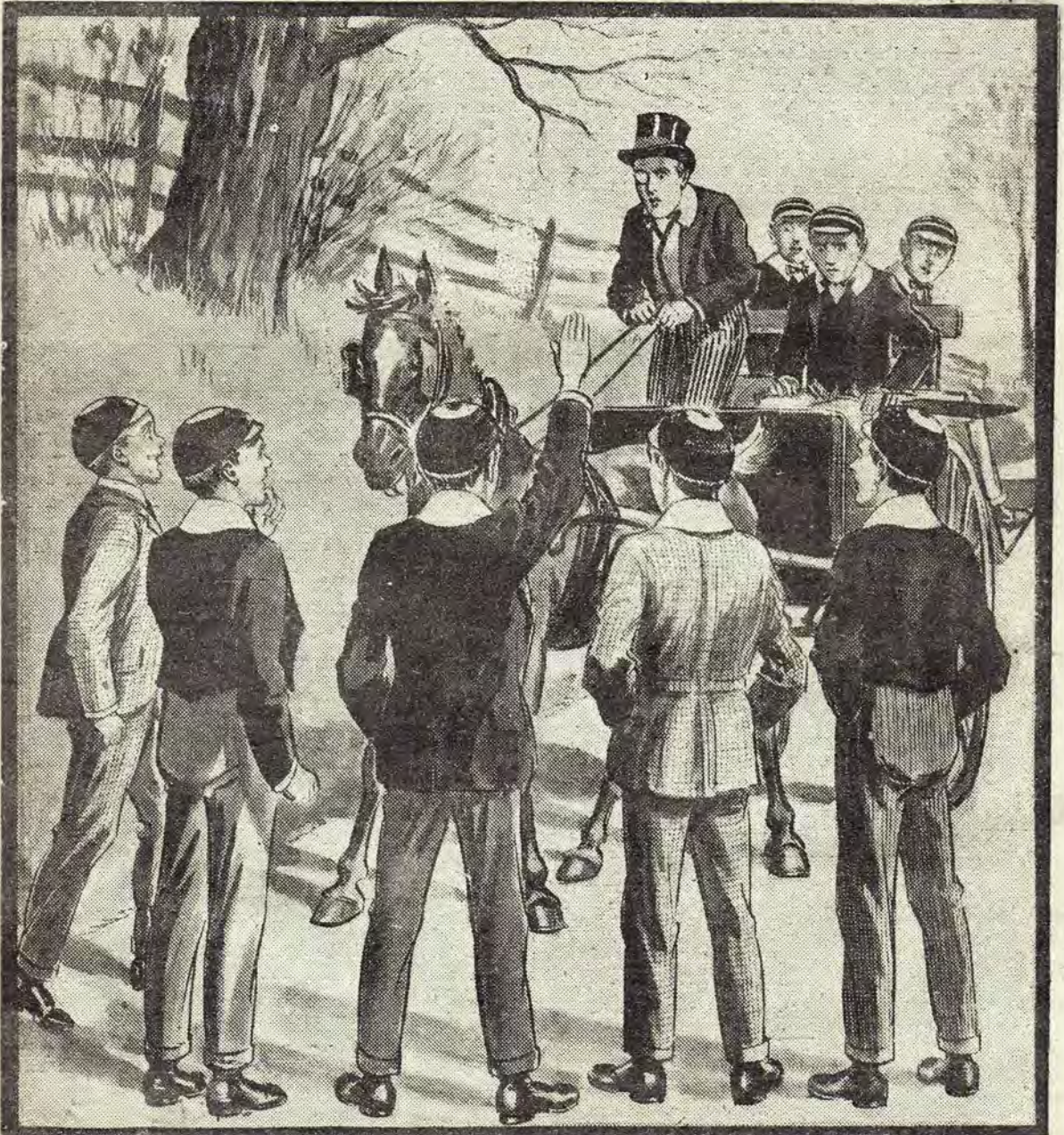


A MISSION OF MYSTERY!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete Tale of School Life at St. Jim's.



THE GRAMMARIANS HOLD UP THE "SAINTS"!

(An Exciting Scene in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale in this issue.)



THIS WEEKS CHAT



Whom to Write to
EDITOR "THE GEM" LIBRARY.
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OUR THREE COMPANION PAPERS!
"THE MAGNET" THE "PENNY" CHUCKLES.
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EVERY MONDAY | EVERY FRIDAY | EVERY SATURDAY.

For Next Wednesday:

"THE CONQUERING HEROES!"

By Martin Clifford.

In the grand, long, complete story which will appear next week, lovers of the great summer game will find something very much to their taste. Tom Merry accepts a challenge which he sees in a local paper, on behalf of the junior eleven of St. Jim's, and he and his youthful stalwarts find themselves up against something a good deal above their weight in the powerful khaki team which comes to oppose them. Later, the St. Jim's first eleven oppose the soldiers, and a thrilling game results. After the match a rowing race and a swimming contest are got up, and St. Jim's carry off the honours. The great George Alfred Grundy provides the comic relief of the story, and the fate with which his freak team meets will amuse all readers. Needless to say, Grundy and his very scratch lot are not

"THE CONQUERING HEROES!"

HAS THAT RIDDLE AN ANSWER AT ALL?

I am beginning to feel inclined to believe that the bishop who invented that riddle died before he had thought out the answer himself. Anyway, I cannot solve it, and as far as I have seen at present none of my readers can. I have received several attempted solutions, it is true; but I really cannot see how any of them can be made to fit each clause. Miss Dorothy Dixon says she cannot think of anything better than Cupid. I fancy Miss Dixon will have to think again before she is right. Miss Connie Thurstans says "tone," but does not say how she makes it fit. I can't. "Cymro" has a shot with "presence." He might as well have said "absence" as far as I can see. W. G., of Bradford, goes several better, for he sends along a riddle of his own composing, to which he does not add the answer—for a tolerably obvious reason! I don't know that it is as good as the bishop's, but I think it worth giving.

"I dance on my head, yet no head have I got;
 I never do run, but I keep on the trot;
 I've never been wounded, but twice I've been shot.
 My grandfather says I am clean off my dot!
 My birthplace was Bedlam; in Kent I was born;
 My watch and my necktie have long been in pawn.
 I never drink liquor, but always I'm swigging.
 As out in the garden for wrinkles I'm digging.

Any more? No, thanks!

Well, what am I?"

W. G. says "bubble" is the nearest solution he can get to the bishop's riddle. It is not very near; I never heard of a bubble in an orchestra.

Kevin Oakes and Stanley Tillman think the answer is "a kiss." The latter makes a gallant attempt to prove his case, and among his statements is one to the effect that you cannot "give a girl a proper kiss in the dark." I do not pretend to an extensive knowledge of this sort of thing; but I should say the thing has been done at times with more or less success. Percy Bishop suggests "sound" as the answer, and a naval reader weighs in with "flying fish." But I rather think not.

NOTICES.

"Canuck," a member of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, asks if any reader or readers can spare him a magnetic compass and a pair of field-glasses. Will anyone who has either of these articles, and is prepared to part with them to our correspondent, who has come from over the Atlantic to help the Old Country in her hour of need, write to the Editor, who will then put him in communication with "Canuck"?

A. E. Parsons, 6, Longmead Avenue, Bishopston, Bristol, wishes to form a "Gem" and "Magnet" League in his district, and ask readers who would like to join to write to or call upon him.

Ernest A. Knight, of H.M.S. Liverpool, has received a fine supply of reading matter in response to his appeal of a few weeks ago. He is trying to thank by letter all those who responded; but in case he should find the task too big, he asks the Editor to convey his thanks to the generous senders.

Will W. Redford, of Prestwich, send the Editor his full address? His notice cannot be inserted without it.

Driver R. Hargreaves, T4-040520, A.S.C. attached 102 F.A., 34th Division, B.E.F., France, would be grateful for any numbers of either the "Gem" or "Magnet" between 230 and 376.

Both Gunner W. J. Colliver, 1054, 48th Siege Battery, R.G.A., British Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, Egypt, and Private N. Colliver, 23279, 6th Platoon, B Co., 4th Entrenching Battalion, B.E.F., France, would be glad to have copies of the Companion Papers, current or back numbers.

Will readers wishing to join a "Gem" or "Magnet" League in and near Cattigtwohill, Co. Cork, apply to Tom Gee, Glen House, Forrestown, Cattigtwohill?

Miss Rose Palmer, 180, Cromwell Road, Peterborough, wants to buy a copy of "The Boy Without a Name."

Frank A. E. Price, 2, Wolseley Road, Wood Green, N., is anxious to join a "Gem" League in his neighbourhood, if one exists.

Trumpeter N. S. Nicholls, 36191, "J" Co., R.E. Signal Depot, Dunstable, would like correspondence with a reader aged about 18.

Private A. Payne, 1694, 8th Royal Scots, 51st. Infantry Base Depot, care of A.P.O. S. 17, B.E.F., France, would be glad to have back numbers of either the "Gem" or "Magnet."

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

G. G. (Workshop).—Many thanks for the kind things you say about my papers.

"Gem-Magnetite."—No, I should not say Bob Cherry is in love with Phyllis Howell. They are simply good friends. The Greyfriars colours are blue-and-white.

"Gem Social League" (Maidstone).—I regret that I cannot make room for League reports and news, as they would only interest a very small circle.

T. S. B. (Ely).—You are evidently a comparatively new reader. Talbot came to St. Jim's originally merely to burglar the valuables. He was an expert cracksmen, and the Toff was the name by which he was known among his criminal associates.

D. M. (Ossett).—Not a misprint. The Form standards at Greyfriars and St. Jim's differ somewhat. This is the case with many public schools. H. W. & Co. could not work on munitions unless they could get jobs. That was the difficulty.

"Royal Engineer."—Surely six months' training in your branch is not too much!

R. W. (Dunstable).—I regret that the number you want is out of print.

N. A. Burrows (Ormskirk).—Glad to welcome you as a "Gem" reader. There is not very much between Tom Merry and Harry Wharton as boxers, but Tom is a bit the better of the two.

E. A. D. R., and C. S.—Place and characters imaginary. Blue—sorry, but George Washington and all that sort of thing, you know!

Your Editor

PUBLISHED IN TOWN
AND COUNTRY EVERY
WEDNESDAY MORNING



COMPLETE STORIES
FOR ALL, AND EVERY
STORY A GEM!

A MISSION OF MYSTERY!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



The tables were covered with snowy-white cloths, and upon them were the choicest dishes. Standing, serious and majestic, were four waiters in the regulation "evening dress" with serviettes over their arms. Arthur Augustus couldn't have provided much more food, hardly, if he had invited the whole school.

CHAPTER 1.

Waiting for Gussy.

"WOTTEN!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's stood before the glass in the dormitory, and regarded himself with a critical eye. What he saw in the mirror was truly a vision of glory. He was attired with more than usual splendour. His collar was spotless, his tie a dream, his trousers a model of perfect fit, and his waistcoat was almost too magnificent for words. In fact, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was simply gorgeous. Yet he stood in front of the glass and said:

"Wotten!"

He frowned upon his noble reflection and proceeded to take his waistcoat off.

"Weally, it is a wotten fag for a fellah to dwess decently nowadays!" he murmured. "I am constantly bein' wowwied to the point of distwaction! I wondah which waistcoat will match the colah of my tie?"

The whole trouble, as a matter of fact, was concerned with D'Arcy's fancy vests. He had such an array of glorious waistcoats that he couldn't make up his mind which one to wear. Already he had tried on six different waistcoats, and he was still undecided.

Apparently the occasion was one of some importance. Arthur Augustus always dressed with scrupulous care, but he was even more than usually particular now.

"Pewwaps I had bettah decide on the one with a pink background and gween spots!" he murmured. "It is certainly wathah showay. On the othah hand, the one with the wed stwipes coincides wippingly with the colah of my

Next Wednesday.

"THE CONQUERING HEROES!" AND "THE PRIDE OF THE FILM!"

No. 429. (New Series.) Vol. 10.

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neekie. Oh, bothah! I wish I had only one wotten waistcoat, then I shouldn't experience all this wretched twouble!"

Arthur Augustus tried on vest after vest, and still his aristocratic taste was not satisfied. Finally he decided that his tie was at fault, and proceeded to choose another one.

And meanwhile, fuming with impatience, Jack Blake and Digby and Herries, his three long-suffering chums, were waiting in Study No. 6 in the Fourth-Form passage.

"Ain't the silly chump ever coming?" growled Digby.

Blake glared at his watch.

"If he doesn't show his funny face within two minutes we'll go up to the dormy and lug him down by force!" he said. "The young fathead missed half his tea so that he could go and dress! Here we've been waiting hours for him!"

"Ten minutes, at any rate!" agreed Herries.

"Well, it seems like hours!" growled Blake. "Gussy'll be the death of us before he's done! I expect the trap will be here in a minute or two."

"Well, I don't care," said Herries. "I ain't going to the station to meet Gussy's pater. I've got something better to do."

"Towser, I suppose?" said Digby, with a sniff.

"Yes, Towser!" said Herries aggressively. "What's wrong with him?"

"Well, you might be offended if I told you," replied Dig.

"You ass! My bulldog's the best animal in the giddy country!" exclaimed Herries. "I'm going to feed him, and teach him some new tricks."

"Such as biting chunks out of fellows' bags?" asked Blake.

"Oh, rats!"

Herries went out of Study No. 6 feeling rather huffed. He never could get his chums to appreciate the full worth of his famous bulldog.

There was a crunch of wheels on the gravel of the quad outside. Digby looked out of the window.

"Here's the trap!" he exclaimed. "And there's no sign of Gussy! Let's go upstairs, and yank him down! If we wait here, we shall be kept hanging about until the giddy horse dies of old age!"

And Blake and Digby proceeded upstairs with grim faces.

They weren't going to stand any nonsense. If their noble chum wasn't ready, he would have to come without being ready.

They entered the Fourth-Form dormitory, and grinned in spite of themselves. Arthur Augustus was standing before the mirror in an elegant attitude.

"Yaas; I wathah think I look pwetty wippin'!" he murmured aloud.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus turned with a severe frown.

"Weally, you boundahs. I can see nothin' to laugh at!" he said stiffly.

Blake chuckled.

"Turn round and look in the glass again, and then you will!" he grinned humorously.

"Are you suggestin', Blake, that I should gwin at my own reflection?"

"Well, you're a trifle funny, ain't you?"

"You—you ass!" exclaimed D'Arcy indignantly. "I uttally refuse to be wferred to as funny!"

"Well, we won't argue," said Blake. "Why ain't you ready? The trap's outside, waiting for us. I suppose you've finished painting your face, and all the rest of it, haven't you?"

"I nevah paint my face, you swabjous chump!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus warmly. "I think I am all weady now, howevah. I have been labowin' undah difficulties, deah boys. As I am goin' to meet my patah, I have natuwallly dressed wathah nobbily for the occasion. How do you think I look?"

"Awful!" said Digby absently.

"Weally, Dig—"

"I—I mean, you look awfully ripping!" said Digby hastily, as he received a freezing glare from Blake. To tell D'Arcy that he didn't look perfectly all right was to set him off changing waistcoats, ties etc., and that would never do when the trap was waiting for them. "I think you look simply charming!" added Dig enthusiastically. "I'm blessed if you ain't as smart as some of those dressed-up figures you see outside tailors' shops!"

Digby meant to be complimentary, but he hardly succeeded.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "Do you mean to suggest, you wude boundah, that I look like a tailah's dummy?"

"Nunno! Not at all, Gussy!" gasped Dig. "I was only—"

"Oh, rats!" growled Jack Blake. "Do you want us to arrive at the station an hour after the train's come in?"

"Pway don't be absurd, Blake! You know vewy well that I ordahed the twap to be here ovah an hour in advance, so that we could go for a dwive before meetin' the twain!"

"Well, I suppose we want the drive, don't we?"

"Yaas; wathah!"

"Then come on, before we yank you out by force."

"I should uttally wefuse to be yanked out!" said Arthur Augustus severely.

He walked to the door rather hurriedly, nevertheless. He knew very well that, in spite of his refusal, it wouldn't take his chums long to do the yanking business if he provoked them.

When they arrived in the quad the trap was waiting there, with the man at the horse's head. It was a fine, bright evening—just the evening for a drive. As Blake & Co. appeared upon the School House steps, Tom Merry, Monty Lowther, and Manners, the Terrible Three of the Shell, strolled up in flannels, from the direction of Little Side.

"Oh, chase me!" ejaculated Monty Lowther. "Look at the gorgeous apparition that's just blown out!"

Arthur Augustus halted, and jammed his monocle in his eye.

"Are you weferring to me, Lowthah?" he demanded freezingly.

"To you, Gussy?" said Monty Lowther innocently.

"Fancy thinking that! There's not much of an apparition about you. You're more like one of those beautiful posters we see outside the Wayland Theatre—all colours of the rainbow!"

"You uttah ass!"

"You needn't apologise, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to have anythin' to do with you, you wotten Shell boundah!" said D'Arcy stiffly, walking on with his nose in the air.

"Hi! Look out, Gussy!" roared Lowther, in alarm.

"Bai Jove! What evah's the matter?"

Lowther pointed urgently.

"Don't go in front of the horse, you ass!" he said. "If the poor animal sees you, it'll fall down in a fit, and then you'll have to buy a new gee-gee!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus glared at the grinning juniors.

"You insultin' wottah, Lowthah!" he exclaimed wrathfully. "Bai Jove, if I wasn't togged up to meet my governah, I would give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"Lucky for you, Gussy, that you're togged up!"

"Do you mean to insinuate that I couldn't administah a thwashin'?"

"Well, I'm not a betting chap," said Lowther modestly; "but I'd lay odds on myself!"

"Look beah—"

Monty Lowther held his hands over his face.

"Don't ask me to!" he said, horrified. "Do you want me to go blind all at once?"

"Weally—"

Blake grabbed D'Arcy by the arm.

"Chuck it, ass!" he said curtly. "We can't stop here, rowing with these Shell asses! Let's buzz off before you lose your elegant temper!"

"Welease me, Blake!" shouted Arthur Augustus excitedly.

"Welease me, you wottah—"

"Rats! Jump into the trap!"

"I uttally wefuse!"

"He refuses, Dig!" exclaimed Blake grimly. "Lend a hand to chuck him in!"

"I'm your man!" said Dig promptly.

Arthur Augustus backed away.

"You boundahs! Don't you touch me with your wotten paws—"

"Will you get into the trap?"

"Certainly not—"

"Collar him, Dig!" said Blake.

The two juniors moved forward, and D'Arcy held up his hands in alarm.

"Pax!" he roared. "If you touch me you will wumple my collah and wuin my twousahs! I'll get in, you wottahs!"

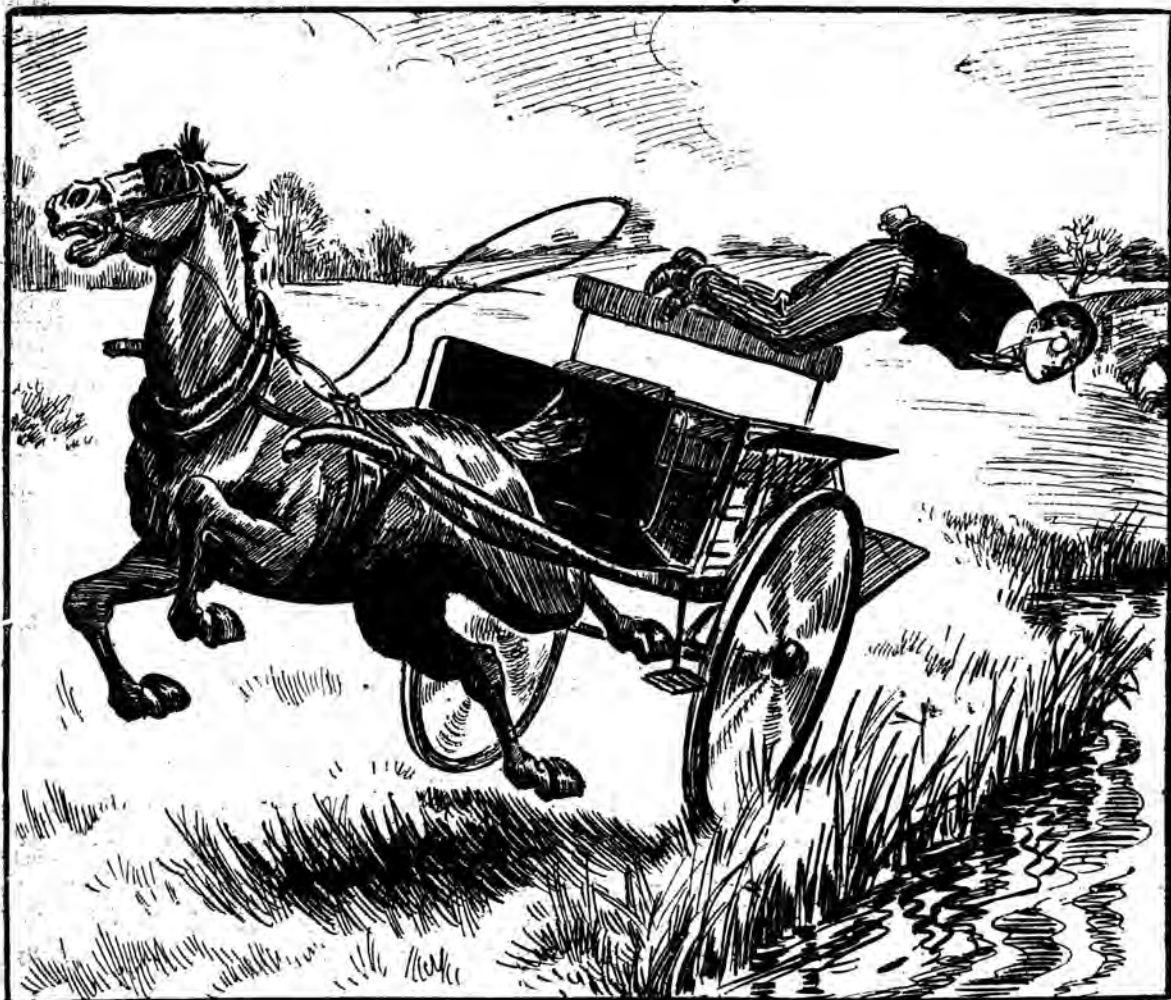
And Arthur Augustus climbed into the trap with as much dignity as possible.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Terrible Three.

D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass more tightly home, and took up the reins. Blake and Digby occupied seats beside their noble chum, grinning hugely.

"You will wait beah until I weturn with the twap," said Arthur Augustus to the man who had brought the vehicle. "And beah is half-a-crown to pprovide yourself with some tea during the interval."

D'Arcy gave the horse a light touch with the whip, accompanied by a curious sound from his mouth. The animal



The horse saw the glistening water right ahead. Instantly the animal swerved, and the trap, swinging round with terrific force, overturned with a crash, causing Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to be hurled into the air like a stone from a catapult! (See Chapter 3.)

understood perfectly, for it moved forward, and the Fourth Form trio drove triumphantly across the quad and out into Rylcombe Lane.

They were off to meet D'Arcy's pater, Lord Eastwood; but, as events turned out, much was to happen before Arthur Augustus came face to face with his noble parent.

CHAPTER 2.

Gordon Gay and Co. on the Warpath.

"**N**OTHING doing!" Gordon Gay, of Rylcombe Grammar School, uttered that remark in a disgusted voice. He and his chums were sitting along the bank in Rylcombe Lane. The half-dozen were all looking somewhat fed up. As a matter of fact, having nothing particular to do, they had strolled up to the lane with the gentle intention of improving the shining hour by seeking a harmless row with the St. Jim's fellows. There was a constant feud between St. Jim's and the Grammar School, and just now Gordon Gay & Co. felt in the mood for a rag.

But the lane was quite deserted.

"Might have expected this!" growled Frank Monk. "Your potty ideas never do pan out well, Gay, you ass!"

"Bow-wow!"

"I'll tell you what!" said Carboy suddenly. "I've got a brilliant idea!"

"Trot it out, then!"

"Well, it's this," said Carboy, turning to the others. "It was Gay's idea to come here with the intention of ragging Tom Merry or some other St. Jim's bounders. Well, there's

nobody to rag. We can't go back empty-handed, so to speak, so I vote we all pile on Gay, and rag him!"

"Hear, hear!" said Wootton major heartily.

"The very thing!" added Lane enthusiastically. "Collar him!"

Gordon Gay jumped to his feet.

"You silly fatheads!" he roared. "What's the giddy idea? It's not my fault there ain't any St. Jim's chaps, is it?"

"That's nothing to the point," said Wootton minor. "We're all dying to rag somebody, and if there's nobody else to rag, you'll have to be sacrificed. Don't be unreasonable. You ought to be pleased to have the honour!"

"You—you frabjous idiot!" howled Gay. "I—I—"

"Shush!" ejaculated Frank Monk suddenly. "Here come three chaps in a giddy trap! Corn in Egypt! Bunk behind the hedge!"

The Grammarians lost no time in bunking. Gordon Gay forgot his indignation in the new excitement. It was very fortunate for him that Blake & Co. turned up at that precise moment—but very unfortunate for Blake & Co.

"I thought I saw some chaps down the road, against the hedge," remarked Digby, as the trap joggled along at a comfortable pace.

"I wathah think it was your imagination, Digby," said Arthur Augustus. "I didn't see any chaps, so there couldn't have been any!"

"Of course not!" said Blake gravely. "Nothing could escape your eagle eye. All the same, I shall be better satisfied when we get in sight of Rylcombe."

"Why, deah boy?"

"Well, the Grammar cads are getting rather bold lately,"

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

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said Blake, "They might even have the unadulterated nerve to stop this trap!"

"Gweat Scott!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "I twust there are none of the wotten boundahs aound this evening. I am quite sure that they would not wespect my best clobber. As a mattah of fact, I have got a howwible feeling that they would take extra delight in wagging me!"

"How could they wag you, Gussy?" asked Digby. "You ain't a flag!"

"You uttah ass!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus crossly. "I didn't say wag—I said wagi!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally—"

There was a sudden rush of juniors into the road in front of the trap, and they formed a barrier from hedge to hedge.

"Grammarians!" roared Blake, in alarm.

"Bai Jove!"

"Stand and deliver!" shouted Gordon Gay cheerfully. "Hands up, forsooth, or we'll shoot every man in his tracks, by my halidom!"

"Better give in!" said Frank Monk. "We're two to one!"

"You—you wottahs!" gasped D'Arcy, pulling the horse to a stop, and standing up in the trap. "Pax, you boundahs! We're in a huiwway!"

"You don't say so, Gussy!" said Gordon Gay sweetly.

"By gum, what a howling swell you are to-day!"

"I uttably wefuse to be called a howlin' swell! I nevah howl, and I nevah swell—I—I mean—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stand cleah!" went on D'Arcy wrathfully. "Weally, Gay, I must decline to regard you as a friend if you persist in this widdleous nonsense. I am dwessed wathah particularly in ordah to meet my patah at the station. Pway be weasonable and allow us to pass!"

Gordon Gay chuckled.

"Now don't be silly, Gussy!" he said cheerfully. "We've been waiting here for a tremendous time for some of you St. Jim's asses to turn up. And now, when you've kindly obliged us, you calmly ask us to let you pass! You don't suppose we're going to do it, do you?"

"Bai Jove! What are you going to do, you uttah wuffian?"

"Oh, you'll see, Gussy!"

And the other Grammarians grinned—loudly.

"Look here!" said Jack Blake aggressively. "If you try any tricks on us, you Grammar cads, we'll slaughter you. I don't say we shall do it now, because we're out-matched, but there'll come a time!" he added darkly.

"You're perfectly welcome to try any of your silly little japes against us," said Frank Monk genially. "For the time being we're going to teach you youngsters a lesson. You seem to have got the idea in your nappers that St. Jim's is top dog. Well, that's absurd! We're going to jape you—particularly Gussy!"

"Bai Jove! You—you scoundwels!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Now, no more nonsense!" said Gay briskly. "Jump down!"

"I uttably wefuse!"

"Better humour 'em," muttered Blake, inwardly fuming. "We're outnumbered, so we'd better eat humble pie. But, by gum, they'll pay for it afterwards!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus stepped down into the roadway and glared at Gordon Gay through his monocle.

"If I had you alone, you boundah, I'd thrash you!" he said hotly.

"You don't say so, Gussy!" grinned Gordon Gay. "Well, the other chaps won't interfere—you can start right away if you like!"

"I uttably wefuse! I am dwessed to meet my patah—"

"That's all right; we'll dress you some more!" said Carboy generously. "We're always obliging, Gussy. You look pretty gorgeous now, but by the time we've done with you, you won't know yourself from a circus poster!"

Arthur Augustus dropped his monocle from his eye to the end of his silken cord.

"Do you mean to suggest, you howwid wottahs, that you're goin' to do somethin' to atah my appeawance?" he asked excitedly.

"Ha, ha!" grinned Gordon Gay. "Well, I should say so. Lend a hand, Carboy!"

Arthur Augustus was firmly grasped by Gordon Gay and Carboy. Blake and Digby were securely held. For a few wild moments they thought of making a desperate attempt to escape. But second thoughts are always the wisest, and they realised that by making any such attempt they would only be subjected to sundry black eyes, swollen noses, and thick ears. So they contented themselves by remaining passive and breathing dreadful vengeance under their breath.

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Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the centre of attraction. He really ought not to have blamed the Grammarians for singling him out for special attention. His very appearance was simply irresistible. Gordon Gay & Co., once they saw him, felt a unanimous desire to rag him bald-headed. D'Arcy was always given special consideration in the way of rags; but to-day he seemed simply begging to be ragged.

"We'll make you look really beautiful, Gussy!" chuckled Gordon Gay.

He produced something from his pocket, which turned out to be a small paint-box, with various gaudy water-colour paints within. He grinned cheerfully, and he and Carboy deftly secured D'Arcy's hands behind his back with a handkerchief. Then the swell's ankles were tied.

"Get some water, Carboy," said Gay briskly. "Plenty in the ditch. It's not very clean, and there might be some wiggle-woggley insects in it; but Gussy won't mind."

Arthur Augustus fairly choked.

"You—you frightful wuffians!" he gasped.

"Not at all, Gussy," replied Gay. "We're doing you a good turn, if you only knew it. We're going to improve your appearance."

And, in spite of D'Arcy's wild protestations, the improvements were carried out. Securely bound, he could offer no resistance. Gordon Gay got to work with the paints, and in a very few minutes D'Arcy's face bore a striking resemblance to a tropical sunset, only it was not quite so artistic. It was simply a mass of green, yellow, red, blue, and purple colours. By way of adding to the effect, Gordon Gay painted red and blue stripes round Gussy's immaculate collar. This, if anything, was the worst insult of all. When D'Arcy saw his spotless collar being treated in that manner, he was so full of indignation that speech simply failed him.

"I think you'll do, kid," grinned Gordon Gay. "What do you think, you chaps?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You ought to feel jolly grateful to us, Gussy!" said Gordon Gay. "Just think of the attention you'll attract! Why, you'll be the talk of Rylcombe, and that's something to be proud of!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you—Bai Jove, I am too fufwious to expwess myself!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "I uttably wefuse to be tweated in this wotten mannah! I considah that you're a set of howlin' wottahs!"

"Very nice of you, Gussy!" said Carboy. "And as for your refusing to be treated like this—well, since your lordship has spoken, we must desist—eh, you chaps?"

Gordon Gay chuckled.

"Oh, we'll desist all right. We've finished with Gussy now, so desisting is the only thing left for us to do. First of all, though, we're going to be kind enough, Gussy, to put you back in the trap. We're also going to be kind enough to set the horse trotting down the road. It's a good horse—I've driven him myself, so I know. Given his head, he'll trot right through Rylcombe, no matter how much you yell to him to stop. And you'll cause quite a lot of interest."

Arthur Augustus was horrified.

"Do you mean to say, Gay, you waseal, that you're goin' to send me to Wylcombe in this feahful state?"

"That's the idea, Gussy."

And, without further ado, Arthur Augustus was forced into the trap. Once there, his hands were secured more firmly than ever, and his ankles tightened. It was quite impossible for him to jump down without risking serious injury, and the Grammarians knew that Arthur Augustus would not do anything so mad as that.

"Gee up, my pippin!" chirruped Gordon Gay, as he gave the horse a sharp smack. It started forward with a jerk, and then settled down into a steady trot.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Grammarians simply wept with laughter. And even Blake and Digby chuckled at the recollection of their unfortunate chum's ridiculous appearance. Meanwhile, Arthur Augustus sat helpless and fuming in the trap, a laughing-stock for everybody, as the horse jogged complacently along the lane towards Rylcombe.

CHAPTER 3.

At the Risk of His Life.

"O H, ewwmbts! The wottahs! The wuffians! The howwid scoundwels!"

Thus Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

He was furious, and little wonder. That evening he was dressed "up to the nines," as Blake expressed it, and it was simply awful to be subjected to this humiliating jape.

"Stop!" yelled Arthur Augustus to the horse. "Stop, you wotten beast!"

The horse twitched his ears, however, and quickened his pace a trifle. Perhaps he was incensed at being insulted thus. Anyhow, the animal made no attempt to stop.

"Whoa, you howwid beast—whoa!" roared Arthur Augustus frantically.

But the horse evidently had decided objections to "whoa-ing." Gordon Gay had been quite correct in stating that he wouldn't stop once it had his head. Arthur Augustus uttered an exclamation as he beheld Kangaroo and Bernard Glyn of the Shell coming up the lane. The two juniors stopped in astonishment at the side of the road as they beheld the startling apparition approaching them.

"Great pip!" gasped Kangaroo. "What is it?"

"Looks like the missing link, or a Red Indian in a fit!" chuckled Bernard Glyn.

"Wescue!" shrieked Arthur Augustus excitedly. "Wescue, deah boys! Pway stop this wotten horse, and wescue me from these wotten bonds!"

"Gussy, by gum!" roared Kangaroo. "Oh, this is killing! Poor old Gussy! - Ha looks as if he's been through the mill!"

"More likely through a giddy printing-machine!" grinned Glyn. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wescue me!" roared Arthur Augustus. "Pway stop the twap!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The two Shell fellows collapsed backwards against the hedge and doubled themselves up like pocket-knives. They simply roared. And before they had recovered from their merriment the trap swept past, with D'Arcy overcome by wrath and indignation.

"The awful wottahs!" gasped Arthur Augustus faintly. "They nevah attempted to help me! Bai Jove, what a pair of uttah outsiders!"

He gave up all hope then. There was nothing for it, he told himself resignedly. He must go right through the village, and would be a laughing-stock for every urchin and every yokel. The position was terribly humiliating, and Arthur Augustus breathed vengeance upon Gordon Gay & Co. for their jape.

The horse was a quiet one, and there was no traffic in the lane. Gordon Gay had reckoned that the trap would jog triumphantly through Rylecombe, and then be stopped by some thoughtful person. As to danger, the Grammar School fellows never gave such a thing a thought.

They were not to be blamed for what happened, startling though it was. It was so unexpected, so totally amazing, that Arthur Augustus himself didn't realise what the peril actually was.

The trap was sailing along smoothly. Just ahead was a bend in the road, and at the corner a gate stood wide open, leading into a meadow.

As D'Arcy neared the bend, he caught sight of a man behind a hedge just in front. The fellow had a gun, and he evidently did not hear the trap approaching. His gun was a heavy double-barrelled one, and he placed this abruptly to his shoulder and fired both barrels in quick succession—apparently at a flock of birds.

Bang! Bang!

Two shots roared out like miniature cannon at the precise moment that the horse was passing. The man was only just on the other side of the hedge, and very close.

"Goodness gwacious!" gasped Arthur Augustus, greatly startled.

The next second he had more cause to be startled than ever. The horse was not prepared for such a cannonade at such an unexpected moment, and he reared up, with a neigh of frightened terror. Then, with the bit between his teeth, he dashed forward at a mad gallop.

"Bai Jove!" panted Arthur Augustus. "Stop, you uttah beast! Whoa! Gweat Scott!"

There was absolutely no means of pulling the horse in, for D'Arcy had not the reins.

Arthur Augustus was jolted about helplessly.

"Keep to the woad, you wretched beast!" roared Arthur Augustus. "Oh, cwumbs!"

For the horse, maddened by its own terror, was making straight for the open gateway leading into the meadow. D'Arcy could do nothing. Bound hand and foot, he simply had to sit in the seat and cling there as best he could.

By a miracle the trap passed between the gate-posts without colliding with either. Then it went careering across the meadow, swaying from side to side violently. More than once Arthur Augustus was nearly flung out. But he managed to remain in the trap, and after a few moments he regained his head. D'Arcy, although the swell of St. Jim's, and an extremely elegant youth withal, was possessed of any amount of pluck, and he could generally be relied upon to acquit himself well in a real emergency.

But what could he do in such a case as this?

Nothing, except wait for the horse to tire. And this is just what the horse did not seem likely to do. On the contrary, he was as fresh as paint, and seemed game to dash on for some considerable time. Sooner or later it was practically certain that Arthur Augustus would be hurled violently from the trap.

"Oh, what a wotten nuisance!" murmured Arthur Augustus helplessly. "Bai Jove, I shall have a word to say—several words, in fact—to that fwabjous idiot who fished off the gun within a couple of blessed inches of this twap. Whoa, you beggah! Gweat Scott, I shall come a feahful cwoppah when I'm pitched out!"

Bump! Jolt! Bump!

The trap raced on, the horse simply tearing across the grass.

Suddenly D'Arcy started.

"The wivah!" he gasped. "Bai Jove, the wivah!"

Arthur Augustus turned pale.

The river!

It was dead in front of the rushing, maddened animal! What would happen if the horse dashed in? D'Arcy was bound, helpless! And at this point, the unfortunate junior knew, the Ryll was deep and treacherous—the spot was, in fact, the most dangerous for miles. There had been many accidents there, some fatal.

"Goodness gwacious!" panted D'Arcy. "Stop, you bwute! Stop!"

The horse didn't obey, but rushed straight on.

"Oh, if I onlay had the weins!" muttered Arthur Augustus. "Then I might possibly dwaw the wotten animal woun!"

Stop, you fwihtful beast!"

Bump! Bump!

On went the trap.

"I suppose I had bettah jump for it!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "If I get pitched into the wotten wivah I shall have no chance at all, bai Jove! With these howwid wopes wound my w'ists and ankles I'm uttahly helpless—like a beastly sack of beastly potatoes! I should sink without warnin'. And there's nobody about to come to the wescue! Oh, deah, what a howwible posiah!"

Yes, there was nothing else for it. He would have to jump for it, and chance his luck. But the swell of St. Jim's was too long in making up his mind. The frightened horse was already within ten yards of the river's bank.

Apparently the animal was too maddened to notice it, for he dashed straight on. Arthur Augustus stood in readiness to make a desperate leap; even a broken limb was better than being drowned like a mongrel in a sack!

For D'Arcy had no delusions on that point. The river was deep, and he was helpless. If he once plunged in he would be doomed.

He gathered himself to jump.

And then the horse saw, for the first time, the glistening water right ahead! Instantly the animal swerved—swerved abruptly, violently. It was simply too much for the trap. The horse's front feet were within a yard of the river's bank when it swerved, and the trap, swinging round with terrific force, overturned with a crash.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was hurled into the air like a stone from a catapult.

Up he went, in a curving half-circle, right into the stream! He flopped into the water with a terrific splash, fully ten feet from the bank.

The accident was so sudden, so abrupt, that it was over in less than five seconds. D'Arcy could not have been flung into the stream more neatly had he been in the grasp of half a dozen men. He simply plunged in, unhurt, but in terrible danger.

The horse, newly frightened by the startling crash, tore away at a tangent, breaking completely free from the broken shafts of the trap.

"Help!" roared Arthur Augustus, coming to the surface. "Wescue!"

He struggled desperately, trying to free himself, but the water was a terrible handicap to these efforts, and he sank below the surface once more.

"Bai Jove, I shall dwown!" gasped D'Arcy, horrified. "There's nobody within heavin' distance!"

He looked round despairingly. He was almost too flustered to realise the awful nature of his peril. He was in deep water, and might be caught any moment by a treacherous current.

Bound hand and foot, what could he do?

He was a good swimmer, but swimming was impossible in the circumstances.

"Help!" shouted Arthur Augustus frantically. "Oh, help!"

"Say, keep still, young 'un!" roared a strange voice.

"Guess I'll be right there good an' slick!"

D'Arcy's heart leapt

"Wescue!" he shouted, looking round with renewed hope.

"Pway be quick, deah boy! My hands and feet are tied up,

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and I can't swim a wotten stroke! My clobber is uttably winned!"

Even at such a terribly anxious moment Arthur Augustus could not help putting in a word about the destruction of his stylish clothes. The surface current had carried him into mid-stream, and he looked eagerly at the opposite bank. He saw a smallish man rapidly divesting himself of his coat and boots.

D'Arcy breathed a sigh of relief—a rather watery, gurgly sigh, it is true.

But, even with rescue in sight, Arthur Augustus was capable of a noble sense of self-sacrifice. The river was treacherous here, and this stranger might not be aware of that. There would be no sense in throwing away his life in an effort to save another.

"Pway be careful!" called D'Arcy anxiously, as he endeavored to keep upon his back. "The wivah is howwid dangerous. If you can't swim vewy well you had better not twy to lug me out!"

"Geo-whiz!" roared the stranger. "You're a plucked 'un! Guess I can't swim a whole heap, but I ain't going to stand here and see you snuff it!"

And he took a running jump from the river-bank. Splash!

In he went, and struck out with slow, powerful strokes for Arthur Augustus. The current was strong, but he battled against it doggedly. And gradually he drew nearer and nearer to the anxious junior.

At last! The stranger grasped D'Arcy's coat-collar.

"Don't struggle, my boy!" he panted.

"Wathah not!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove, you're a bwick!"

"We shall both be bricks if we're not careful!" said the stranger grimly. "And I guess bricks have a darned uncomfortable habit of sinking to the bottom!"

Then the battle began.

It was slow, hard work—a battle for two lives.

D'Arcy's rescuer struck out for the bank, holding the bound junior's head well above the water. Alone, the stranger could have got back easily. But he stuck to his task like a hero, and gradually, fighting hard against the current all the way, he drew closer to the welcome bank.

"Guess we'll do it, boy!" he gasped.

"It's wotten!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "I wish I could help! Take it easy, sir!"

This was all very well as advice, but if the stranger had "taken it easy," they would both have been swept back into mid-stream. The rescue was only effected by sheer, slogging, hard swimming. It was a fight for life!

And doggedness won the day!

Almost exhausted, the stranger at last felt the soft river-bed beneath his feet. He gasped out a sigh of relief, and staggered forward, dragging Arthur Augustus with him. A minute later both were upon the bank, soaking, utterly spent—but alive and safe!

CHAPTER 4.

An Astounding Proposition.

"FEEL better?"

"Yaas, wathah, sir!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove, you're a splendid chap!"

The stranger smiled.

"Say, don't mention that again," he said. "Guess I'm learning it by heart! It was a pretty stiff job, but we're both O.K., so there's no call to yell about it. Let's drop the subject for something else!"

Ten minutes had now passed, and Arthur Augustus and the stranger were both feeling pretty fit again. Neither had swallowed much water, and the exhausting effects of the fight against the current had worn off. D'Arcy was overwhelmed with gratitude.

"You saved my life, sir!" he said quietly. "I should have been drowned—"

"Gosh! Cut all that out!" roared the other. "My name's Mr. Jonathan Poppe, of New York, United States of Americka. What's yours?"

"Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—"

"Say, that's some name, young 'un!"

"Well, it is wathah a mouthful," admitted D'Arcy. "I'm at the big school up the woad—St. Jim's. In the Fourth Form, you know."

Mr. Poppe looked hard at the elegant junior.

"And what in the name of all that's mysterious is the meaning of it all?" he demanded. "How the blazes did you get roped up and flung into the river? Looks like a case of deliberate murder!"

Arthur Augustus grinned.

"It was an accident, sir," he replied. "If you care to heah, I'll explain."

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"Fire right ahead."

And D'Arcy did so. Mr. Poppe listened attentively. When Arthur Augustus had finished, the stranger nodded.

"I reckon that galoot behind the hedge ought to be roped!" he commented. "Say, he might have been the cause of your death! I don't blame those schoolboys. I guess they were only larking. But that fool who loosed off his gun right alongside a hoss—waal, there ain't words strong enough for the critter!"

"Yaas, it was a wotten thing to do, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove, I shall nevah forget my feelin' as I bumped along in the twap! I was in a howwid pwedicament, bound up and helpless!"

"You were, sure."

"When I saw the wivah wight ahead, I realised that the best thing was to jump out and wisk gettin' a broken leg. But the wotten horse was goin' too quickly, and before I could say 'Jack Robinson' or any othah name, I was flung into the watah like a stone twom a catapult! Gwreat Scott! I thought my last minute had awwived!"

"Lucky for you, young 'un, that I was around," said Mr. Poppe.

Arthur Augustus looked serious.

"I owe you my life, sir," he said quietly. "Yaas, I'll wepeat it again and again! You jumped into the wivah at vewy gwreat wisk and wescued me. The curwrent just heah is simply feahful; it's a wondah we're both alive. You're a hewo, sir! You wisked your life to save mine, and I'm gwateful!"

"Waal, there's one thing you can do—"

"What is it, sir?" asked D'Arcy eagerly. "I'll do anythin'! Nothin' will be too much twouble. I'll do anythin' you like to ask, sir—honah bwight!"

"Then say no more of the little service I performed."

"Oh, weally, sir," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, "I didn't mean that! I want to wepay you for savin' my life. If theh is anythin' within my power to perform, I'll do it wvillin'ly. You saved my life—"

"Snakes!" groaned Mr. Poppe. "I wish you'd freeze up!"

He remained silent for a few minutes, Arthur Augustus watching him anxiously. The junior was 'extremely desirous of showing his gratitude in some concrete form. Mere words were not enough. Mr. Poppe had saved him from certain death, and he wanted to repay the debt.

Suddenly Mr. Poppe started, and looked at D'Arcy with great intentness.

"Geo whiz!" he murmured, half aloud.

"Anythin' the mattah, sir?"

"Say, wait a moment, young 'un!" exclaimed the stranger quickly; and he continued to look at his young companion with a curious persistence.

He was apparently deep in thought. After a few moments longer, he smiled broadly and chuckled.

"Guess I've hit it!" he murmured. "Gosh, it ought to do the trick real proper!"

"Hit what, sir?" asked D'Arcy, puzzled. "I fail to compwehend!"

Mr. Poppe turned to Arthur Augustus.

"Right now," he said quietly, "you offered to do anything I chose to ask of you. You said that nothing would be too much trouble. Is that offer still open?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Very well, I'm going to startle you, my lad," said Mr. Poppe. "I want you to do me a very great service, and you ain't to ask questions. You say that I saved your life. Waal, if you're anxious to do me a good turn back, here's your opportunity!"

"I'll do anythin' within my powah, sir!"

"Good enough," said Mr. Poppe. "Listen!"

He took from the pocket of his coat a fat leather wallet. He held this in his hand while he looked at D'Arcy. Mr. Poppe was a small man, with a keen, clean-shaven face. His eyes were penetrating, and there was a twinkle in them at the present moment.

"This is what I want you to do," he said quietly. "In this wallet is exactly two hundred pounds in banknotes, and I guess it's real good, top-notch currency. To-day is Monday. Waal, I want you to spend the whole of this two hundred pounds by Wednesday evening. You can spend it how you like, and on what you like, but the whole darned lot has got to go by the day after to-morrow—Wednesday!"

Mr. Poppe made this astounding proposition in a calm, even voice, as though he had been asking D'Arcy to run an errand for him.

The swell of St. Jim's stared at the American in blank amazement.

"Gwreat Scott!" he ejaculated at last. "Weally, sir, is this a joke?"

Mr. Poppe shook his head.



Wally leapt from the bicycle while it was still going at full speed, and the big traction engine thundered relentlessly over his brother's magnificent machine. (See Chapter 6.)

"I guess I'm real serious," he replied. "Say, don't look like a dying fish! Get hold of the wheeze. It's surely simple enough!"

"But—but— Bai Jove, you have made me quite in a fluttah!"

"Yep, I calculated you'd be surprised some," smiled Mr. Poppe. "But, see here, your chums will be along presently, and that won't suit my scheme. Take this money!"

Arthur Augustus breathed hard.

"Weally, sir, it's imposs," he declared. "I cannot take—"

"Didn't you offer to do anything within your power, young 'un?"

"Yaas; but—"

"I guess there ain't any 'buts' connected with this lay-out," interrupted Mr. Poppe sharply. "You offered to serve me, and I'm going to make use of you. I'll repeat my instructions. Take this two hundred pounds, and spend it all by Wednesday evening—every cent. I guess it'll be easy enough. There are one or two things you've got to promise me."

"Yaas!" gasped D'Arcy, who was feeling faint.

"First, you've got to spend all the money—savvy? You mustn't lend a single cent to anybody, and you mustn't give a cent, neither. It's all got to be laid out in hard cash to the tradespeople locally—in Rylcombe and in Wayland. And you must keep the whole thing secret. Not a soul must know how you got the money, or how much you've got. Do you promise?"

"Bai Jove! Weally, I—I—"

"Do you promise?"

"Yaas, of course," gasped Arthur Augustus. "You know vewy well, sir, that I'll do anythin' to serve you. But, weally, spendin' two hundred quid in two days is wathah thick, you know. I want to help you—"

"I guess you'll be helping me a whole heap," interrupted Mr. Poppe, handing over the wallet to his amazed companion. "Mebbe you'll think I'm several kinds of a lunatic, but that's

wrong. I've got a thundering good object in asking you to do this. There's the two hundred pounds. Do you agree to spend it all by Wednesday evening?"

"Yaas, wathah; but—"

"Then shake on it!"

And Mr. Poppe extended his hand briskly. Arthur Augustus took it, and the two solemnly shook hands on the amazing compact. The stranger didn't wait another minute.

"Guess I'm on the right road for a heap big cold!" he exclaimed. "And it wouldn't do you any harm to get your clothes changed. Waal, sonny, I'll be off. I guess I'll see you again!"

And Mr. Jonathan Poppe strode off. In a few moments he had disappeared among a clump of trees.

CHAPTER 5. Filthy Lucre.

"MY onlay toppah!"

Arthur Augustus simply gasped out these words.

"Weally, I'm all in a fluttah!" he murmured breathlessly. "I certainly wogard Mr. Poppe as a tame lunatic! He's a wippin' chap—a hewo, in fact—but there's no question about the fact that he's completely off his wockah!"

Two hundred pounds! What sane object could any man have in giving such a big sum to a schoolboy to spend in any way he pleased? The whole thing seemed utterly ridiculous!

Yet Mr. Poppe had handed over the money.

"Bai Jove, why didn't I think of it before?" ejaculated Arthur Augustus suddenly. "I suppose Mr. Poppe was pullin' my giddy leg! I don't suppose there are any bank-notes in this wallet at all; it was simply a wotten joke!"

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A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"THE CONQUERING HEROES!"

D'Arcy opened the wallet hastily, and produced from it a wad of crisp banknotes—one hundred pounds in fivers, and another hundred in tensors. Arthur Augustus simply gasped at them. For a second he had the suspicion that they were counterfeit, but a close inspection soon dispelled that idea.

The swell of St. Jim's had had some experience with banknotes, and he knew immediately that these in his hand were the genuine thing.

"Two hundred quids!" he gasped. "And I've got to spend it all by Wednesday evening! I mustn't lend any or give any away, and I mustn't tell the chaps anythin' about it! Gweat Scott, what an amazin' situation! I wathah think I must be dwamin'!"

He put the banknotes back in the wallet, and stowed it away in a damp inner pocket. Then, for the first time, he realised that he was cold and wet, and as he gasped about him he heard sundry shouts, and saw Blake and Digby and Gordon Gay & Co. rushing across the meadow towards him.

"Bai Jove, I quite forgot!" he murmured. "I expect they'll wondah what has happened. I shall tell them all about Mr. Poppe and the two hundred— Oh, cwamps! I promised not to say a word! I'm in wathah a difficult posish!"

But he managed to pull himself together by the time the crowd of juniors rushed up.

"Are you hurt, Gussy?" bawled Blake anxiously.

"No, deah boy," replied Arthur Augustus. "I'm as wight as wain!"

Blake and the others rushed up, and surrounded D'Arcy like a swarm of angry bees.

"What a relief!" gasped Blake thankfully. "And we thought you were lying wallowing in your own gore, Gussy!"

"Fway do not be so disgustin', Blake!"

"Well, you see, Gussy, we were anxious!" exclaimed Gordon Gay. "We saw the horse galloping away on his own, and we thought there must be a frightful accident. What the dickens happened? You're wet through!"

"Soaking!" added Digby.

"Well, it would be wathah wearnakable if I fell in the wivah without gettin' wet thwough. Fortunately, the watah washed all the wotten paint fwwm my face, or Mr. Poppe would have weceived a fwight— I—I mean—"

Arthur Augustus paused hastily, but the other juniors were so excited and relieved that they didn't notice anything curious in D'Arcy's behaviour.

"But how did you get into the river, Gussy?" asked Blake.

Arthur Augustus explained briefly.

"I was neahly dwownin', when a stwangah appeahed and fished me out," he concluded. "It was a wippin' wescue, deah boys. The chap was afwaid of gettin' a cold, so he cleahed off. It was wathah unfortunate, as I should have liked to have intwowded the gentleman. But it was all your fault, you wotten Gwammah cads, for tyin' me up!"

Gordon Gay looked penitent.

"We're awfully sorry, old man. We didn't mean to land you into anything like this, you know. We've been looking for you for a quarter of an hour past, and thought something awful had happened to you. I hope you'll accept our apologies."

"Since you put it that way, Gay, I have nothin' to say," replied Arthur Augustus graciously. "We will ovahlook the mattah."

"But what about the trap?" asked Blake practically. "The shafts are broken, and a lot of paint is scratched off. The owner will be in a frightful stew. Who's going to pay the damage?"

"Oh, that will be all wight!" began D'Arcy.

"Hold on!" interrupted Frank Monk. "We were responsible for the accident, in a way, and it's up to us to put things right."

"Of course," said Carboy promptly. "That's only fair!"

The Grammarians were all in agreement. They had been the original cause of the accident, and it was therefore up to them to foot the bill. Having satisfied themselves that Arthur Augustus was quite unhurt, they marched off in a body to interview the owner of the trap.

Arthur Augustus and Blake and Digby were left to themselves.

"Jolly lucky somebody was handy," said Dig thankfully. "You might have been drowned, Gussy! Who was the joker?"

"Some stwangah," replied D'Arcy vaguely. "He cleahed off, you know."

"And that's what we're going to do," said Blake briskly.

"You'll catch a frightful cold, Gussy, if you don't change your clothes! There's only twenty-five minutes before your pater's train comes in!"

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"Gweat Scott!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "I can't meet my patah in this frightful state! I have an ideah. The tailah in Wylcombe has a new suit on ordah for me. Pewwaps it has awwived. If so, ewewythin' will be all sewene!"

"Well, let's buck up and see!"

Blake & Co. marched off briskly. But they need not have been so anxious. The evening was warm, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not a delicate youth.

By the time they arrived at the tailor's shop in the village, D'Arcy was almost dry. He certainly looked rather dishevelled, for his clothes were all creased and out of shape, and his collar was dirty and like a limp rag.

"I twust nobody saw me, deah boys," he said anxiously, as they entered the shop.

"Can't help it if they did," said Blake bluntly. "You don't look any more of a fright now than usual, so it doesn't matter!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Ah, good-evening, Master D'Arcy!" said the tailor, breaking in and stopping further argument. "That suit is ready for you. It arrived from your London house this morning."

"Wipin'!" said Arthur Augustus. "I'll put it on now, if I can have the loan of your fittin'-woom for a little while. Blake, deah boy, I want you to go out and buy me a new shirt, a new collah, new boots, new socks, new toppah—"

"Anything else?" asked Blake wonderingly. "Any other articles besides all these?"

"Yaas, one or two. I must have a new wig-out, you know," said D'Arcy. "I'll just write down a list of my wequahments, and then you an' Dig can wun along to the outfittah's and purchase them. Heah is a fivah!"

Arthur Augustus managed to get one of the banknotes out of the wallet without showing the whole wad to his chums. They stared at the fiver.

"I thought you were rather hard up, Gussy?" said Dig. "This afternoon you only had a quid and some small silver."

"Yaas, I—I—" hesitated Arthur Augustus. "Weally, Dig, theah is no time to explain!"

"Gussy's right!" said Blake. "Let's buzz off and get the ass his precious finery!"

And Blake and Digby hurried out. They returned very shortly, with a big parcel, and then Arthur Augustus proceeded to dress. The shirt, collar, etc., from the village were not quite "the thing," but could be made to serve. New articles, although not in the West End style, were better than D'Arcy's wet and soiled clothing. The new Eton suit, however, was perfect.

Arthur Augustus beamed.

"That's vewy good!" he said. "You weally think I am all wight?"

"Of course you are, ass!" roared Blake impatiently. "Come on!"

"Wait a moment. My clobbah—my wet clobbah—"

"Well, what about it?" demanded Digby.

D'Arcy was near the shop door, and he smiled as he saw a ragged youth coming wearily down the village street. He had a bundle upon his back, and looked dusty and tired. Arthur Augustus opened the shop door and beckoned to him.

"Want me, guv'nor?" inquired the youth respectfully.

"Waas, wathah! You look pretty hard up—"

"I am that, sir!" said the boy eagerly. "Ad bad luck to-day. Ain't earned a copper, an' I'm blowed if I know 'ow I'm goin' to git a night's doss—"

"Pewwaps you can sell this clobbah for somethin'," said D'Arcy, thrusting a thick bundle into the youth's hands. "It's only soiled with a little watah!"

"You ass!" whispered Blake. "That suit will be as good as new once it's pressed. If you want to do a good turn, give the kid a bob—"

"Pway do not intewwupt, Blake," said Arthur Augustus severely. "Heah you are, deah boy," he added to the eager wayfarer. "There's a whole suit, and sundray othah things. Don't stop to thank me, I'm in a huwway!"

And D'Arcy walked down the street with Blake and Digby.

Suddenly Blake came to an abrupt standstill, and stared at Arthur Augustus.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated, in a startled voice.

"Whatevah's the mattah, Blake?"

"You—you thumping idiot—"

"Weally—"

"You thundering ass, Gussy!" roared Blake. "What about the money in the pockets of that suit? You put the change out of the fiver into these clothes, I know; but what about that loose cash you had?"

"Bai Jove!"

"How much was there, Gussy?" asked Digby.

"Half-a-quid in gold, and a few shillings in silver," replied D'Arcy complacently. "Howevah, the mattah is of no consequence. The poor beggar will get a pleasant surprise when he finds the tin!"

D'Arcy was not worried about the loss of the few shillings he had had in his other clothes. He had promised Mr. Poppe to give none of the two hundred pounds away, but there was nothing to restrict him from doing what he liked with his own cash.

Blake and Digby simply gasped.

"You can't let that tramp chap clear off with the tin!" exclaimed Blake excitedly.

"Pway don't be absurd, Blake. I've got oceans more!"

"Then you must be swimming in filthy lucre, Gussy!" said Dig humorously.

"Yaas, wathah! I've got simply heaps—I mean—There is no need wathvah for us to go into financial mattahs at the moment, Digbay!" said Arthur Augustus hastily. "I am wathah anxious about my patah!"

"Mad!" said Blake significantly, touching his forehead. "He's always been a bit touched, but when it comes to giving away new suits, with half-quids in the pocket—well, it's time a doctor was called in!"

"You uttah ass!"

"My hat! The train's in!" said Digby suddenly. "Come on, ye cripples!"

The train had stopped, and the three juniors hurried to the station at top speed.

But when they arrived there, they found, to their surprise, that Lord Eastwood had not come.

"Bai Jove, the governah hasn't awwived!"

"Well, that's fairly evident, Gussy," said Blake. "If you ask me, I think it's playing it rather low down. Your pater writes to say he's coming by this train, and we put ourselves out to a terrific extent to honour him with our presence. And yet, when the train comes in, nobody stepped off but a giddy labourer!"

"You fwabjous ass!" exclaimed D'Arcy indignantly. "Pway wefwain fwom makin' such pwpowstowous wemarks. Evidently my patah has been delayed and will awwive by the next twain."

Digby granted.

"Well, he can jolly well walk up to St. Jim's alone!" he said gruffly. "I'm not going to be brought down here on a fool's errand a second time. My hat, we've had some excitement this journey! First we're collared by Grammarians, and then Gussy tries to drown himself, which was jolly lucky!"

"Weally, Digbay—"

"Lucky for us, I mean," went on Dig. "We heard the fearful crash, and all the rest of it, and knew that something had happened. Gordon Gay & Co. were just about to convert Blake and me into Sioux Indians, and your smash-up with the trap just interrupted at the right moment. Well, I must say that the Grammarians have done the decent thing over the bizney!"

"Rather!" agreed Blake. "But the affair has cost Gussy a pretty penny, one way and another."

"Pway don't let that wowwy you, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus graciously. "I'm simply wollin' in money!"

"So it seems, for I'm blessed if I know where you got it from," said Blake bluntly. "I suppose you had a remittance that we knew nothing about?"

"Somethin' like that, deah boy," said the swell of St. Jim's. "But let us get back and see if a telegram has awwived fwom my patah."

When they arrived at St. Jim's, they found that there was, indeed, a wire for Arthur Augustus. It was from Lord Eastwood, and merely stating that he was postponing his visit for a day or two. Toby, the School House page, met Blake & Co. with the telegram, and said that it had arrived a few minutes after their departure.

CHAPTER 6.

Simply Astonishing.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY wore a far-away look.

"By to-morrow evenin' I've got to have nothin' left!" he murmured. "Bai Jove, howevah can I manage it? I pwomised Mr. Poppe—"

"Gussy!" shouted Jack Blake.

Arthur Augustus took no notice. As a matter of fact, he didn't hear at all. It was the following morning, and D'Arcy had paused in the middle of his dressing to sit on the bed and tackle the problem which had been causing him uneasy dreams. The rest of the Fourth were in various stages of dress and undress.

"He's dreaming!" grinned Lumley-Lumley. "I guess the young ass ain't properly awake yet!"

"I'll soon wake him," said Blake grimly. "He's been mooning about ever since last night, as though he had a ton of worry on his aristocratic brain. Chuck over that pillow, Reilly!"

"Faith, I will, and welcome!" grinned Reilly. "Anything to oblige!"

Blake caught the pillow, and the next moment it whizzed unerringly across the room and smote the noble head of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Smack!

"Yawwoooooh!" roared Arthur Augustus, sitting upon the floor with a terrific bump. "Bai Jove, what on earth is the mattah? Wescue! The wotten Zeppelins are dwoppin' bombs—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus glared round at the grinning juniors.

"So it was a wotten pillow!" he ejaculated, getting up. "Who thwew it? I'll administrah a feawful thwashin' to the wottah who dared—"

"That's all right, Gussy!" grinned Blake. "I'll let you off!"

"You—you—"

"Now, don't get excited!" said Blake. "I only chucked a pillow at you to wake you up!"

"I uttahly wefuse to be waked up—I—I mean woken up—that is to say—"

"Bow-wow!"

"I wefuse to bow-wow—I—I mean—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'd better cool down a bit, Gussy," chuckled Blake.

"You're getting incoherent—that's a jolly good word! What's the matter with you, ass? What do you mean by squatting on the bed and looking like a loony chimpanzee?"

Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle in his eye fiercely.

"Weally, Blake, I must wewquest you to gwant me the bonah of a fight—with or without gloves. In any case, I intend to administrah a fwightful thwashin'! When a fellah is compared to a loony chimpanzee, I wathah think it is time to pwotest!"

"Oh, my hat!" roared Blake. "You'll be the death of me, Gussy!"

"I twust not! I have no wish to completely slaughtah you, Blake. I considah a sound thwashin' will meet the wewquishments of the case!"

"I was trying to do you a good turn, you burbling ass!" said Blake. "Your young brother, Wally, is riding round the quad like steam on your fifteen-guinea jigger!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus started. Wally D'Arcy, his younger brother in the Third, was a regular young scamp, and always took keen delight in doing the very things which his major forbade him to do. D'Arcy's bicycle was a ripping machine, certainly as good as any in St. Jim's. Wally, being an extremely destructive young rascal, was expressly forbidden to ride it. And yet the Third-Former was now careering round the quad at a terrific speed, taking advantage of the fact that his elder brother was not on the scene.

Arthur Augustus leaned out of the dormitory window and waved his hand imperiously.

"Wally!" he shouted. "Wally, you young wascal!"

Wally, who was riding past, slowed down and looked up at the window with a grin.

"Hallo, Gus, what's the matter?" he asked coolly. "Lasy beggar! Why ain't you down?"

"Pway wefwain fwom bein' cheeky, Wally!" said D'Arcy severely. "What are you doin' with my jiggah?"

"Riding it!" said Wally promptly.

"You young wascal—"

"Go and chop chips, Gus!" said Wally, cheerfully. "Don't be a giddy dog in the manger! You ain't using your bike yourself, and you don't want me to use it! I sha'n't hurt the old jigger!"

Wally was still riding when a warning shout came across from the School House steps.

"Hi!" It was Curly Gibson who called. "Wally, you ass, Gussy's coming downstairs! You'd better bunk to the bike shed!"

"Oh, crumbs!" muttered Wally. "I didn't think Gus would be so quick!"

He steered towards the bicycle shed, but at that moment Arthur Augustus appeared, and stood upon the School House steps waving his arms frantically.

"Wally, you young wascal, stop! I want a word with you! Tom Mewwy, deah boy, kindly collah my young bwothah for me!"

Tom Merry, who was near the shed with Manners and Lowther, nodded.

"Right you are, Gussy!" he shouted. "Now then, Wally, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 423.

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my pippin, off you get! Strikes me you're in for a licking!"

"Rats!" Wally wasn't done yet. He wheeled round sharply and sped towards the gates at top speed. Joe Frayne and Jameson were there, doing their best to support one of the stone pillars. They immediately yelled out in alarm and waved their arms.

"Stop!" roared Frayne. "My 'at, you'll be killed, Wally!"

"There's a lorry coming!" shouted Jameson desperately. "Stop, you fathead! Oh, crikey!"

Wally was going at a terrific speed. At first he thought that his chums were joking, but as he heard the word "lorry," he also heard a loud rumble outside. With really surprising agility he leapt from the machine while it was still going at full speed. Wally had been tinkering at the brakes, and they didn't pull up promptly. So Wally, realising that there was actual danger, jumped off like a monkey—and the bike went on!

The scamp of the Third had meant to keep hold of the bicycle; but somehow he tripped on a stone and fell. And the machine, as bicycles will on rare occasions, kept going on its own for a few seconds. It whizzed out of the gates, and collapsed with a crash right in the centre of the road.

Wally was up in a second. "Keep back!" roared Jameson in alarm. "You can't save it, you ass!"

Wally hung back with his heart in his mouth. What he saw made his face blanch. A big traction-engine was exactly opposite the gates, and the bicycle had fallen five yards in front of it. The whole thing had happened so quickly that the driver, even had he seen it, could not have averted the smash. As it was, the heavy engine thundered relentlessly over D'Arcy's magnificent machine.

Crash! Crumple! Crack!

In two seconds the bicycle was a complete and utter wreck! "Great—great pip!" gasped Wally faintly.

"Oh, my only straw-yard!" muttered Jameson. "Gussy's jigger! You ass, Wally! You thundering young idiot!"

Wally's face was pale, and he was breathing hard. "I—I couldn't help it!" he said in a low voice. "Oh, what will Gus say? I didn't mean to hurt the bike! It's ruined—it ain't worth twopenies!"

The Terrible Three and several other fellows came running up, alarmed at the smash, and there were many startled ejaculations as D'Arcy's ruined bicycle was seen.

"Well, I've seen a few smashes in my time," said Monty Lowther calmly, "but Wally didn't make any mistake about this! If Gussy rides this bike again he ought to get the Victoria Cross!"

"Great Scott!" said Tom Merry. "What a smash! How on earth did you manage it, Wally? Gussy will be simply furious when he sees this wreck! It's not a cheap bike, you know!"

Wally nodded miserably. "Gus—Gussy warned me not to ride it!" he muttered. "Oh, what a silly ass I am!"

"For once in a way," said Lowther, "your remarks are truthful!"

"Here's D'Arcy!"

Arthur Augustus sauntered out, and for a moment did not quite understand what had happened. Then his gaze rested upon the wreckage in the middle of the road. The bicycle had been enamelled olive-green, and D'Arcy recognised it at once.

"Good gracious!" he gasped. "My jiggah!"

"Or, rather," said Lowther, "the forlorn remains of it."

"Gweat Scott!" shouted Arthur Augustus excitedly.

"My jiggah! It's uttally ruined! Wally, you howwid young wascal, what evah have you been doin'?"

"I—I— You see—"

"Yaas, I see, wight enough!" said Arthur Augustus wrathfully. "I see my jiggah smashed out of all recognition! That bicycle cost ovah fifteen quid—"

Arthur Augustus started, and ceased talking abruptly.

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Fifteen pounds! After all, what did it matter? He had nearly two hundred in his pocket, and it all had to be got rid of by the following evening.

"I—I'm awfully sorry, Gus!" said Wally, with a gulp.

"I—"

Arthur Augustus waved his hand and smiled serenely.

"Pway don't say a word, Wallay!" he said gracefully.

"It's nothing—nothing at all!"

"Eh?" said Wally, who had been expecting a simply awful lecture. "Ain't—ain't you wild, Gussy?"

Arthur Augustus looked at his younger brother benevolently through his monocle.

"Not at all, Wallay!" he replied. "I nevah liked that jiggah! I—I mean there are plenty more in the shops. I am wathah glad! Ahem! One jiggah more or less doesn't make any difference! You had better wun ovah to Wayland aftah brekkah and buy me a new one. Heah are two tennahs. You had bettah purchase the best machine you can see."

And Arthur Augustus handed over the banknotes as though they were mere pennies.

"You're—you're dotty, Gussy!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Not at all, deah boy! Wallay had an accident, that's all. It was wathah cheekay of him to take my bike without askin' permish, but I will ovahlook the mattah. Evewybody is liable to have a little accident."

"Little!" gasped Blake, who had come up with several others. "Why, it's cost you twenty quid, Gussy!"

"That's nothing, deah boy!"

"Nan—nothing!"

"The mewest fleabite!" said D'Arcy coolly.

Monty Lowther mopped his brow.

"Don't talk to me, you common people!" he exclaimed disdainfully. "What's money to me? Twenty quid! Why, I spend that amount every day for my blessed toilet, don't you know!"

Arthur Augustus glared at the humorist of the Shell.

"Weally, Lowthah, I object to bein' made fun of!" he protested. "Wallay has smashed my bike, but I'm wathah glad of that—"

"Glad!"

"My only hat!"

"I—I mean it is of no consequence!" amended D'Arcy hastily. "You had bettah buzz off to Wayland immediately aftah bwakfast, Wallay!"

Wally fingered the two tenners in a dazed manner.

"Ain't—ain't this a joke, Gus?" he asked faintly. "Are these tenners good 'uns?"

"You uttah young ass! Of course they're good!"

"Well, I'm blowed!" said Wally. "You're a ripper, Gus!"

"Pway don't mention it, deah boy!"

And Arthur Augustus walked away, leaving the juniors feeling rather flabbergasted.

Blake, Herries, and Digby did not know what to make of it all. Their elegant chum seemed to have suddenly become

possessed of an unlimited supply of cash. Yet he had said nothing to them about a remittance—and that was very unlike D'Arcy.

Arthur Augustus was tackled vigorously by his chums, but they could get no satisfaction out of him. He admitted that he had some cash—he couldn't help admitting it—but he would not say a word as to how he had got it or how much he had.

"I'm sowwy, deah boys!" he said finally. "It's imposs! My lips are sealed! It is uttally wotten, of course; but theah you are!"

"Look here—" began Blake.

"Sowwy; but I can't say and more, Blake, deah boy!"

And Arthur Augustus walked into the School House hurriedly to escape further questioning. As a matter of fact, he was finding his compact very hard to keep. He wasn't a fellow to keep secrets from his chums, and it was very hard.

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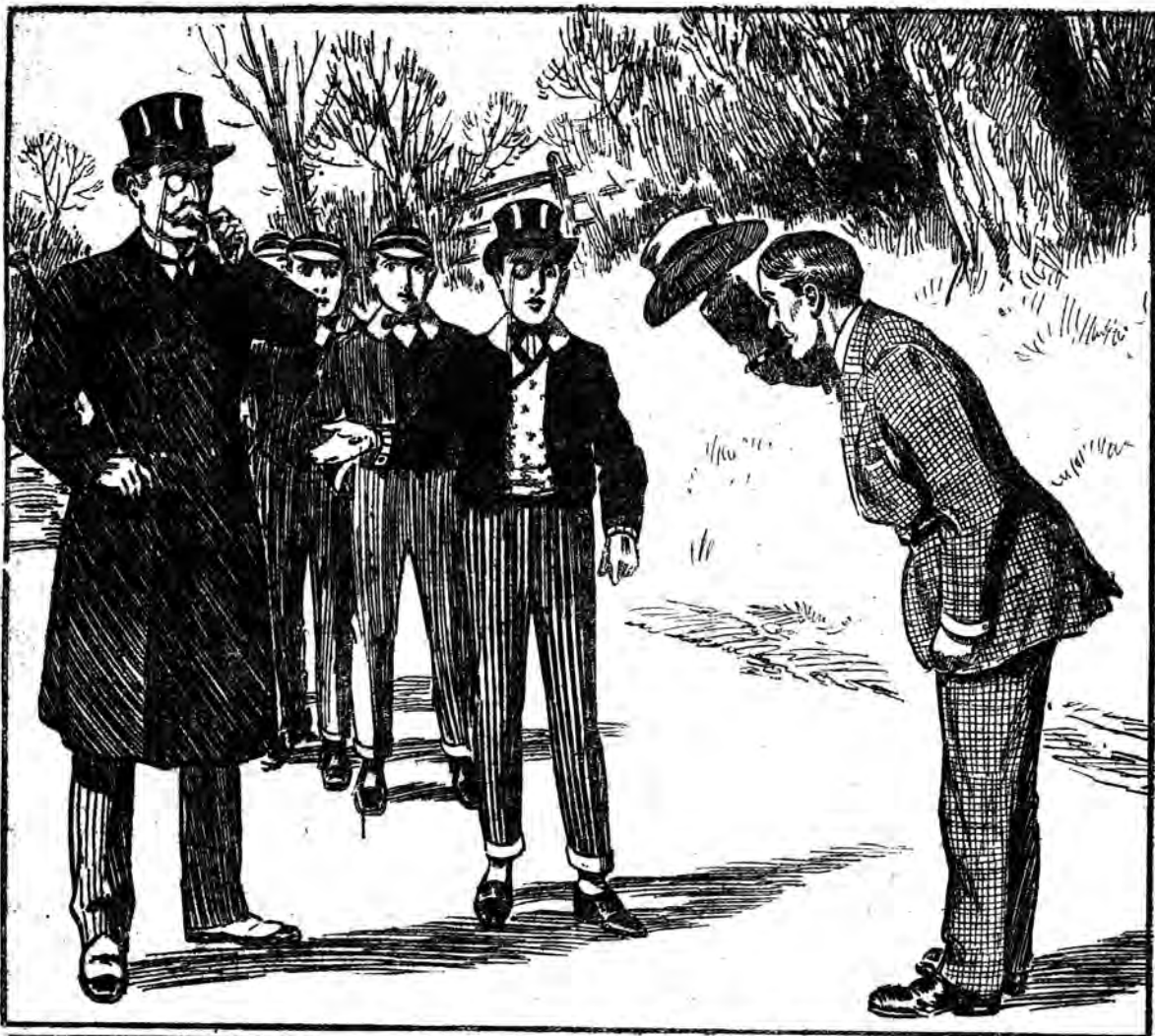
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"This is my patah, Lord Eastwood," said Arthur Augustus. Mr. Poppe raised his hat deferentially to the real live lord. "Say, I guess I'm honoured to meet you, my lord," he said. (See Chapter 12.)

CHAPTER 7.

A Record in Feeds!

TWENTY quids for the jiggah, seven quids for the suit and outfit— Oh, cwumbs, I'm in a frightful bothah! How much monay have I got left? Weally, it was wotten of Mr. Poppe to seal my lips! I'm simply dyin' for advice!"

Arthur Augustus murmured the words plaintively. He was seated at the table in Study No. 6, with a worried frown upon his brow. He was wrestling with his financial problems. Breakfast was over, and morning lessons would begin in a few minutes. But D'Arcy had forgotten all about morning lessons.

"How can I manage it?" he murmured. "One hundred and seventy quid! Bai Jove, it's staggevin' me! How on earth can I spend all that money by to-morrow evenin'? I think Mr. Poppe is a wottah for makin' me pwomise—"

Then D'Arcy paused, and shook his head.

"No; Mr. Poppe is not a wottah!" he amended. "He's a hewo! He saved my life, and I'm a wottah, if anybody is, for gwumbin' ovah the task he has set me. Nevahtheless, I certainly considah that the chap is a twife gone in the uppah stowey. Nobody but a lunatic would give two hundred pounds to a schoolboy to spend in two days."

He tapped the table with the rim of his monocle.

"But this is away from the point," he went on, still talking to himself. "I've got to think of some means of spendin' the tin. Bai Jove, a whackin' great feed would get wid of a decent sum—a feed on a gwand scale to the whole Fourth

"Hallo! Who's talking about feeds?"

Blake came into the study, followed by Herries and Digby. Arthur Augustus was so engaged in his thoughts that he didn't appear to notice them for a moment.

"Yeas, that's the ideah!" he murmured softly.

"Eh?" said Blake.

"A feed—a wippin' feed!"

"Hear, hear!" said Digby heartily.

"I can ordah it from Wayland, and have waitahs— Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy suddenly. "I didn't see you fellahs come in! How long have you been heah, deah boys?"

"What's that you were mumbling about a feed?" asked Blake curiously.

"I wasn't aware that I was mumblin'!" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I'm going to give a whoppin' feed to the whole Form—and the Shell as well!" he added, under his breath. "That will get rid of a lot more money."

"There you go—mumbling again!" said Blake. "What's up with you, aas?"

"Weally, Blake, theah's nothin' up with me!"

"You look a bit dazed," said Herries.

And, indeed, Arthur Augustus certainly wore a vacant expression. His brain was so full of figures and ideas for spending money that he couldn't bring himself to earth, as it were. His chums looked at him curiously.

"Time for lessons," said Blake shortly. "We'll talk to you later. Come on!"

"Lessons?" asked D'Arcy absently.

"Yes, fathead! If we don't hurry we'll be late!"

And D'Arcy was yanked out of the study violently. The

exercise restored his scattered wits, and by the time he was sitting in the Form-room he was thoroughly aroused, and alive to the things that were going on round him.

Before ten minutes had passed, Arthur Augustus was completely lost in thought. Mr. Lathom did not notice it for a while; then he frowned angrily. He could see at a glance that Arthur Augustus knew about as much of the lesson as the blackboard did.

"D'Arcy!" rapped out the Form-master.

Arthur Augustus did not reply. He was, in fact, busily writing something down on a scrap of paper, and, as the class was doing no writing at all, Mr. Lathom knew that D'Arcy's efforts must be something foreign to the lesson.

"What are you writing, D'Arcy?" demanded Mr. Lathom sternly.

No answer.

The Form-master strode across to D'Arcy's desk and brought the pointer down with a sharp rap across his knuckles.

"Yow!" roared Arthur Augustus. "Gwreat Scott! Ow, you wottah! I—I mean—"

"You're not attending to your lesson, D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, I am, sir!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "We were learnin' all about awithmetic—how to get wid of two hundred pounds! I—I mean— That is to say—"

"I think you are not yourself this morning, D'Arcy," said Mr. Lathom sharply. "We are not taking arithmetic, but history. What have you put on that paper?"

Arthur Augustus grabbed the sheet.

"It's nothin', sir!" he said hastily. "At least, it's pwivate!"

"Indeed, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah, sir—vowwy pwivate. I cannot possibly let you woad it!"

"That is very unfortunate, D'Arcy, because I intend to read it!" said Mr. Lathom grimly. "You will please understand that the Form-room is no place for writing private communications. Give that paper to me, D'Arcy!"

"Weally, sir, it's imposs!"

Blake chuckled audibly.

"My hat, I've got it," he murmured. "Gussy's in love again!"

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Lathom. "D'Arcy, how dare you bandy words with me! Give me that paper at once!"

"Weally, sir, if you insist—"

"I do insist!"

And Mr. Lathom stopped all further argument by taking the paper from Arthur Augustus' hand. He glanced at it, and then frowned.

"I have the honour of inviting the whole Fourth Form and the Shell to a ripping feed!" murmured Mr. Lathom.

"Thanks awfully, sir!" said Blake innocently. "It's jolly good of you, sir!"

"Take fifty lines, Blake, for attempting to be humorous!" said the Form-master crossly.

"Yes, sir!" said Blake meekly.

Mr. Lathom threw the paper into the waste-basket.

"You will please understand, D'Arcy, that the Form-room is no place for writing invitations," he said icily. "To impress that thoroughly upon your mind, you will come to me this evening at seven o'clock, and I will detain you an hour to make up for the time you have lost this morning!"

"Weally, sir—"

"Another word, D'Arcy, and I will cane you severely!"

"Bai Jove!"

And Arthur Augustus subsided, and gave his full attention to the lesson. So work in the Form-room proceeded fairly smoothly until they were dismissed for the dinner interval.

Arthur Augustus hurried straight away to Study No. 6, and was glad that his chums did not follow. Ten minutes later he descended to the entrance-hall and pinned a sheet of paper to the notice-board. A crowd of juniors at once crowded round, and there were many exclamations of pleasure, for the notice was exceedingly gratifying to read:

TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE FOURTH AND SHELL IN THE SCHOOL HOUSE.

"I have very great pleasure in inviting you to a special feed in the common-room this evening at five-thirty precisely. I trust everybody will do me the honour of turning up.

"ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY."

There was an animated buzz.

"I guess that's what I call a real good notice!" said Lumley-Lumley heartily.

"We'll all turn up, Gussy," said Bernard Glyn, of the Shell.

"I trust you will enjoy yourselves," said Arthur Augustus graciously. "You can wely on it bein' a wippin' feed—somethin' quite out of the ordinawy."

"Good!"

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Arthur Augustus walked away before he could be questioned further. He made his way to the Sixth Form passage, and luckily encountered Darrell coming out of his study.

"Hallo, D'Arcy, what do you want in this quarter of the globe?" asked Darrell cheerily.

"Well, deah boy, I was thinkin' of usin' the telephone, if I can get permish."

"That's all right," said Darrell obligingly. "The prefects' room is empty just now, so you'd better run along and take advantage of it!"

"Thanks awfully, deah boy!"

And Arthur Augustus went into the prefects' room and rang up a very large firm of caterers in Wayland. He had quite a long conversation with the manager, and was perfectly satisfied with the result.

"Yaas, that'll do wippin'ly!" he said in conclusion. "It is undahstood that I pay the head waitah in cash for the whole transaction before the gwub is delivahed. Yaas, be heah at five o'clock. Thanks, Good-bye!"

He hung up the receiver and then rang up another firm. After a long talk, he went out of the prefects' room with a satisfied smile on his face. When he emerged into the quad, quite a crowd collected round him.

"What's this marvellous feed?" asked Tom Merwy.

"What's the idea, Gussy?"

"Weally, Tom Merwy, I think I made the notice quite cleah," replied Arthur Augustus. "I'm in funds, you see, and so I thought it wathah decent to have a whoppin' feed in honah of the occasion!"

"Well, it's your bizney," said Manners, "but I should think it'll cost you a pretty penny. There are a good many chaps in the Fourth and Shell, you know, and if the feed ain't up to the mark, there'll be ructions!"

"Rather!" agreed Talbot. "All the chaps are expecting something gorgeous!"

Arthur Augustus smiled complacently.

"They'll get it, deah boy!" he said quietly.

And he walked away to the bicycle-shed to inspect the new jigger which Wally had purchased.

Tom Merry scratched his head.

"Can't make it out!" he said. "Gussy's always smothered in fivers, so to speak, but to-day he's fairly wallowing in wealth. First he hands Wally twenty quid for a new bike, after Wally's smashed up his old one through sheer carelessness, and now he's inviting dozens of fellows to a spread that'll cost at least another twenty quid!"

"Well, if Gussy likes to do it, I've no objection!" said Monty Lowther. "If he provides a feed every night for weeks, I'll turn up cheerfully and smiling as regularly as clockwork!"

There were many conjectures among the juniors as to what sort of a feed it would be, but not a single fellow over dreamed of the actual splendour which was to be provided!

The New House fellows felt rather in the cold. Figgins & Co., the redoubtable leaders of the New House juniors, actually mooted a scheme for raiding the feed. But due thought and consideration made them realise that such a scheme would be doomed to failure.

Arthur Augustus would have extended his invitation to the New House willingly if the thought had struck him, but, unfortunately for Figgins & Co., the thought didn't.

Afternoon lessons were rather tiresome to most of the juniors, for they were all extremely curious. But lessons were over at last. And at five o'clock precisely a huge motor-van arrived, and Arthur Augustus was seen to pass sundry bank-notes over to the man in charge, and to receive gold in change.

As a matter of fact, D'Arcy parted with fifty-five pounds in notes, and got two sovereigns back.

"Fifty-thwee quid!" he murmured. "Wippin'! That's eighty quid altogether. I've got a hundred and twenty quid to get wid of now. Bai Jove, it'll want some doin'!"

Huge hampers were carried into the common-room, which the juniors had prepared for the feed by bringing in tables and chairs from all quarters. The hampers were at last exhausted, and then Arthur Augustus, with the men, locked himself in the common-room to prepare. The juniors were completely shut out. And they had to wait in the passages impatiently until half-past five. Five minutes before that time, four important-looking individuals arrived in a motor-car, and were at once admitted to the common-room. Then the other men took their departure, and Arthur Augustus faced the fellows, who were by now simply in a fever of excitement.

"Tea is waitin', deah boys. Pway entah!"

He flung the door open, and the foremost juniors entered with more violence than dignity. They could hardly help doing so, for those behind were pushing strenuously. Gasps of astonishment went up from the fellows as they surveyed the scene.

The common-room was almost unrecognisable.

The tables were covered with snowy-white cloths, and they were laid magnificently. Upon them, in astounding quantities, were dozens and dozens of the choicest dishes. Hams, joints of cold meat, pies, salmon, sardines, and other good things too numerous to name. The pastries were confusing in their variety and number.

And, standing serious and majestic, were four waiters in the regulation "evening-dress" costume, with serviettes over their arms. Everything was complete; the feed was a terrific surprise to everybody.

Nothing approaching its magnificence had ever been seen at St. Jim's before.

The fellows simply gasped open-mouthed.

"My only Aunt Jane Mary Josephine!" ejaculated Blake softly. "Am I dreaming, or is it real? Great pip, I—I feel dazed!"

"Same here!" murmured Tom Merry. "What does it mean, Blake? Where did Gussy get the money to provide this marvellous spread?"

Arthur Augustus beamed round the room.

"All weedy, deah boys?" he asked affably. "Plentay of woom for ewerybody, and to spare. Nevah mind, if any othah fellahs dwop in—"

"What does it mean, Gussy?" whispered Herries audibly.

"Where did you get the tin?"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Yes, shut up, ass!" growled Blake. "We'll talk to Gussy afterwards!"

At first the juniors couldn't quite get over their astonishment. Then, after they had started feeding, they brushed all questions aside and set to with a will. The feed was there, and they piled into it.

And Arthur Augustus smiled happily at the diners through his famous eyeglass. Fifty-three pounds had been expended on that feed; and the idea of it had started other notions in his head. He had, indeed, already made arrangements over the 'phone for the expenditure of another large sum that very day.

Altogether, the compact he had made with Mr. Poppe wasn't panning out so badly after all. He could see his way clear, he thought, to spend the whole two hundred by the following evening.

So D'Arcy was feeling light-hearted, and he ate a good tea in consequence.

Nobody troubled themselves, after the first breathless period of astonishment, as to how the feed had been paid for. That was Gussy's business. He was the host, and they were merely guests.

And the guests, invited and uninvited, acquitted themselves extremely well.

The great feed, in fact, was a roaring success.

CHAPTER 8.

Solid Mahogany!

JACK BLAKE stared at Herries and Digby in Study No. 6, and scratched his head.

"Well, I'm blowed if I can make head or tail of it!" he said frankly. "Where the dickens is Gussy getting all his tin from? It's absolutely amazing! That feed must have cost him a terrific amount!"

"Twenty quid, at least!" said Herries.

"Ass!" exclaimed Digby scornfully. "I'd like to see you get a feed like that for twenty quid! Why, the expense must have been double that!"

Blake nodded.

"It's serious," he said gravely. "We shall have to inquire into things. Gussy must be made to understand that he can't keep secrets from his kind uncles. Somebody has sent him a whacking remittance; and he hasn't told us a word about it!"

"Awful!" said Digby.

"Wait until we get him alone," went on Blake. "We'll get the truth from him then. He's with old Lathom now, doing detention for acting the giddy goat this morning."

The great feed was over, and everybody was feeling well-filled and happy. Various cupboards, to tell the truth, were well-filled, too. A good proportion of the junior guests had taken their departure simply laden with spoils. And there was still plenty over for Study No. 6 to be well supplied with eatables for several days to come.

Everybody at St. Jim's was talking about the wonderful banquet. The New House fellows felt decidedly out in the cold, and their rivals were crowing joyously. The School House certainly held the record in feeds. The New House could come nowhere up to it; and Figgins & Co. felt naturally wild about it. Fatty Wynn, in fact, was almost desperate.

Blake, Herries, and Digby descended to the quad, and were immediately pounced upon by the Terrible Three and others

for an explanation. But D'Arcy's study-mates were as much in the dark as everybody else.

"It's a mystery," said Tom Merry. "Where's Gussy now?"

"Doing detention with old Lathom."

"Well, I will say that Gussy knows how to spend his money," said Monty Lowther comfortably. "Of course, we must get to know where he got the tin from— (Great Scott! Is this another consignment of grub arriving?)"

They all looked towards the gates, and saw a large, covered van entering. It drove right up to the School House steps, where the knot of juniors were standing. The driver, who wore a green apron, jumped down and commenced giving his horse a nosebag.

"What's this?" asked Lowther. "What have you got in that van?"

"Furniture," said the man shortly.

"Furniture!"

"My hat!"

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry. "You must have come to the wrong place."

"This is the School 'Ouse, ain't it?"

"Yes, but—"

"Well, this 'ere furniture is for some young gents in the School 'Ouse," said the carman.

"My only topper!" said Blake. "What are their names?"

"Now, you've done me! All I know is, that I've got to deliver them to Study No. 6; and I've got to receive payment for the stuff before I unload!"

"Study No. 6!"

Blake & Co. stared at one another in amazement.

"Rats!" said Blake. "There must be a mistake. We belong to Study No. 6, and we haven't ordered any furniture! How much does the bill amount to, anyhow?"

"Forty pounds. And I want the cash before I deliver the goods!"

"Forty quid!"

Blake chuckled.

"What a lark!" he grinned. "Somebody's been stuffing you, old chap! Do you think we're millionaires? Why, we haven't got forty bob!"

The carman glared.

"So, it's a 'oax?" he said surlily.

"Must be a 'oax!" said Monty Lowther, in a solemn tone.

"Well, if this ain't enough to make anybody wild!" said the man. "These 'er goods was ordered by telephone this mornin', and my orders was to deliver them to Study No. 6 in the School 'Ouse. If it was some fool joke—"

"By Jove!" exclaimed Tom Merry suddenly. "Perhaps Gussy ordered the stuff."

"Gussy!"

"That's right!" said the carman. "They was ordered by a bloke named Augustus somethin' or other!"

Tom Merry & Co. stared at one another.

"It must be some other wild scheme of Gussy's!" exclaimed Manners. "Furniture! Forty quid to pay! Ye gods and little tadpoles, what next?"

"You'd best 'urry up, young gents," said the furniture-man.

"Hold on a minute," replied Blake. "I'll just run in and fetch D'Arcy."

Blake rushed indoors, and went straight to the Fourth-Form room, where Arthur Augustus was just putting up his books after doing the detention. Blake burst in like a whirlwind.

"Bai Jove! What evah's the matter?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"You ass!" roared Blake. "You burbling jabberwock—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"What's the meaning of it?" demanded Blake, grabbing hold of Arthur Augustus and shaking him violently. "Are you dotty, or have you—"

"You uttah wuffian!" gasped D'Arcy. "Weleaso me! You are wumplin' my collar and wuinin' my jacket! I uttably refuse to be tweated—"

"Oh, rats!" said Blake quickly. "There's a chap outside with a vanload of furniture, and he says that you ordered it by telephone. Come out and tell him that he's off his rocker!"

"I refuse to do anythin' of the sort! The man's quite wight!"

"Quite right?" gasped Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! I did ordah the furniture. It's twue!"

Jack Blake staggered back and stared at his elegant chum, as though he were some weird and wonderful specimen in a museum. Arthur Augustus did not feel exactly flattered, and a frown marred his noble brow.

"Are you dottay, Blake?" he asked. "I ordahed the furniture for Study No. 6. Ouah's hasn't worn vewy well, so I thought it time to have a change. I've ordahed solid mahogany chairs, a wippin' ovahmantel, a Bwussels carpet,

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and all the west of it. I wathah think we shall be all wight in futchah."

Blake sat down suddenly on a form. Somehow his knees didn't seem able to bear his weight. He passed a hand across his eyes, and then looked up again.

"There's forty quid to pay!" he said faintly.

"Yaas, that's wight," said Arthur Augustus, with serene calmness.

"Oh dear!"

Blake breathed hard, and got upon his feet once more. He was getting over his amazement now. At the same time he felt that he was in the midst of some wonderful dream. Arthur Augustus was throwing money about in a stupendously lavish fashion.

"Let's get out into the air!" he muttered.

He led the way, and Arthur Augustus followed, chuckling silently. The swell of St. Jim's was enjoying himself hugely. It afforded him great delight to cause his chums and the rest of the fellows these breathless surprises. And he knew that he could not possibly explain—at least, not until the evening of the following day. He had given his word of honour to Mr. Poppe upon that point.

"Yes, the furniture is for Study No. 6," said Blake, in a dazed voice, when he and D'Arcy arrived in the quad. "You'd better begin carting it in."

"Right you are, sir," replied the carman cheerfully. "Thought I wasn't mistook. But what about the cash? I can't unload until—"

"That's all wight," said D'Arcy calmly.

And he produced his wallet and handed out forty pounds in banknotes. The Terrible Three and Blake & Co., who were looking on, could see that there was still a goodly supply of notes left.

CHAPTER 9.

Figgins & Co. Take a Hand—Also a Motor-car,

"HEARD about Gussy?"

Everybody was asking the question, juniors and seniors alike, in both Houses at St. Jim's. Much comment had been raised by the terrific feed in the common-room, but the arrival of forty pounds' worth of furniture for Study-No. 6 was even more exciting.

Fellows came from far and near to the Fourth Form passage to look in at Study No. 6 and gaze upon the magnificent array of furniture which was displayed therein.

Blake & Co. had been busy. After they had recovered their wits somewhat they realised—that, since the furniture had come, they might as well use it. So all the stuff which had been foisted upon D'Arcy by the astute manager of the Public Benefit Company was carted out into a lumber-room and the new was put in its place.

Arthur Augustus had not chosen the furniture, of course, but he had given his orders with discretion this time, and the articles were just fitted for the study.

"Oh, Gussy's mad!" remarked Kangaroo of the Shell.

"No doubt about that!" said Gore.

"Weally, you Shell boundahs," protested Arthur Augustus, who was within earshot, "I see no weason at all why you should conclude that I am off my wockah! I suppose I can buy some new furnitchah if I like?"

Kangaroo didn't reply; he merely shrugged his shoulders. It was generally concluded that Arthur Augustus had received a terrific remittance, and that his brain had given

way through the joyful shock. But D'Arcy smiled quietly to himself, and enjoyed the sensation he was causing.

The following morning Arthur Augustus was awake before anybody else. This was a Wednesday, and therefore a half-holiday. He lay in bed and smiled as he schemed out a plan for disposing of some more money. He remembered, with joy, that there was no cricket on that afternoon, and therefore the fellows would be free. While he was dressing, after rising-bell had gone, he was again the victim of much questioning. But he gave no satisfaction to anyone.

There were three other juniors at St. Jim's whose thoughts were focused upon D'Arcy's sudden and mysterious accession to wealth. And these three were Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn of the New House.

Figgins, in fact, was laying down the law.

"It ain't right; that's what I say!" he declared emphatically, as he and his two chums went for a stroll in the quad before breakfast. "Why should Gussy provide those School House rotters with a terrific feed and leave us out of?"

"It's scandalous!" said Fatty Wynn indignantly.

"Of course!" agreed Figgins. "On an occasion like that New House chaps ought to have been invited as well. I vote we think of a wheeze to get our own back."

"That's all very well," said Kerr practically. "What can we do?"

"That's what we've got to think of."

Kerr shook his head rather doubtfully. It was all very well to talk of getting their own back, but how could it be worked?

Figgins & Co. strolled towards the gymnasium. As there were some School House fellows close by they walked inside and took up their stand against one of the open windows. It must have been a kindly fate that led them to stand in such a position. They had no thought of any special object in standing against that particular window, but by so doing they became possessed of a very interesting piece of information.

The windows in the gym were rather high, and it was impossible to look out of them without standing on something. So Figgins & Co., just within, were invisible to anybody outside.

They had been discussing all sorts of wild schemes for about five minutes, when they heard the dulcet tones of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. At first his words were indistinguishable; then, as he came nearer, Figgins & Co. metaphorically pricked up their ears.

"Nevah mind about how I'm goin' to pay for it, Blake, deah boy," Arthur Augustus was saying. "That is entirely my own affair. To-day is a half-holiday, so I think it will be a wippin' way of spendin' the aftahnoon. You've no objection to havin' another glowious feed, I suppose?"

Fatty Wynn grabbed Figgins' arm feverishly.

"Feed!" he hissed. "Did you hear it, Figgy?"

"Of course I did, ass! Shut up!"

Figgins & Co. had a horror of eavesdropping, but on this occasion Blake & Co. had walked within earshot and had commenced discussing a feed. And it was not humanly possible for Figgins & Co. to walk away in such circumstances. Their minds were immediately focused upon one subject—a raid. The School House fellows were making plans for a feed, and Figgins & Co. had not intentionally sought to overhear the scheme. If Blake and his chums chose to walk within earshot, that was their own look-out.

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The others were certainly not spying. Besides, as Fatty Wynn had often pointed out, eavesdropping when a feed was concerned was quite a different matter to any other variety of eavesdropping. To Fatty Wynn's mind almost anything was allowable where a feed was concerned.

"Shush!" murmured Kerr.

"But how much will it cost you, Gussy?" asked the voice of Digby.

"Nevah mind about that, Dig," said Arthur Augustus. "Pway leave it all to me. My ideah is to bespeak a whackin' great motah-car—one that will cawvy a dozen of us—and ordah it to awrive heah at half-past two. There will be a tewwifie hampah with it, filled with grub even bettah than the feed of yestahday. We will invite the Tewwible Thwee and one or two othahs, and go for a wippin' picnic. How does it stwike you?"

"Great!" said Blake heartily. "A motor ride, and then a splendid feed at the end of it! Crumbs, you're going it, Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Half-past two will be just about the right time," said Digby thoughtfully. "It's jolly good of you, Gussy, but just think of the tin—"

The voices died away as Blake & Co. moved on, and the last that the New House fellows heard was D'Arcy's voice assuring Digby that money was really no consideration whatever.

Figgins & Co. drew deep breaths.

"A motor-car!" murmured Figgins.

"A glorious ride into the country!" said Kerr.

"A feed!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn ecstatically. "Blow the motor-car and the blessed ride! It's the feed that matters, my sons. Somehow, by hook or by crook, we've got to get hold of that giddy motor-car—grub and all. We'll get hold of the grub, anyhow; it doesn't matter much about the car."

"Yes, it does," said Figgins. "If we do the thing at all we'll do it properly. We've got to do those School House fellows in the eye. Listen! I've got a wheeze."

And Figgins & Co. plotted a plot.

When they went into breakfast it was all cut and dried, and Fatty Wynn wore a radiant smile.

It was noticed that Blake & Co. and the Terrible Three ate rather sparingly, and Figgins and Kerr followed their example. Fatty Wynn, however, cleared up everything, as usual, and then declared that he was famished, and in splendid form for a terrific tuck-in that afternoon.

At two o'clock precisely Figgins crept silently into the prefects' room in the New House. Luck was certainly favouring him, for the room was empty. He slipped over to the telephone, and then rang up a certain number—none other than that of the School House. Anybody answering could not possibly tell whether Figgins was just across the quad or miles away. Kildare, who happened to be in the prefects' room in the School House, answered the 'phone.

"Can I speak to Master D'Arcy?" asked Figgins, in a gruff voice.

"Do you mean D'Arcy of the Fourth?"

"Yes, sir—that's 'im."

"Hold on a minute, and I'll fetch him."

Kildare went out, and rapidly made his way to the Fourth Form passage. D'Arcy was just coming out of Study No. 6, and Kildare beckoned to him.

"You're wanted on the 'phone, D'Arcy!" he said shortly.

"Bai Jove! Whatevah for?"

"That's your business," said Kildare. "You'd better buck up—it might be important."

Arthur Augustus hurried to the telephone, a fearful thought in his mind that something had gone wrong with his arrangements. He had ordered the motor-car and the feed from the same firm of caterers who had supplied the banquet the day before. The prompt payment on that occasion had instantly led the firm to obey D'Arcy's further commands without hesitation. What could be wrong?

"Hallo!" said Arthur Augustus anxiously. "Who is it wants me?"

"Is that Master D'Arcy?"

The voice was unrecognisable, and rather husky.

"Yaas. Who are you?"

"You're expecting a motor-car, ain't you, sir?" said the voice, disregarding D'Arcy's question. "Well, accidents are always liable to happen, and chauffeurs ain't always capable of making quick repairs—"

"Gweat Scott! Have you had an accident with the car?" asked Arthur Augustus quickly. "I gathah that you are the dwivah?"

The voice at the other end of the wire made an unintelligible sound.

"Well, if you are the dwivah, what does it mattah?"

"You and your friends had better walk down Rylcombe

Lane towards the village," said the voice. "Punctures don't take long to mend. I expect everything will be all right by the time you get to Rylcombe. I don't want to keep you waiting, sir."

"Yaas; but why can't you come up heah aftah you have wopaihed— Hallo! Bai Jove! The wottah has wung off!"

Arthur Augustus considered for a moment. He concluded, naturally, that his caller was the chauffeur of the motor-car, and he had no idea that when Figgins had said that "everything would be all right by the time they reached Rylcombe," that Figgins meant everything would be all right from his own especial point of view.

Arthur Augustus hurried to his chums.

"Theah's been an accident," he said. "The motah-car has bwoken down."

"Oh, crumbs!" said Blake, in dismay.

"It's onlay a puncture, I think," went on D'Arcy. "The dwivah wung up just now, and told me. He advised us to walk down Wylcombe Lane, so I gathah the car is between heah and the village."

"Well, we'll walk down," said Digby promptly. "I can't quite understand, though. The car wouldn't necessarily have to pass through Rylcombe to get here from Wayland. The Wayland road is in the other direction. The ass must have come a long way round."

"Nevah mind. Let's tell Tom Mewwy and the west, and then walk down."

Five minutes later Blake and Co., the Terrible Three, Bernard Glyn, Kangaroo, Dane, and one or two others set off in a body. As the last of them disappeared out of the gates, a chuckle of delight was heard from the door of the New House.

"Diddled!" grinned Figgins joyously. "Diddled, dished, and done!"

"Hooroo!" chortled Fatty Wynn. "The giddy motor-car won't pass the silly asses, and we've got nothing to do but hop into it, and buzz off!"

The leaders of the New House juniors emerged into the quad, and with them were Redfern, Owen, Lawrence, and several other New House fellows. And when the motor-car arrived, ten minutes later, they simply took possession of it.

But it was only by a narrow shave that Figgins & Co. were successful. By a sheer chance, the manager of the firm had ridden over during the morning to make arrangements with D'Arcy, and the outing was, therefore, paid for. Twenty-five pounds the bill had come to, and Arthur Augustus had been rather upset at the low figure—he wanted to pay much more!

And so, while Figgins and his accomplices drove joyously away, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy marched down towards Rylcombe with his following on a fool's errand.

CHAPTER 10.

Just What Gussy Wanted!

TOM MERRY grunted.

"Well, it's jolly queer," he said emphatically

—"that's all I can say!"

"I'm bothahed if I can undahstand, Jeah boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, with a worried frown. "Theah seems to be no sign of the wotten car, and we're nearly in Wylcombe!"

Blake gave his noble chum a suspicious look.

"I suppose you haven't been japing us, Gussy?" he asked.

"Bai Jove! Don't be widic, you uttah ass!"

The School House juniors had walked nearly to Rylcombe, and no sign of the punctured car had they seen. This was not at all surprising, considering that there was no car at all. By this time Figgins & Co. were speeding away on their stolen picnic.

Tom Merry & Co. were getting fed-up. It was simply vipping to be invited to a glorious picnic, with a motor-ride thrown in. But it was quiet a different matter to trudge down a dusty lane, hot, impatient and anxious.

Suddenly the ring of a bicycle-bell sounded behind them. Next moment Wally D'Arcy jumped off his brother's new jigger, and gesticulated wildly.

"Good gwacious, Wally! Whatevah—"

"You've been diddled, Gus!" gasped Wally excitedly.

"Eh? Pway—"

"Yes, rather!" said Wally breathlessly. "I rode down like one o'clock to tell you. That telephone-message must have been a fake, Gussy."

"A—a fake?"

"It was Figgins, I expect," went on Wally. "Your giddy motor-car turned up bright and smiling at half-past two, and Figgins & Co. and a lot of other New House bounders jumped into it straight away!"

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"My—my hat!"

"Gwreat Scott!"

"They were off in no time," said Wally indignantly. "Of course, the driver wasn't to know. They were waiting for him, and jumped into the 'bus before anybody could say 'tuppence!' You've been dished!"

Tom Merry & Co. looked at one another blankly.

"Oh, you thumping idiot, Gussy!" roared Blake wrathfully. "You silly cuckoo!"

Arthur Augustus gasped.

"Bai Jove, what have I done?" he asked faintly.

"What have you done!" raved Blake. "Didn't you receive that telephone-message? Oh, you ass! Just like our father-headed Gussy!"

"Pway, wait a moment," said D'Arcy. "Theah is no need for us to be disappointed. Theah are plenty of othah motah-cars, and plenty more gwub. We're within a few minutes of the village, and theah's a telephone at the post-office. My ideah is to wing up the firm in Wayland and tell them to wepeat the ordah!"

The juniors held their breath.

"I mean we can have our picnic aftah all," said Arthur Augustus coolly. "If we're quick we can wing up, and the car will be heah by half-past thwee. The manager knows exactly what I want, because I saw him this mornin' and awwanged it all. He'll simply have to wepeat the ordah, that's all!"

"But—but the cost!" gasped Manners.

"Oh, that's nothin', deah boy!"

"Nothing!" ejaculated Blake. "Why, the bill came to twenty-five pounds—"

"Yaas, that's wight. It'll be the same again, I suppose."

"And—and you can pay—"

"I shouldn't make the suggestion if I couldn't pay," said D'Arcy calmly. "How does the ideah stwike you, deah boys?"

The dear boys were almost too breathless to answer.

"Another twenty-five quid blowed!" murmured Arthur Augustus, under his breath. "Wippin'! That makes one hundred and seventy pounds altogether. I'm gettin' on splendidly!"

"Well, I don't know how you're doing it, Gussy!" said Monty Lowther. "But I think it's a stunning wheeze. Let's telephone at once! If you're willing to shell out I shan't say anything. It ain't my bizney if you've been robbing a giddy bank!"

"Weally, Lowhah!"

"Oh, dry up!" said Blake quickly. "Let's get to the 'phone. I admit I'm nearly dead with all these shocks, but I never mind about that. We'll make Gussy tell us the secret of his wealth some day—there ain't time now. Perhaps he's found a recipe for making fivers!"

"You uttiah duffah!"

The good-humour of the party was restored. Figgins & Co.'s raid was just what D'Arcy had wanted, and he was feeling merry and bright. Upon telephoning he learned that a repeat order could be executed within the hour. That assurance made everybody good-tempered at once.

And at three-thirty a second huge motor-car drove up, and this time the School House party piled into it—to the intense astonishment of the New House fellows left behind, who had been chuckling over the discomfiture of their rivals. Arthur Augustus paid over the twenty-five pounds to the chauffeur and received a receipt. The juniors were getting used to the lavish display of wealth by now—but they stared nevertheless.

Arthur Augustus himself was in a state of wondering surprise. Why on earth Mr. Poppe had given him the money was a standing marvel—and why the stranger had made him promise to spend it all within the two days was still more of an enigma!

However, D'Arcy had made the compact, and he was keep-

ing his word. In fact, he was rather enjoying the sensation he was causing.

The picnic was a huge success. After a long ride into the country the party halted near a little wood, and there they partook of a spread which quite eclipsed the banquet of the previous evening, and that is saying a good deal.

After that they started home again, and, coming through Wayland they passed the picture-palace. Most of the juniors took no notice of the building, but D'Arcy suddenly uttered an exclamation.

"Stop!" he said quickly, to the driver. "I've got a stunning idea!"

CHAPTER 11.

A Treat for Hundreds!

"A N idea?" asked Blake, as the car stopped.

"Yaas, wathah! I want to get widd of some more money—I—I mean—"

"Rid of some more money—eh?" chuckled Lowther. "You're a wonder at doing that,

Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus looked thoughtful.

"I've been considahwin," he said. "We're havin' a giddy lot of pleasuah this aftahnoon. But theah are hundreds of poor kiddies who haven't had any."

Tom Merry & Co. looked at their host curiously.

"What's the idea?" asked Bernard Glyn.

"Pway be patient, Glyn, deah boy! A few minutes ago we passed the common—and theah were scores and scores of poor childwen theah doin' simply nothin'—"

"Well, what of it, aas?" asked Blake.

"I wefuse to be called an aas!"

"I apologise, Gussy!" said Blake gravely.

"Vewy well. My ideah is to give all those childwen a tweek," went on Arthur Augustus calmly. "In othah words, I'm goin' to hire the picture-palace for two hours, and then fetch all those kids. A picture show will delight them more than anythin'!"

"You fathead! What about the cost?" asked Tom Merry.

"Well, it won't be more than twenty pounds!" said D'Arcy.

"Not—not more than twenty pounds!" gasped Blake. "Oh, hellup! I'm done!"

"I'll interview the managah, anyhow."

And Arthur Augustus descended from the car, and walked into the Wayland Picture Palace.

His chums stayed in the car, and looked at one another in silent wonder. Somehow they didn't feel up to saying anything. Arthur Augustus had taken their breath away so many times that they hardly had any breath left for themselves.

The swell of St. Jim's still had thirty pounds to dispose of in order to keep his compact, and here was a chance of getting rid of the bulk of it. Of course, he could easily have purchased something for himself for the money, but he was struck with the idea of doing a good turn to the poor children at Wayland. He didn't see any reason why they shouldn't be given a little pleasure as well as himself and his chums.

The manager was in the box-office himself, and Arthur Augustus was very soon admitted.

"You wish to book some seats, sir?" asked the manager.

"Well, yaas, I suppose I do, in a way," replied D'Arcy. "It's twenty minutes to seven now. I want to hire your hall for two hours frowm seven till nine. It is wathah empty, as I saw when I entahed—"

The manager laughed.

"My dear young sir," he said, "it's utterly impossible for you to hire the hall. The price is altogether too much for you to pay. And, in any case, what do you want it for?"

"I want to fill it with poor childwen!"

"By George!" exclaimed the manager.

"I'm heah to do business!" went on Arthur Augustus quietly. "What is your figuah?"

"I'm afraid you'll be rather disappointed when I mention it," said the manager rather impatiently. "I admit that my hall, on a fine evening like this is not very well patronised until nine o'clock, but I cannot possibly think of letting it be filled with noisy children for less than—well, fifteen pounds!"

"Fifteen pounds!" said D'Arcy. "That is wathah high. I'm willin' to pay you twelve-pounds-ten for the two hours."

The manager started. He could hardly believe his ears.

"Are you serious?" he asked quickly.

For reply Arthur Augustus produced his wallet and laid four fivers upon the pay-deak.

"If you accept my terms," he said, "I will hire the hall, and you can use the othah seven-pounds-ten to tweek the childwen to a whoppin' feed of chocolates each as they come in. Is it a bargain?"

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ARE YOU READING PROSPER HOWARD'S SCHOOL STORIES IN "CHUCKLES," 10?

The manager picked up the money hurriedly and examined it.

"It's quite good!" said Arthur Augustus calmly.

"Yes, so I perceive. But, really, you must not be surprised if I am rather taken aback," exclaimed the manager. "Your proposal is amazing. Yes, certainly you can have the hall for the two hours stipulated, and I will see that the extra seven-pounds-ten is laid out to good advantage in chocolates."

Arthur Augustus beamed.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "At seven o'clock I will bring the children."

And he hurried out.

He re-entered the car, and it proceeded back to the common. Here the swell of St. Jim's got out and gathered a crowd of children round him. He informed the little urchins that if they applied to the picture-palace for admission at seven o'clock they would be let in free of charge, and would each receive a treat of chocolates. At first the children were inclined to believe that it was a hoax, but they were convinced at last.

In less than no time the joyous news spread like wildfire. Excitement among the rising generation of Wayland was intense, and at seven o'clock there were hundreds of children waiting to be admitted to the picture-palace.

The motor-car, with Tom Merry & Co. within, was standing near the side of the road, and Arthur Augustus, smiling happily, directed the driver to proceed.

"I am feelin' wathah light-hearted," said D'Arcy confidentially to his chums. "I'm jolly glad I thought of that idea! Just think of the pleasure that will be given to those poor children!"

Nobody replied. In fact, Tom Merry & Co. were looking at one another rather askance. They were all thinking that Arthur Augustus was certainly a little wrong in the head.

When the party arrived back at St. Jim's they found that Figgins & Co. were already there. The New House juniors had been prepared to crow highly over their victory. But the knowledge that the School House fellows had had their picnic after all took some of the enthusiasm out of them.

Arthur Augustus went upstairs to wash, and Blake & Co. and the Terrible Three immediately retired to the almost unrecognisable Study No. 6 and held a hurried council.

The door opened, and Arthur Augustus entered.

"You're looking jolly solemn, deah boys," he said. "I thought you'd be mewwy and bwight, aftah such a wippin' aftahnoon."

"You—you ain't feeling very well, are you, Gussy?" asked Blake hesitatingly. "You—you look rather pale, you know."

"Gweat Scott! Do I weally?"

"You look awful," said Monty Lowther solemnly. "You're pale, Gussy, and your eyes are shiny with fever. The best thing you can do is to see a doctor."

"That's it," agreed Blake, taking D'Arcy's arm. "Let's go, down straight away."

"Welease me, Blake! I uttally wefuse to see a doctah!"

"There are two ways you can go," went on Blake grimly. "You can walk with us quietly or you can be taken down by force. Which is it to be?"

"It's uttally widic!" he said calmly. "But if you insist upon my goin' I can do nothin' but agree. I have no intention of being forced down to the village, so I will go quietly. However, I shall expect a humble apology from every one of you aftah you have been convinced of my sanity."

Tom Merry & Co. looked uncomfortable. They had expected D'Arcy to protest and struggle violently. But they determined to go through with the business. His actions had been most unaccountable, and a doctor was the right person to see.

So, five minutes later, Blake & Co. and the Terrible Three passed out of the gates, followed by many eyes, for Arthur Augustus was now something of a notoriety. They had not proceeded far when a figure was seen striding up from the village.

Arthur Augustus uttered an exclamation.

"Bai Jove!" he said, starting forward. "It's the patah!"

CHAPTER 12.

Mr. Poppe Explains.

LORD EASTWOOD halted before the juniors.

"Arthur!" he exclaimed, in a curious voice.

"This is unexpected, patah!" said Arthur Augustus. "You didn't wire that you were comin', or I would have met you at the station. But what's the matter? You're lookin' fwrightfully sewious."

"With good reason, my boy," said Lord Eastwood. "What is all this I hear? I have come here to get an explanation from you."

"An—an explanation?"

"Yes."

Arthur Augustus looked confused for a moment as he realised that he had promised Mr. Poppe to tell nobody. Then he smiled. So his father, too, was suspicious of him. The other juniors looked on and listened in silence.

"What do you want explainin', patah?" asked D'Arcy.

"I think you know." Lord Eastwood produced a newspaper from his pocket. "I heard several stories concerning you which I could not believe," he said. "In Wayland this evening, at the station, I bought a copy of the local evening paper."

"Yaas; but—"

"One moment. It says in this paper that you gave a gigantic feast yesterday at St. Jim's," went on his lordship grimly. "The cost, the paper adds, must have been fully fifty pounds. I also read that you spent a further large sum to-day on a motor-car picnic."

"Bai Jove! How evah did the papah get the facts?"

"An enterprising reporter has evidently been interviewing the firm who supplied the orders," said D'Arcy's father. "But that is beside the point. The news is contained in this newspaper, displayed in large type for everybody to see. I mentioned something to one of the Wayland porters, and he informed me that you paid a lot of money to the picture-palace for some hare-brained scheme—"

Arthur Augustus gasped.

"Weally, this is too bad!" he exclaimed indignantly. "I am bein' witten up like a giddy politician!"

"A schoolboy who spends money so recklessly is bound to attract notice," said Lord Eastwood sternly. "I have come here, Arthur, for an explanation. You have not received this money from me—or from any relative, so far as I can gather. Where did you get it?"

"I'm sowwy, patah, but it's imposs."

Lord Eastwood frowned.

"Impossible!" he echoed. "What do you mean?"

"I promised somebody that I would not say anythin' to a soul until this evenin'— Bai Jove, pewwaps it will be all wight for me to tell you," he added. "I have kept my word, now I come to considah it. Yaas, I will. Besides, I'm wathah suspicious of Mr. Poppe—I believe he is a lunatic."

"Mr. Poppe!" ejaculated Blake. "Who the dickens is he?"

"Yes, explain, Arthur," said Lord Eastwood sharply.

So Arthur Augustus, without any further ado, told the story. There was not much to tell, for he was considerably in the dark himself.

"That's all," he concluded. "Mr. Poppe merely gave me the two hundred pounds, and made me promise to spend it all by to-night. I've done it, bai Jove, except for a tennah, although it was a feahful wowwy at first. But, weally, patah, I couldn't wefuse to do as Mr. Poppe requested, could I? He saved my life, wemembah."

Lord Eastwood looked thoughtful.

"Your story is amazing," he said slowly. "If I did not know you to be absolutely truthful, Arthur, I should doubt it. Indeed, I can hardly believe the evidence of my ears. This man was certainly insane. To give a schoolboy two hundred pounds to spend in reckless waste—"

"Oh, go easy, patah!" protested D'Arcy. "The money was spent in a useful mannah."

He glanced down the road as he spoke, and then, before his father could reply, he started forward a pace or two, and his monocle dropped from his eye to the end of its silken cord.

"Gweat pip!" he exclaimed. "I'm blessed if heah isn't Mr. Poppe himself comin' up the woad!"

A man had just emerged from the gap in the hedge, and was now walking calmly towards them smoking a fat cigar.

"I guess you're the very young gentleman I wanted to see," he said to Arthur Augustus. "Lucky we're able to meet so easily. Say, I'm very pleased with you, young 'nn!"

All eyes were fixed upon Mr. Poppe.

"This is my patah, Lord Eastwood," said Arthur Augustus. "As a mattah of fact, Mr. Poppe, we were just discussing you!"

Mr. Poppe raised his hat deferentially to the real live lord. "Say, I guess I'm honoured to meet you, my lord," he said. "Somehow I've got a kinder feeling that it's owing to my transaction with your son that you're around these parts. If I've caused you any trouble, I'm real sorry."

"Please don't apologise," replied Lord Eastwood quietly. "I shall be very interested to know why you gave my son a large sum of money, and why you made such an astounding compact with him?"

"It's dead easy, my lord," replied Mr. Poppe. "Perhaps you'd like to see my card?"

He handed a slip of pasteboard to Lord Eastwood. His lordship read aloud:

"Jonathan Poppe, Private Detective, New York City."

"Bai Jove!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 429.

"A detective!"

Mr. Poppe smiled.

"I guess it's about time I explained," he said quietly. "Waal, I'm a man of few words, and I guess I'll start putting you wise right now. My meeting with this young gentleman was just what I wanted—it provided me with the one chance I had of getting the man I'm after."

"And who is he?"

"His name is Ridgwell Hope, a criminal whose record is about as black as an African nigger," said Mr. Poppe. "The New York police are offering a reward of ten thousand dollars for his arrest—and you can bet your boots I want to freeze on to that money. I guess there's no need for me to go into details. I tracked my man to England, and, to put it short, located him in a small town called Wayland close by here. In an hotel there I overheard him 'phone to a gang whom he works with in this country. I guess they were afraid to meet in the open, and so they planned over the 'phone that Hope should go off on a bicycle and meet his pals in a car. Of course, I was on the job pretty slick."

"This is intewestin'," said Arthur Augustus. "Pway pwooced!"

"I'd better explain that Hope is a darned smart jewel-thief, and he had on him a diamond necklace worth ten thousand English sovereigns. I hadn't got any proof that he was actually my man," went on Mr. Poppe; "but once I could lay hands on that necklace, I should have him as sure as my name ends with an 'c.' Waal, I followed the crook on another bicycle, and hung well behind until the road was nice and lonely. Then I intended to overtake him and search him. But, going down a hill—it was real dark, remember—Hope ran into a thundering big stone and crashed over. When I got to him he was as unconscious as a dead coyote, and I quickly took the opportunity of searching him."

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Was the necklace on him?"

"You bet your sweet life!" replied Mr. Poppe calmly. "Not only the necklace, but two hundred pounds in bank-notes. I guess I was good and elated at my success—for I'd sure got the scoundrel. It was my intention to handcuff him and cart him back to Wayland. But I'd hardly got the bracelets out when I heard a car approaching. I reckon I did some quick thinking. There wasn't time to move Hope, except to get him out of the way of the track. If that car contained his pals, I was done—they'd do for me, as if I was a gnat. But I thought they might ride past without seeing, so I skipped behind the hedge. But luck was against me, and I was furious. The car stopped, and I had to crouch there and see Hope taken away. Since that minute I've lost sight of Ridgwell Hope altogether; but I guess I'll lay a hand on him before I'm done. I was scouting around one day when I happened to find this young man in a pretty tight fix in the river. Waal, I fished him out, and made an arrangement with him—which arrangement you already know."

"But what on earth was your object?" asked Lord Eastwood curiously.

"To put it plain," said Mr. Poppe, "I used your son as a lure. I gave him two hundred pounds—Hope's two hundred pounds, so I didn't lose anything—and told him to spend it by to-night."

"But why?" asked Lord Eastwood. "Why?"

"Waal, just consider the facts," Mr. Poppe blew a large puff from his cigar. "Hope didn't know that I was following him that night, and I took the necklace and notes from him while he was unconscious. Neither he nor his friends knew who had taken the gems. Hope would naturally hang around this neighbourhood for such a prize as that necklace. What would he think when he heard that a schoolboy was spending cash like water? Why, sirree, he'd conclude that the notes and the necklace had been taken from his unconscious form by that same schoolboy. And what's the logical conclusion? He'd think that the necklace was still in the boy's possession, and would try and get it, even at a good deal of risk. I don't believe in working unless I have to, and if I can trick Ridgwell Hope to St. Jim's, all the better for me. In fact, I've got an idea that we shall see Ridgwell Hope around this school this very night."

And Mr. Poppe threw the end of his cigar away and looked at his audience with cool confidence.

CHAPTER 13.

Captured!

LORD EASTWOOD was rather amused at the quaint plan, and was highly pleased to find that Arthur Augustus had been doing nothing wrong.

Tom Merry & Co., too, now that they knew everything, could not help chuckling among them.

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selves about their fears concerning D'Arcy. D'Arcy felt rather pleased with himself, and decided that the remaining tenner should be expended upon a feed in Study No. 6 that night—with Mr. Poppe as the guest of honour.

The detective was perfectly willing. The juniors had taken a liking to him, and he, for his part, was exceedingly pleased with Arthur Augustus.

The party soon settled down to a good supper. In spite of the terrific feed in the afternoon the juniors proved that their appetites were unimpaired. Mr. Poppe kept them highly interested with yarns from his life.

In the midst of one of these Toby, the School House page, tapped at the Study door, and put his head in.

"Excuse me —"

"Well, what is it, Toby?"

"There's a gentleman downstairs, who wants to see Master D'Arcy," explained Toby. "I thought I'd better come and tell you first, young gents, as I knew you was making merry."

"A gentleman to see me?" asked Arthur Augustus wonderingly.

Mr. Poppe snapped his fingers triumphantly.

"Gee whizz!" he ejaculated. "I guess it's my man!"

"Shall I show the gent in, Master D'Arcy?" Toby asked, with a rather bewildered look.

Mr. Poppe rose to his feet.

"Yep, sonny, show him right up as quick as you like!"

Toby disappeared.

"Now, see here," went on Mr. Poppe quickly. "Ten to one this is the man I'm after—he's come here for that necklace, and I guess he'll find some bracelets instead! I want all you youngsters to clear out, with the exception of D'Arcy. I'll remain in here, with my hand on a six-shooter. Now, slick!"

Before the juniors knew it, they were bundled out of the study, and the detective slipped behind the big lounge chair, and was completely hidden from view. Arthur Augustus was still looking round rather dazedly, when Toby escorted the visitor in. He was a tall man, with a thick beard, and looked about him with restless eyes. As soon as Toby had disappeared he closed the door sharply and faced Arthur Augustus.

"You know me, eh?" he demanded roughly.

"Weally, sir—"

"It's no use your pretending to me, young shaver," said Ridgwell Hope sharply. "I guess I've seen facts concerning you. You've been spending money like water. Waal, you got that money out of my pocket, while I was lying in the road unconscious."

"You uttah scoundwel!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, who knew that the criminal now stood before him. Hope, who was sure that D'Arcy had taken the money, had no hesitation in speaking outright, for he thought that D'Arcy was an unprincipled young scamp. Any boy who could rob an injured man must certainly be devoid of scruples.

"You took two hundred pounds and a necklace—"

"Say, ain't you givin' us too much chin-music?"

Mr. Poppe's icy voice cut through the air, and Ridgwell Hope, spinning round, gazed point-blank into the muzzle of a revolver.

"Poppe!" he gasped.

"I guess this gun'll go pop if you try any trick!" said the detective grimly. "I've got you, Ridgwell Hope, and you'd best give in tamely. I've got the necklace, too, and all the proofs I want. To-morrow you'll start back with me for New York—"

"Hang you!" snarled Hope.

And he made a dash for the door. With one wrench it was open—but Tom Merry & Co. were out in the passage. The criminal ran right into them, and in a moment he was sprawling on the floor beneath a pile of juniors.

"I thought you'd run your head into the trap, clever as you are," said Mr. Poppe, with satisfaction, as he slipped the handcuffs on him. "It'll interest you to know that I set this yer little trap for your especial benefit. I had an idea that that ten thousand pounds necklace would lure you to this yer academy. Waal, it's here; but I guess it's in my pocket!"

The criminal was led away utterly downcast. At the moment of victory he had met defeat, and he was almost speechless with rage and chagrin.

And that was the last the juniors saw of Mr. Jonathan Poppe.

THE END.

ARE YOU READING PROSPER HOWARD'S SCHOOL STORIES IN "CHUCKLES," 10?

THE PRIDE OF THE FILM.

**Our Magnificent
New Adventure
Serial Story.**

-- By --

VICTOR CROMWELL

THE FIRST INSTALMENTS.

REGGIE WHITE, an orphan, is befriended by MR. ANTHONY DELL, a millionaire film-producer, and given a position as actor in his company.

A scene is being filmed near an old house, and Silas Shock, the operator, climbs on to the roof of a shed to take the picture.

The roof collapses, and Mrs. Horace Dell—Dell's sister-in-law—who is acting in the piece, picks from the ruins a pocket-book, which is found to be full of bank-notes.

Mr. Rankin, a neighbour of Mr. Dell's, who uses the name of Startlefield, learns through some papers found with the bank-notes that he has a son living of whom, owing to a quarrel with his wife, now dead, he has not previously heard. He determines, therefore, to engage detectives to find his missing boy.

Some time later Startlefield introduces to Reggie a boy who professes to be his son, and the boy proves to be Hubert Nixon, an unscrupulous youth whom Reggie has met before.

Johnson Sprague, a gardener employed by Startlefield, is killed by an explosion, and the fact that he was wearing an old suit of his master's at the time leads people to suppose that the dead man is Startlefield.

Being suspicious of foul play, Startlefield disappears, and, meanwhile, an inquest is being held.

Mr. Walkingdean, a witness at the inquiry, suggests that Startlefield was killed by a new explosive in which he was interested.

(Now read on.)

The Verdict.

The police had no knowledge of any such find.

"A little might still be upon the cornices and the top of the furniture," suggested Walkingdean.

As the inquest was being held in a large front room quite near the wrecked study, it was quite easy for the coroner to order an immediate investigation.

Two officers were sent off, and when they returned in a moment or two they had complete evidence. The first held up his right-hand forefinger, which was quite blue.

"I got this by rubbing my finger along the top of a bureau," he explained. "My man here tried the top of a picture-frame. He can show you his finger."

The other man's finger had a very slight blue discoloration.

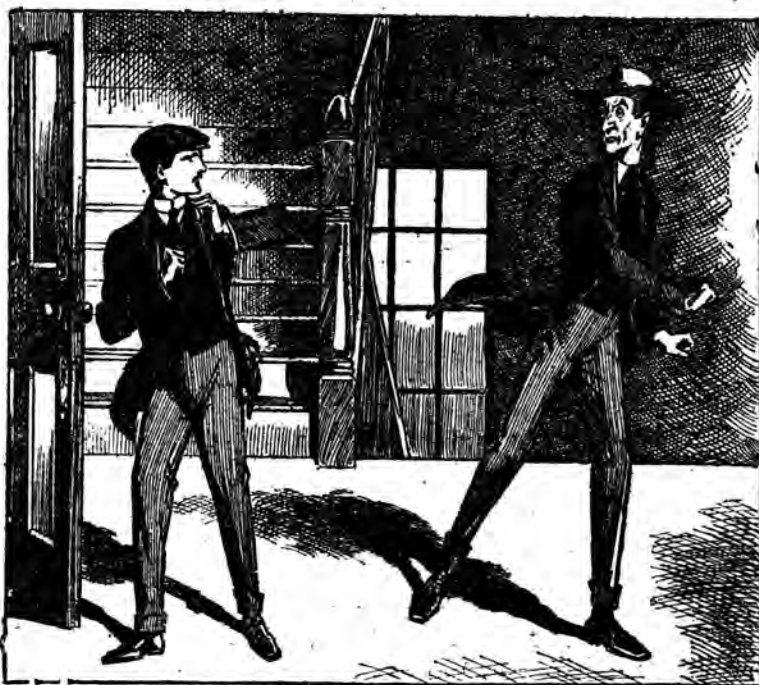
Mr. Walkingdean showed considerable distress of mind, but said nothing.

The next witness was Mr. Startlefield's "son," Hubert Nixon played his part admirably. The subject of his recent change of fortune was not touched upon.

Hubert's evidence was kept almost entirely to the subject of his "father's" interest in explosives, and he brought out some very interesting "facts."

Not one of the jury or witnesses—excepting those who were in the plot—appeared to have the slightest suspicion that they were really holding an inquest on this half-crazed gardener himself, and that the person who was really missing was Startlefield himself.

Reggie could not remain to the end of the inquest, but later in the day he heard the conclusion of the whole matter. The verdict on the supposed body of John Startlefield was "Killed by an accident."



The next moment Silas Shock dashed past him. But the photographer stopped just beyond him. "Gracious!" he cried, "It's you, Master Reggie!" (See page iii of cover.)

That evening, when Reggie recounted the story to Mr. Startlefield—who had moved no farther away than Wimbeldon, and who had made quite a difference in his appearance by a change into shabby clothes—he found himself listened to with intense interest.

It proved to him that Hubert was working hand and glove with the men who were plotting against him, and whose cruel schemes had included assassination.

Mr. Startlefield's great desire seemed to be to find out what the conspirators would do when they had got his property into their hands, and—as he explained to Reggie—he was willing to lose a bit on the experiment.

So very little more was planned just then.

"Keep in touch, my boy!" he said, when they parted. "Just keep in touch! I want to see what will happen when that boy actually does come into my money."

The next time that Reggie met Startlefield he found that a hitch had occurred in the experiment. The cause was very fully explained, but it was of such a nature that another person had to be taken into the secret that Mr. Startlefield was not really dead.

"I forgot all about my executor," Startlefield explained. "He is a City merchant, and of the straight-up-and-down sort who don't like mysteries. As soon as ever the accident took place, he stepped in, and refused point-blank to let anyone touch a penny of my money. He paid off all the servants the moment the inquest was over, and sent down a caretaker to look after the house."

"In fact," went on Mr. Startlefield, "he behaved in a manner that showed he distrusted the coroner's verdict, and believed that there had been foul play. He offered to allow Hubert two-pound-ten a week till the will was proved, which I do not believe he would have done for twelve months."

Reggie expressed admiration for this loyal friend. Mr. Startlefield agreed that he deserved it.

"But," he went on, "I wanted to see what these plotters were going to do, so I had to go and interview my executor. It gave the poor gentleman a terrible turn to see a ghost walk in. I had a lot of trouble to get the good man to do as I wished, but he consented, after much persuasion, and he is proving the will, and letting Hubert take possession of the house."

"And the money?" asked Reggie.

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A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY!

"THE CONQUERING HEROES!"

"Not much of it. You see, the will constitutes him Hubert's guardian."

On this occasion Mr. Startlefield came out with a surprising proposal. He produced a bunch of keys.

"Here are my keys," he said. "I don't know if you would like to make use of them."

"What do you mean?" asked Reggie.

"I mean, find out what is going on in that house. There are some very ingenious hiding-places there, and anyone who knew them could spend hours in the house without being discovered."

Somewhat the idea fascinated Reggie. It was not that he liked the idea of acting spy. But the circumstances of the whole case were so unusual that he felt there was nothing at all disgraceful in this kind of spying.

So, without a word to show that he understood, Reggie accepted the mission.

A Queer Household.

It was not very long before Reggie took the opportunity which Mr. Startlefield's keys gave him of getting into the house where Hubert Nixon was now the master.

But first he learned as much as he could about the household and its occupants, in which endeavours he found himself greatly assisted by the discoveries of Ben Wheeler, Mr. Dell's one-time chauffeur. His conversation with Ben was quite accidental.

"It's a queer show in there!" said Ben, the day after Mr. Startlefield gave Reggie the keys of his house. "Your old chum Hubert Nixon is having the time of his life, I fancy!"

Reggie was eager for information.

"There's two of them," went on Ben—"the young hopeful and his 'tooter.' And a handy kind o' man the tooter must be, seeing they've got that big place and no servants, with 'pa' always dropping in to smoke his pipe and sip his whisky by the kitchen fire."

"You mean young Nixon's father?" asked Reggie.

Ben nodded.

"There's a swindle, if ever there was one!" he declared, with a decisive shake of his head, thus indicating the whole subject of Hubert's newly-discovered relationship to Mr. Startlefield. "It is a put-up job, if you ask me, and there's one man on our show who thinks the same as me, and expects to get wise about the whole business before we are much older."

"And who is that?" inquired Reggie.

Ben Wheeler winked solemnly.

"There are some folk about who can do better than turn machine-handles!" he replied, with mysterious suggestiveness.

"You mean Silas Shock?"

"Now, I didn't say so!" retorted Ben. "But, since you've mentioned his name, let me tell you that our Silas has got more in his head than cotton-wadding, and he's not satisfied. Mind, what I'm telling you don't come from him! Have you ever met Master Hubert's 'tooter'?"

Reggie had not met the tutor, and, frankly, he was somewhat surprised that that young hopeful should think of surrounding himself with men of learning now that he was in possession of his property.

"Well, you may take it from me," went on Ben, "that he's no more a tooter than I am. He's in there because he's got a hold over the boy. He's called Stancombe."

In a moment Reggie understood how affairs were standing in the Startlefield household.

Stancombe had either inspired or assisted to carry out the wicked plot by which Hubert was to become the possessor of Startlefield's money, and the blackmailer was not content to keep out of sight while the youth and his real father realised the fortune. On the contrary, he had constituted himself "one of the family," and was on hand not only to reap the full harvest of fortune when it came, but to do a little gleaning in the meantime while affairs were being settled.

Reggie learned from Ben that these two—Hubert Nixon and Mr. Stancombe—were the occupants of the house, and rarely left each other. Even when they went out it was in company.

That day was a busy one on a new film, which was rather a new departure in its way for the boy actor, because it was to be a "talking film." Mr. Dell had not been very enthusiastic about the idea, as he regarded talking films as a very poor mixture of two arts that were much better kept separate.

"A talking film is like a mule," he said, "and is a disgrace to both its parents."

But he consented to please that enthusiastic inventor, Silas Shock, who lately had been keen on speech-recording cylinders and phonographs generally.

Reggie's first sensation when he heard his own voice on the gramophone was of consternation. He had an idea that he spoke in a rather muffled and gentle tone, whereas in reality he had a singularly clear, and resonant voice, capable of all kinds of musical inflections.

"Good gracious!" he said. "Do I talk like that?"

"Much better as a rule," returned Silas. "You were nervous and high-pitched, talking into a machine for the first time. We'll try again!"

After the voice-recording was concluded Reggie got a chance to ask Silas a few questions about the Startlefield household, but he only got snubbed for his pains. Silas at times could be very unapproachable, and even nasty-tempered.

"I mind my business, Master Reggie," he said, "and I leave others to mind theirs. You've got no call to think I know anything about the matter at all. If a man sets himself out to be chuckleheaded, and let swindlers get his property, that's his business, not mine!"

"But I thought perhaps—"

"Look here, Master Reggie," interrupted Silas, "your thoughts are free as air, and I don't want to say a word about 'em. It's your speech just now that I don't want, so give it a rest!"

"What has come over the beggar?" wondered Reggie, as he walked away.

That evening he nearly ran into Hubert and his "tooter" coming away from Mr. Startlefield's house, and as they passed a sudden impulse came to him to use the bunch of keys that had come into his possession.

There was no one in sight as he reached the entrance-gate, so he quietly slipped into the grounds, and found his way around to a side entrance of which he had the key.

Inside the house he found things much as he had expected to find them. A goodish layer of dust was covering the furniture in most of the apartments, and only two or three rooms gave any evidence of having been used.

These looked very much as they might be expected to look when two or three men are running the place without any womenfolk to exercise their domestic energies; but occasional efforts at "clearing up" were traceable—indeed, Reggie nearly fell over a broom that was resting against the hat-rack.

The big dining-room was chill and dusty, but a pleasant breakfast-parlour bore evidence of serving as living-room, parlour, and kitchen, for the gas-stove had a "ring," on which still rested a frying-pan.

In a cupboard were numbers of eatables, including a big pile of rashers, and about half of a ham, evidently bought ready cooked to save trouble. Bottles were also in evidence, and, strangely enough, most of these were empty milk bottles, proving that the occupants of the house were not as eager in putting out the returns as they were in taking in the full ones.

A teapot and a kettle and part of a pound packet of tea proved that one or both of the occupants liked Dr. Johnson's favourite beverage.

Reggie looked around for papers, as the discovery of incriminating evidence in black and white was the chief part of his mission.

But here he was disappointed. Not a scrap of writing could he find.

Just as Reggie was leaving the breakfast-parlour he gave a little start of surprise, for he saw what looked like a familiar object.

This was a queer-shaped table that stood in the window. It was not more than two feet square, and the special feature of it was that it had very deep sides, giving more the impression of being a box on four legs than a flat table.

But it was not its unusual shape that struck Reggie; it was the fact that he had only once before seen a similar article of furniture, and the place where he had seen it was among some of Mr. Dell's most recently acquired "properties." In fact, he had used the very twin of that table in one of his most successful recent picture dramas.

Probably he would not have noticed this table in a room that was rather over-furnished had it not been for the similarity that specially caused him to feel an interest in it.

He passed to the wrecked study, but could not enter it, as the door was locked, and the key had been removed. From outside he had seen that the window of this room had been roughly boarded, and that no effort had yet been made to repair the damage done by the explosion.

It was getting fairly dark by now, so Reggie made a hasty search of the upper part of the house. The two bed-rooms in use showed something of the character of the two occupants. One—the garments lying about proved it to be Stancombe's—looked fairly neat, as the bed had been made up, but it was "a lick and a promise" kind of neatness.

The other room was an orgy. Reggie doubted if the bed

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THE PRIDE OF THE FILM!

(Continued from previous page.)

had ever been made since Hubert took possession, and garments lay about everywhere.

Those garments!

Reggie felt mean as he went through all the pockets, but no papers of any importance came to light.

"Now for the kitchens!" thought Reggie. "I hate this beastly job!"

The kitchens were on the ground floor, behind the parlours. Only one of these appeared to be used, though upon every available table the searcher found piles of unwashed plates, knives, cups and saucers.

Of these there was a huge stock, and it appeared that the two hermits were working through them methodically.

"They'll have to have a special washing-up day soon," thought Reggie, as he noted the almost empty china closets.

Almost as Reggie thought these words, he heard a slight creaking noise near him. It was just such a sound as might be caused by a window being pushed open from outside.

Reggie stood back into the protection of a large cupboard, and watched, half expecting to see one of the windows raised.

Two of a Trade.

But, instead, a door opened, and a man cautiously entered. By this time it was nearly dark, especially in that part of the house, so that it was difficult to see very clearly, but the man had a familiar appearance.

The next moment Reggie knew him.

Silas Shock!

"What on earth is he doing here?" thought the boy.

Silas passed through the kitchen and out into the passage, disappearing into the breakfast parlour, and the boy followed him as far as the door.

Then through the crack he saw some surprising happenings.

Silas went straight to the small table in the window which had caught Reggie's attention, and opened it.

Yes, that strange article of furniture really appeared to be a box, after all, and, though the opening was at the side instead of at the top, it was clearly intended to answer the purpose of a box.

Reggie saw Silas make a movement as if he were taking something out of the box, and, in his desire to see more clearly, he must have pushed rather heavily against the door, for that contrivance emitted a most thrilling "creak."

There was a "snap" from the table as if it had been closed up again, and the next moment Silas Shock darted past him.

But the photographer stopped in his sudden flight only just beyond him.

"Gracious!" he cried. "It's you, Master Reggie! And I nearly laid you out as I dashed by. It was half in my mind to give you a rather smashing under-cut just for luck, but I saw who you were just in time. What on earth are you doing here?"

"Peering around," replied Reggie, somewhat awkwardly.

"Better you were minding your own business," said Silas gruffly; and then, as he seemed to reflect on some possible explanation of the meeting: "Perhaps, though, you're on the same game as I am?"

This opening seemed a good one for Reggie, as it enabled him to give the reason for his presence. It had better be explained here that, in spite of the very suspicious circumstances in which he had discovered Silas Shock, he never for a moment suspected his object as being in any way dishonest or improper, and he saw that Silas was regarding himself with equal charity. "On the same game as I am" was consequently a good statement of the case, and a sound beginning for explanations.

"I believe that I am," replied Reggie. "At least, I am trying to get to the bottom of all the wickedness that is going on in this house."

Silas grunted.

"They coal-mining is a fool to your job!" he remarked. "The wickedness goes deeper than any Yorkshire pit. But I'm afraid, my boy, that this time I have stolen a march on you. I'm getting the noose round a neck, and by the time you are posted in all I know, it will be about time to pull the slip-knot tight!"

He seemed to be pleased at his own simile, for he chuckled grimly.

"Though I've got one bone to pick with you," he added. "You gave me such a start just now that I nearly smashed the cylinder!"

"What cylinder?" asked Reggie.

"Last night's conversation," returned the man of the camera. "These old villains meet here every evening, and quarrel about the plunder. They don't know who is listening!"

"Do you mean—"

"No, I don't!" snapped Silas. He was in one of his sharp,

explosive moods. "I don't mean anything I haven't told you yet; and if you'll listen without interrupting, you will know all I mean to tell you. I've fixed a speaking-tube from that room to the garden, and I can sit under a bush—which I do hours at a stretch—and hear enough to interest an archbishop."

"But what about that cylinder?" asked Reggie.

"That cylinder made me a thief, or a borrower—whichever you like. If you ever hear Mr. Dell ask what became of his carved Georgian card-table, you may now know who took it away. I did, Master Reggie. It has a box in it that nicely holds one of my record-making phonographs."

"I thought I recognised that table," said Reggie.

"I thought I'd broken my back the night I got it over the wall," returned Silas.

"But surely—"

"Boy, you wait!" said Silas. "This plan of mine wasn't thought of yesterday and carried out to-day. That box-table was in this house before our young hopeful and his tutor moved in. I acted quick on this affair. I made my plan an hour after the explosion—Now—will—you—wait—and—not interrupt?"

This hint was a check on a sentence of inquiry Reggie was just going to speak.

"You saw the explosion," Silas went on. "So did I, for we were on the top of the studio together. But I saw something else that I don't think you saw. I saw a man cause that explosion."

"So did I," said Reggie.

"Gun shine!" ejaculated Silas. "And I thought you didn't! Well, anyway, I saw what would very likely happen later, and I fixed in my speaking-tube and phonograph. I was puzzled which room they would use most, and I have a neat little arrangement in the big one in front, and also in the servants' parlour; but I guessed right about this being the place. As I told you, I can stand outside and listen. When they get interesting, I clap on the phonograph."

Reggie was startled at the thoroughness of Silas Shock's plan.

"Then I have to get into the house and get my record, wind the machine, and fix another. I guess I'll do that now."

There was a few moments' interval while the deed was being done, after which Silas rejoined his young friend.

"Don't you bang against me in the dark," he cried. "These records are as brittle as glass, and I've got one in my pocket. Did you go to the inquest?"

"Yes," said Reggie.

"Did you hear the evidence of a johnnie called Walkingdean?"

Reggie said that he had heard it.

"That man is a nut!" remarked Silas. "He was here last night. He is causing a regular flutter in the henroost."

Silas chuckled again at the thought.

"He is a queer sort of chap altogether," he went on. "As far as I can make out, his business is phrenology, and Stancombe got hold of him in some shady deal. He can tell lies at a rate that would make Ananias perspire, and never turn a hair. They primed him up with the explosion story, and promised him a neat little nest-egg for his trouble."

Here Silas Shock charged his pipe, and solemnly lit it, but quite abruptly extinguished the flame again.

"I mustn't show a light in here with these windows."

He resumed his remarks about Walkingdean:

"The trouble was," he went on, "that Walkingdean wanted his money, which was a goodish lump, paid right away, and there has been a hitch about it. Walkingdean is not a particularly easy sort of man to disappoint when hard cash is involved, and he came last night in quite a nasty mood. The joke is, he has raised his price pretty much, having learned the art of blackmail pretty thoroughly from Stancombe, I suppose."

"What's that?" asked Reggie, hearing a noise.

"By Jove! They're back!" said Silas. "They're at the back door! We'll make for the front door. It opens on a hatch."

But as they neared the front door, the unmistakable sound of a key in the lock stopped them. At the same moment they heard a sound in the kitchen.

"Upstairs, and trust to luck!" said Silas.

So up they went.

But they were seen, or heard, for a voice, probably Stancombe's, was heard:

"They're going upstairs! After them!"

The next moment the passage and landing were flooded with light. Reggie felt himself drawn into a bed-room by Silas just as his eyes met those of Hubert Nixon standing in the passage below.

In the bed-room Silas switched on the light. The first thing he did was surprising. Reaching up, he placed his precious cylinder on the top of a wardrobe.

"I must make that safe, anyway," he said. "My confounded pipe caused all this mischief!"

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LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE.

OH, THAT NEW LIGHTING ORDER!

"Oh, see, the papers that I must screen the lights, bedad!" said Pat Malone.

So that as he blacked the window of his bed-room. Several times he woke up, but as it was still dark, he turned over and went to sleep again.

At last, feeling that he had had sufficient sleep, and wondering at the continued darkness, he got up and opened the window.

It was broad daylight, so he dressed himself and hurried off to work.

"Where have you been?" asked the foreman, when he arrived.

"Shure, ma, I've overslept meself," said Pat.

"That's all—very well," the foreman answered; "but where were you yest' day and the day before?"—Sent in by F. G. Denny, Ipswich.

UNJUST CRITICISM.

A storm was brewing in Bill Jones' back yard.

"It's too much of a good thing, Liz!" he yelled. "I've told you before that I won't have the kids carry the coals from the shed in my best hat! How'd you like it if it was yours?"

With arms akimbo, his better-half sauntered into the cabbage patch.

"Look here, Bill," she said coldly, "stop chinning a minute! You've spoilt the shape of that there hat already with your funny beard; and as you work coal all day at the wharf, what does that little extra bit of dust in your hat matter? You want something to make a fuss about, I suppose?"

"Tain't really the dust I object to," responded the infuriated Bill; "but I wear that hat in the evenings, and if I take it off my head while I'm out, it leaves a black mark round my forehead. So, of course, I gets accused of washing my face with my hat on!"—Sent in by H. Solomons, Mile End Road, E.

A CLEAFUL PROSPECT.

In the barber's shop the scissors clicked merrily away, and the barber's dog lay on the floor close beside the chair, looking up intently all the time at the occupant who was having his hair cut.

"Nice dog that?" said the customer approvingly. "He seems very fond of watching his master at work, too."

"It ain't that," said the barber, smiling blandly.

"Sometimes I make a mistake, and take a little piece off a customer's ear!"—Sent in by T. Beccroft, Peckham, S.E.

MISSING.

Two men met at the corner of the street, and, being friends, paused to exchange greetings and indulge in a little neighbourly gossip.

"Oh," exclaimed one of them suddenly, "have you heard that old Watson, the bank manager, is looking for a clerk?"

"Why, it was only last week when he engaged a new one," said the other.

"Yes," said his friend, "That's the one he's looking for!"—Sent in by J. Slack, West Gorton.

GATHERING INFORMATION.

"I'm very pleased to meet you. Your name is Miss Green, is it not?"

"Yes, that's right."

"Have you lived here very long?"

"About four years."

"Where do you work?"

"I'm employed in a broker's office."

"Stenographer, I presume?"

"Yes."

"That's your own complexion, I suppose?"

"Sir!"

"Do you make your own dresses?"

"I never was insulted so much in all my life! What do you mean by asking me so many personal questions? At our first meeting, too!"

"I'm sorry if I have offended you; but, you see, I might pass you in the street some day, when I'm out walking with my wife. If I should speak to you, those are only a few of the questions she will ask me about you, and I'd like to be able to answer some of them!"—Sent in by Edward Piskin, New Southgate, N.

ONE OF LIFE'S LITTLE TRAGEDIES.

He carefully locked the door behind him. No one should see him do the dreaded deed. He could no longer stand the smiles and jeers of his friends. Even his own particular friend had turned against him, and this was the last straw.

He would end it all! He had been trying for several months to summon up his courage, but always at the last moment it had failed him. To-day he was determined! He had made all preparations carefully. No one should see—no one would know of the scene that was being enacted behind the closed door.

What if he failed? Perish the thought! he must not fail!

All! What was that—a footstep? But it passed on, and all was quiet again.

Now he braced himself together, and with a look of determination he picked up the deadly weapon. To be more sure, he sharpened it until its edge was as keen as any razor's. With a fearful glance round, and with uplifted arm, he commenced the ghastly deed.

Blood! Eugh! His hand trembled. Never fear; he would not fail this time!

The seconds crept slowly by, and passed into minutes. At last the deed was accomplished!

He had had his first shave!—Sent in by A. Dalton, Bolton.

HE WAS QUITE PUT OUT.

"Good-morning, Mr. Ryetop!" greeted the waiter in the big city hotel. "I hope you enjoyed the bottle of whisky I left in your room for you?"

"It was pretty fair," drawled Farmer Ryetop, rubbing his parched lips. "But, by-gone, that syphon you sent up had the strongest stream of fizzy water I ever tackled. The thing came near to knocking me through the window."

The waiter looked puzzled.

"Syphon?" he gasped.

"Why, I didn't send up any syphon."

"Yes, you did!" asserted the farmer. "It was red, and bound with brass bands."

"Great Scott! That was the automatic fire-extinguisher!"—Sent in by L. Hathaway, Sheffield.

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