

663
"SLAVE ISLAND!" THE GREATEST ROMANTIC ADVENTURE SERIAL
FOR MANY YEARS (See page 17).

The GEM **1** **12**

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"RENTON OF THE ROVERS!"
A Tale of the Footer Field.

"THE COLD SHOULDER!"
A Story of Tom Merry & Co.

"SLAVE ISLAND!"
A Thrilling Adventure Story.



THE FORM-MASTER TURNS UP AT AN AWKWARD MOMENT!

(An Incident in the Great Fight Scene In this week's Complete School Story.)

MY READERS' OWN CORNER

NOTE.—Half-a-crown will be awarded to the sender of every paragraph published on this page.

THE CALL.

Come out, 'tis now October,
The football boom's begun;
And through the clicking turnstiles
Crowds rush to watch the fun.
Come out of forge and factory,
The workshop, office, store,
All full of keen expectancy
Of seeing favourites score.—
—B. Goodman, Aspill Meadow, Upper Gornal, near Dudley, Staffs.

A MARSH WARBLER.

This bird, until recently, was mistaken for the reed warbler, so closely does it resemble that bird. The general colouring he had risen to give her his place, lightish olive-brown in spring, darker brown in summer. Chin, throat, and breast are nearly white. It builds its nest amongst bushes overgrown with rank vegetation. The nest is composed of grass, stalks, reeds, etc., with inner lining of horsehair. The eggs are from four to seven, varying from greenish blue to light grey, spotted with brown, and underlying grey markings.—Cecil Elliott, 6, Bourne Bridge Cottages, Hayes, Middlesex.

MISUNDERSTOOD.

As a very pretty girl entered a crowded tramcar, an old gentleman in the corner rose from his seat. The pretty girl, thinking he had risen to give her his place, gave him a gentle push back again, saying: "Don't trouble. I don't mind standing!" "Madam—" began the old man. "I say don't trouble!" repeated the girl. "I am young, you are old." "Madam, will you—" yelled the old gentleman. "Please sit down!" said the girl, blushing. "Madam, I want to get out!" roared the old man.—Miss Margaret Hicks, the Laurels, Bradninch, Devon.

BOSTON CHURCH.

Boston Church is one of the largest in the country. It was built in 1309, when Boston was at the height of its prosperity. The tower is about 272 feet high, and the steps up to the top are the same number as the days of the year. There are fifty-two windows, twelve pillars, and seven doors, so the calendar is well represented. The church has eight bells. There was a second tower planned in the shape of a cone, but this has not been built yet.—F. Lawson, 10, Tower Street, Boston, Lines.

HIS MISTAKE.

Tom Jones wished to varnish his door, so he bought some varnish, and carried it home in an old golden syrup tin. He placed the tin on a shelf for the night, and early next morning started in and varnished the door, but he did not like the look of it when done, so took the tin back to the shop. "This is not what I sold you. This is treacle!" said the shopman. Jones told his wife about his mistake. Mrs. Jones collapsed. "Oh, Tom," she cried, "and I've made a pudding of the other stuff!"—James Greenwood, 650, Heaton Road, Park View, Heaton, Bradford, Yorks.

All contributions to this feature should be sent to: The Editor, The "Gem," Library, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4., and marked: "Readers' Own Corner."

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of our

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THIS WEEK WE ANNOUNCE A VERY NOVEL COMPETITION.

Below you will find six puzzle-pictures, and each of these has the last two or three letters of the words represented.

What you have to do is to fill in, IN INK, the letters which you think should go before those we publish.

For instance, Picture 37 has the letters "OOM," and when the correct letters are supplied, which in this case are BR, the word is revealed. The same thing applies to the other pictures.

This competition will run for eight weeks, and there will be one more set of pictures for you to solve.

DO NOT SEND IN YOUR EFFORTS NOW.

FULL INSTRUCTIONS WILL BE GIVEN AS TO HOW YOUR EFFORTS ARE TO BE SENT TO US.

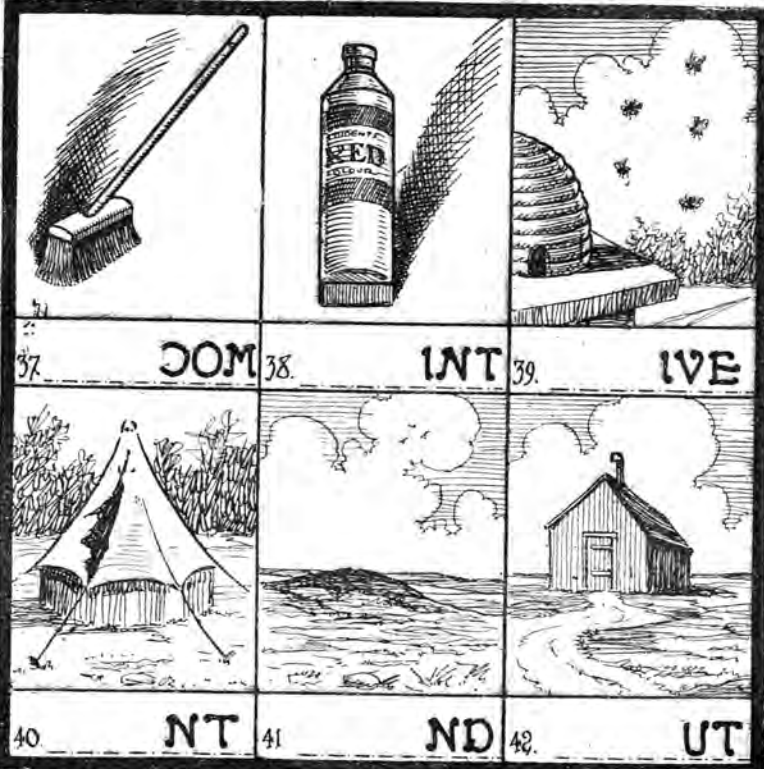
The First Prize of 10s. a week for one year will be awarded to the sender of the set of eight pictures which bear solutions identical with the list now locked in the Editor's safe, and other prizes to the competitors sending in the fewest number of mistakes.

Competitors must bear in mind that the Editor's decision must be accepted as final and binding, and entries are only accepted on this express understanding.

You may send as many complete sets of eight as you please, but each must be submitted on a coupon taken from "The GEM," and when the time comes for sending in, sets must be made up separately.

START TO WORK NOW, BUT DO NOT SEND YOUR EFFORTS IN UNTIL WE ASK YOU TO DO SO

Employees of the proprietors of this journal are not eligible to compete.



RENTON OF THE ROVERS!



A Magnificent New Football Serial. By PAUL MASTERS.

Read This First.

JIMMY RENTON is a keen footballer and an excellent fellow, and his heart is in the great winter game. On leaving St. Clives, he obtains a situation as a newspaper-reporter on the "Burchester Times." Here he meets and chums up with

BILLY DESMOND, a cheery, high-spirited fellow of his own age. Jimmy also comes into contact with

LUKE RAYNER, coward, spy, and blackguard, who is envious of Jimmy's footballing ability, and schemes to bring about his downfall.

Thanks to Rayner, Jimmy Renton loses his job and is compelled to tramp the country in quest of another. He has the consolation of giving Rayner a good thrashing before he sets out on his wanderings.

Arriving at the flourishing town of Easthampton, Jimmy makes strenuous efforts to obtain employment, but the luck is against him. He visits the local football-ground to witness a match between Easthampton and Belmont Rovers, and while the game is in progress he decides to approach the Easthampton directors and ask them to give him a trial.

(Now read on.)

Turned Down!

WHEN the whistle sounded for half-time, Jimmy Renton attempted to get to the grand-stand, in which some of the directors of the Easthampton Foot-

ball Club were seated. But he might just as well have attempted to get to the moon.

He progressed for a few yards, and then found himself up against a solid wall of spectators, and he could make no further headway.

"I shall have to wait till the match is over, that's all!" he muttered.

The score-sheet was blank at the interval.

Easthampton had done the bulk of the attacking, but their opponents had set up a magnificent defence.

The Rovers had evidently had a "confab" in the dressing-room, for when the game was resumed they adopted fresh tactics, and became very aggressive.

Again and again their forwards swept down upon the home goal. And then Easthampton showed that they, too, had a sterling defence—a couple of stalwart backs who, though sorely tried, were not found wanting.

Jimmy Renton looked on with fascinated eyes.

It was a good, clean, sporting game to watch.

Fouls were few and far between, though there was a good deal of heavy shoulder-charging, which was taken in good part by the players on both sides.

It seemed as if the match would result in a goalless draw. But Jimmy Renton anticipated—and not without reason—that Belmont Rovers would force a win. They had youth on their side—youth and dash—whereas some of the home players were already beginning to feel the burden of Anno Domini.

Five minutes from the end there was a remarkable scene on the field, and the spectators were roused to a high pitch of excitement.

The Easthampton half-backs—and even the forwards—had dropped back to defend their goal. And Belmont Rovers, determined to snatch a victory in the closing stages, were setting up a terrific bombardment. Their centre-forward, who was little more than a boy, was dead out of luck with his efforts. Twice he hit the crossbar, and once he actually netted, but the referee disallowed the point, because at that same moment one of the home players had been accidentally injured, and was lying on the ground.

Four minutes to go—three minutes—two minutes only!

Jimmy Renton's heart was thumping against his ribs.

Would the Rovers pull it off? Or would Easthampton manage to keep them at bay until the final whistle sounded?

These questions were soon answered.

With one minute to go, the Rovers' centre-forward, his spell of bad luck at an end, sent the leather crashing into the net.

It was an unstoppable shot—a glorious last-minute effort—and although the home spectators were disappointed, they applauded like true sportsmen.

The teams retired to the dressing-room, and the crowd began to melt away.

Jimmy Renton remained where he was until the lengthy stream of humanity had flowed out of the turnstiles. Then he made his way to the dressing-room.

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He was met at the door by one of the ground-attendants of the Easthampton club.

"Woddyerwanthere?" demanded the man, linking his words together in a bewildering manner.

"I want to see the directors," said Jimmy.

The attendant scowled. He was not favourably impressed by Jimmy's appearance.

"Is that Yiddish or double-Dutch?" asked Jimmy.

The attendant repeated his remark, and at last it dawned upon Jimmy that he meant "You get out of it!"

"Certainly—as soon as I've seen the directors!" said Jimmy. "Are they in the dressing-room?"

"No!"

"Then where shall I find them? Any one of them will do. I don't want to tackle the whole lot."

The attendant was not disposed to answer any more questions. He was evidently a man of few words. He pointed to the exit, and raised his foot off the ground, as if to say:

"If you don't get out I'll jolly well boot you out!"

At that moment a stout, pompous-looking gentleman, with a florid face, appeared on the scene.

This was Mr. Montgomery Snooks, the Mayor of Easthampton, and the chairman of the local football club.

"What's all the rumpus about?" he demanded.

The attendant pointed to Jimmy Renton.

"Told this young feller to gerrouervit, sir," he said, "an' he won't budge!"

Mr. Snooks frowned. And he directed a glance of strong disapproval at Jimmy.

"What are you hanging about here for—eh?"

"I want to see one of the directors, sir," said Jimmy.

"I am a director," said Mr. Snooks—"the chairman of the directors, in fact. What do you want?"

With the attendant looking on and listening with all his ears, Jimmy felt rather ill at ease. But he pulled himself together, and took the plunge.

"I want to play for Easthampton, sir—"

"What?"

"That is to say, I want to be given a trial with the reserves, with a view to qualifying for the first team later on."

Mr. Montgomery Snooks stared blankly at Jimmy Renton. Despite the important office he held, he was a man of limited imagination, and he was no judge whatever of football talent. He continued to stare at Jimmy in a stupefied sort of way; and the attendant broke into a loud guffaw. Jimmy could cheerfully have punched the fellow's head.

"Do—do I hear aright?" gasped Mr. Snooks at length.

Jimmy Renton nodded.

"I've had no experience of League football, sir," he said, "but I've no doubt I should soon shake down to it. I've had a couple of games with Burchester United, and on the strength of that, p'raps, you'd like to give me a trial?"

Mr. Snooks gave a snort.

"You—you insolent young puppy! I've a good mind to hand you over to the police! Give you a trial, indeed! The only sort of trial you're likely to get is at the Assizes!"

The attendant gave another guffaw, louder than before.

Jimmy Renton flushed.

"There's no harm in my asking for a trial," he said. "I take it that all these crack players had to prove their mettle at some time or other. And as for hand—"

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ing me over to the police—why, I've given you no cause to do anything of the sort!"

Mr. Snooks scowled. "You have tried to be funny at my expense—"

"I'm dead serious, sir, I assure you! I'm very anxious to get my living as a professional footballer."

"Allow me to inform you," said Mr. Snooks, "that we have over forty players on the books of the Easthampton club. All of them are men of proven ability and exceptional merit. And I should not dream of giving a trial to a vagabond like you!"

Mr. Snooks glanced derisively at Jimmy Renton's dusty and dishevelled garments as he spoke.

A burly policeman was passing at that moment, and Mr. Snooks beckoned to him. The arm of the law came hurrying to the spot.

He touched his helmet respectfully, and awaited instructions.

"Remove this insolent young jackanapes from the ground!" fumed Mr. Snooks.

"Cert'nly, sir!"

Jimmy Renton was not feeling very sweet-tempered just then, but he had sense enough not to offer resistance to the law. And he suffered himself to be gripped by the arm and marched off the ground.

"You run along 'ome," said the constable, not unkindly.

And Jimmy went. Not home, for he had no home to go to. He paced the noisy streets of Easthampton, with bitterness in his heart, and with no hope for the future. He was the plaything of a merciless Fate. At every turn he had encountered crushing disappointments. He had nothing in common with the jostling, turbulent crowd with which he rubbed shoulders. He was among them, but not of them. There were none who cared for him; there were none for whom he could care. He was an outcast—homeless, and well-nigh hopeless.

He thought of the happy days at St. Clive's—the days when his father had been well-to-do, and he had revelled in the joyous routine of school and sport. Life had resembled a picnic in those days; now it resembled a battlefield.

Jimmy Renton was down and out. And the only consolation he had, in that dark hour, was the knowledge that he had several pounds in his pocket.

But when he groped for the wallet in which his notes had been kept, he uttered an exclamation of dismay.

The wallet was gone! It had doubtless been stolen by a pickpocket during the football match.

Jimmy Renton stopped short, and a sob rose in his throat.

All hope was gone now. He was utterly destitute; alone in a strange city, without a penny in his pocket.

He was conscious of gnawing hunger. But his appetite would have to remain unappeased. He hadn't even the price of a meal. He had nothing but the clothes he stood up in.

The winter dusk descended upon the busy streets of Easthampton.

Finally, the outcast wended his way towards the docks. And here he found shelter for the night.

It was a very crude shelter, but it at least afforded protection from the elements.

The pangs of hunger kept Jimmy Renton awake until a very late hour, but at last he fell asleep from sheer exhaustion.

His slumber was disturbed by unpleasant dreams. When he awoke, it was still dark; but Jimmy was so

cramped and chilled that there was no more sleep for him that night. And for hour after hour he lay awake, listening to the roar of the sea and to the shrieking of sirens.

Never had Jimmy Renton felt so utterly wretched and despondent as at this crisis in his affairs.

And over and over again he asked himself the question:

How was it all going to end?

Loyal to His Chum!

DAWN flushed up over sea and land.

Jimmy Renton staggered to his feet, and stretched his cramped limbs. He was cold, hungry, and despairing.

More than once his glance wandered to the water's edge, and he was prompted to put an end to it all—to sever the knot of life and all its troubles.

But that was the coward's way. And Jimmy Renton was no coward. Even in his present plight, when cowardice might have been excusable, he possessed a certain measure of fortitude, though hope had long since fled.

Early though the hour was, there was a stir and commotion in the streets of Easthampton. The first morning shift of dockers were on their way to work.

Jimmy Renton walked aimlessly along the streets, and presently he was hailed by a coffee-stall proprietor.

"Hi, there!"

Jimmy crossed over to the modest stall.

"Down on yer lock, what?" said the proprietor sympathetically.

Jimmy nodded.

"You'd better 'ave summat to eat an' drink," said the man. "It's a perishin' cold mornin'!"

"I've got no money," said Jimmy ruefully.

"That don't matter. It's my funeral."

So saying, the good-natured proprietor served the wanderer with a large cup of steaming coffee and a plate of meat sandwiches.

Jimmy could scarcely find words with which to thank his benefactor. He started operations on the sandwiches, and, by the ravenous manner in which he ate, it was obvious that he had been without food for some time.

The coffee stimulated and invigorated him. The colour came back into his cheeks, and he felt a different fellow.

"I don't know how to thank you!" he said to the proprietor, when the meal was finished.

"Don't try," was the reply. "Look 'ere, kid! You'd better squeeze a packet of these sandwiches into yer pocket. You'll be wantin' 'em later on, I'm thinkin'!"

The man wrapped a number of sandwiches in paper, and insisted upon Jimmy Renton taking them.

This was the first kindness that Jimmy had received since setting out from Burchester, and he was almost overcome. He again tried to stammer out his thanks, and again he was cut short.

"I've bin in the same boat as yerself, an' I know what it's like," said the coffee-stall proprietor. "An' what I says is this 'ere. Cast yer bread upon the waters, I says, and it'll return to you after many days. That's Scripter, that is. An' the time may come when our persitions, laddie, will be reversed."

"If it does," said Jimmy fervently, "I shan't forget to repay this kindness!"

Jimmy's benefactor regarded him curiously. This was no ordinary tramp, he reflected. Jimmy's voice bespoke education and refinement.

"I suppose you're what they call an Adversity man?" said the proprietor.

"No; I'm not a 'Varsity man," said Jimmy, with a smile. "I might have been, but I had to leave school before my time was up, owing to my pater having failed in business."

"An' you're strugglin' along on yer own?"

Jimmy nodded.

"Well, let me give you a tip. You won't find no work in Easthampton. There's a lot of unemployment in this place, though you wouldn't think so, to see all the people swankin' about in swell togs."

"Then you wouldn't advise me to stay here?" said Jimmy.

"No jolly fear! If I was in your shoes, I'd take to the road. If you go as straight as a die in a westerly direction, the road'll take you through the King's Forest to a place called Bourne. Dessay you've 'eard of it?"

"Big seaside resort, isn't it?"

"That's right. An' there's several jobs goin' beggin' there. You'll ave more luck at Bourne than you're ever likely to get in Easthampton."

"Thanks awfully!" said Jimmy. "I'll follow the road—and also your advice."

He shook hands with the proprietor of the coffee-stall, who wished him the best of luck, and then he set out in the direction indicated.

It took Jimmy over an hour to get clear of Easthampton; and then he was surprised to find what charming and agreeable country he was passing through. Even in winter it was glorious.

By the time he reached the outskirts of the King's Forest, Jimmy was all of a glow. He was almost beginning to enjoy himself, and he now laughed aloud at the bare idea of self-destruction.

But by noonday he was fagged, and the old feeling of depression and despair was beginning to steal over him once more.

He sat down on a stile by the roadside, and pulled out the packet of sandwiches. They were all that stood between him and starvation, and he knew that he ought to economise them. But he was very hungry, and he consumed the whole lot at one sitting.

A signpost on the opposite side of the road told him that the town of Bourne was twelve miles away.

"Twelve miles will take some backin'," he reflected. "Think I'll have a jolly good rest first."

And he remained on the stile, idly contemplating the distant stretch of wooded country.

He had met very few persons on the road. A few country yokels, who had stared at him with jaws agape; and a caravan-load of gipsies, moving slowly towards the forest. That was all. He wished he could meet somebody who was in the same plight as himself; somebody who would be ready and willing to share his tribulations and grim adventures.

Jimmy was roused from his reverie by a sound of singing. He was unable to see the singer—the stile stood well back from the road, and the tall hedges obstructed his view—but he could hear the sound of approaching footsteps, and he caught the devil-may-care spirit of the song, which was rendered in a cheerful and melodious voice.

The chorus rang out for the second time. Jimmy Renton listened intently, almost rapturously.

"When you're jog, jog, joggin' along the white road,

With your luck all upside-down;

Well, you don't much care if you're on the right road,

When you're bound for Nowhere Town.

I'm just as happy in the byways,

My ways wheresoever I may be;

For there's no friend waiting along the highways

For a vagabond like me!"

There was something familiar about the voice—something which caused Jimmy Renton's heart to leap.

And then the singer came into view, and Jimmy leapt down from the stile with a whoop of delight.

"Billy! Billy Desmond!" he exclaimed joyously.

The singer halted, and turned a radiant face towards Jimmy Renton.

"So I've found you at last!" he panted. "Thank Heaven! I knew I was on the right track!"

The hands of the two chums met in a tight grip; and it was a long time before the pressure of that grip was relaxed.

"This seems like a dream, Billy!" said Jimmy Renton breathlessly. "What's happened? Have you left the 'Burchester Times'?"

Billy Desmond nodded.

"The 'Burchester Times,'" he said, "has shut up shop."

"What!"

"It's dead—defunct—finished! The merry old rag breathed its last yesterday. And Burchester is now without a local paper."

"But—but how has this come about?" gasped Jimmy Renton, in wonder.

"Wilberforce was arrested yesterday on a charge of criminal libel."

"Phew!"

"And he told his staff that he'd have no further use for their services. The paper's dead, and it's not likely to be resurrected."

"Then you and Rayner are out of jobs?"

"Yes."

"Great Scott!" said Jimmy.

"The first thing I did, on being given the order of the boot," said Billy Desmond, "was to set out on your trail. I've been on the road since late last night."

"You've come on foot?" said Jimmy incredulously.

"No, dear boy. I've brought my motor-bike, complete with side-car. It's at the Forest Arms, half a mile away. I came on from there on foot."

"How on earth did you strike my trail?"

"I made exhaustive inquiries on the road, and eventually came to Easthampton. Then I met a coffee-stall proprietor, who told me all I wanted to know. He said that you intended to tramp through

the forest to Bourne, and I knew you couldn't have got much farther than this."

"But what are you going to do, Billy? What are your plans for the future, I mean?"

"Stroll back with me to the Forest Arms, and I'll unfold my plans as we go along."

The two chums set off together.

"Now, it's like this," said Billy Desmond. "I said just now that I was out of a job, and so I am. But only for a month. I've been offered the job of chief reporter on the 'Daily Sportsman.'"

"Splendid!"

"But they don't want me to start for four weeks."

"And meanwhile—"

"Meanwhile, Comrade James, I'm going to throw in my lot with you. I'm going to help you all I know to get the job that you're dying to get—a professional footballer's billet. We can travel about the country together until you're fixed up. My side-car's at your disposal."

"But I'm stony!" protested Jimmy Renton. "My wallet was pinched at Easthampton."

"My purse," said Billy Desmond, tapping his breast-pocket, "is a common purse. By common, I don't mean cheap. I mean that its contents are for our joint use. I've got a matter of forty quid or so, and that ought to tide us over for a month."

Jimmy Renton flushed.

"You are a rattling good sort, Billy," he said. "But if you think I'm going to sponge on you—"

"Fiddlesticks! There's no question of sponging. We're pals, you and me. And it's to be a case of share and share alike. What's mine is yours, and vice versa."

"That's a jolly one-sided arrangement," said Jimmy, laughing, "considering I've got nothing. I couldn't possibly fall in with your suggestion—"

"If you don't fall in with it, my son, we shall fall out! You don't want me to strew the roadway with your bones, I suppose? Very well, then. Dry up, and don't talk rot! Here we are!"

They had reached the Forest Arms by this time, and Billy Desmond escorted his chum into the private parlour.

"This is one of the jolliest old places I've ever struck!" he said. "Dates back to the time of the king with the ginger locks—old Rufus, I mean. Squat down, Jimmy boy, and I'll get mine host to prepare lunch for two."

With glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes, Jimmy Renton sat down on the settee. And he told himself joyfully that the tide had turned at last!

(Another grand instalment of this magnificent football serial next week.)

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Mr. Lathom marched off with D'Arcy, leaving Pilcher and Grimes looking after them very curiously.

THE COLD SHOULDER!

A MAGNIFICENT LONG,
COMPLETE SCHOOL TALE
OF TOM MERRY & Co. AND
ARTHUR AUGUSTUS
D'ARCY AT ST. JIM'S.

By

Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.

A Question of Dignity!

"D'ARCY!"
"Gussy!"
"Gus!"
The three voices were almost beseeching.

Blake and Herries and Digby, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, looked very much in earnest.

And they were!

There was trouble in Study No. 6 in the School House; there was a rift in the lute, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the ornament of the Fourth, was no longer on speaking terms with his old chums.

It was Blake & Co.'s fault, and they admitted it freely. That ought to have been enough for any fellow—excepting Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Not that Gussy was unforgiving. Far from it. He had a most forgiving temper; he had never been known to bear a grudge, even against unpleasant fellows like Racke or Crooke.

He had forgiven his chums. He had not let the sun go down on his wrath.

But he could not forget!

That was quite a different matter. The dignity of Arthur Augustus had been cruelly wounded. His dignity was his tenderest spot. Any other injury could have been forgiven and forgotten. But this injury could only be forgiven; it could not be forgotten.

Blake & Co. waylaid the Hon. Arthur Augustus as the Fourth came out of the Form-room after morning school. As they ranged themselves in his path Gussy had to stop.

He stopped, but he did not unbend.

He groped in his waistcoat-pocket for his celebrated monocle, adjusted it in his eye, and surveyed the three juniors calmly and freezingly.

"Will you have the extreme goodness to allow me to pass?" he inquired. "Gussy!"

"I beg to remark, John Blake, that I am Gussy only to my friends!"

"John Blake!" repeated the great chief of Study No. 6. "What the merry thump are you calling me John Blake for, you fathead!"

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"I believe your name is John Blake?"

"My name's Jack, you howling ass!"

"I refuse to be called a howlin' ass, John Blake, especially by a fellow I do not know."

Jack—or John—Blake pushed back his cuffs. He was tempted to be guilty of assault and battery upon the noble nose of his estranged chum there and then. But he restrained the impulse.

If Arthur Augustus was to be brought back into the fold of friendship, it could not be by punching his aristocratic nose; Blake realised that.

"I say, Gussy—" began Dig.

"Pway do not address me as Gussay, Wobert Digby!"

"Can't you call me Dig, you ass?"

"Certainly not, as I have not the honour of your acquaintance, Wobert Digby."

Dig breathed hard.

He felt the same temptation as Blake. Like Blake, he restrained it. For the second time Arthur Augustus' Grecian nose had a narrow escape of being turned into a Roman one.

"Now, old chap—" said Herries, in his most persuasive tones, trying to succeed where his chums had failed.

Arthur Augustus interrupted him.

"Will you have the kindness, George Hewwies, not to address me as old chap?" he inquired politely.

"Look here—"

"Wats!"

For the third time Arthur Augustus' noble nose had a narrow escape.

There was a pause.

Arthur Augustus, as his former chums would not move out of his path, essayed to walk round them.

Blake & Co. moved to intercept him, and he was blocked.

He walked further round. Again his old chums moved into his path, and Arthur Augustus stopped.

There was a chuckle from some of the Fourth, who were looking on at this peculiar scene with much interest.

Cardew even winked at Levison, as if the lofty dignity of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not a serious matter at all. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, coming along from the Shell class-room, stopped to look on.

They were interested.

"Dear old Gussy on the high horse again!" Monty Lowther murmured to his companions.

"Gussy—" Blake started once more.

"I wepeat—"

"How long are you going to keep this up?" demanded Blake.

"Keep what up, John Blake?"

"Playing the giddy ox!" growled Blake.

"I refuse to admit for one moment that I am playin' the giddy ox, John Blake."

"If you call me John Blake again I'll punch your silly nose!" roared Blake, showing signs of exasperation.

"I should refuse to have my silly nose—I mean my nose—punched," answered Arthur Augustus frigidly. "I will thank you to allow me to pass. My friend Julian is waitin' for me in the quad."

"Ain't we your friends?" demanded Digby.

"Certainly not!"

"Have you forgotten, then, so soon?" chanted Monty Lowther, and there was another chuckle in the corridor.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Look here, Gussy," said Blake, "we're getting fed up. You've been on the high horse now for two or three days. Come off it!"

"Yes, come off!" urged Herries and Dig.

"Wats!"

"If you say rats to me—" howled Blake.

"Wats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake made a forward movement. His heroic self-restraint was getting near the limit. But Dig caught him by the arm.

"Chuck that, old chap!" he said. "You can't punch sense into Gussy's head. You've tried that before."

"Weally, Dig—I—I mean, Wobert Digby—"

"Gussy, old man," said Tom Merry gently, "don't you think you've kept it up long enough?"

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon the captain of the Shell.

"You misapprehend, Tom Mewwy," he said quietly. "It is my intention

nevah to speak to these fellows again. They doubted my word—"

"Well, you see—"

"I cannot possibly overlook such an occurrence, Tom Mewwy. I am disappointed in them, and shocked at them. I should nevah have believed them capable of such a twangswession of the wules of good taste. In fact, I cannot help wegardin' them as wuffians. I pwesume you would not advise me to be fwienly with fellows I wegard as wuffians."

"Oh, my hat!" said Tom Merry, quite overcome.

The swell of St. Jim's turned back to Blake & Co.

"Pway allow me to pass," he said; "and pway, in future, do not make any remarks to me. I have already said that I do not know you. I do not like remarks from swangahs."

Blake breathed hard through his nose. "You're not going to make it up?" he asked.

"Nevah."

"You won't come back to Study No. 6?"

"No."

"Then we'll jolly well bump you, anyhow!" exclaimed Blake, in great exasperation.

"Weally, you wuffian—"

Tom Merry interposed hastily. "Hold on, Blake! It was Racke of the Shell who caused all the trouble. Go and bump Racke!"

"That's a good idea," said Herries, with a nod.

Arthur Augustus, with a lofty disregard of his old chums, walked round them at last, and pursued his way to the quadrangle. And Blake & Co., feeling that they must take it out of somebody, went to look for Aubrey Racke of the Shell. They bumped Racke with great vigour, and found solace in it; and bumped him again. When they left him they seemed a little comforted; though Racke, to judge by his remarks, did not.

CHAPTER 2.

Wanted—A Second!

TOM MERRY were a thoughtful look at tea in Study No. 10 in the Shell. Tom was thinking about Study No. 6 in the Fourth, and its internal troubles. The rift in the lute in that celebrated study entertained some fellows, but Tom was not one of them. He was really concerned about the affair. Undoubtedly it had its comic side; and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy on his dignity was hard to take with due seriousness. But it was quite possible that the breach, if left unhealed, would widen, until the estrangement became serious and perhaps permanent. And Tom Merry would have taken a great deal of trouble to prevent that.

Gussy was in the right, so far as that went. He had been cruelly misjudged. He had been suspected of "acting the goat" in the manner of Racke and Crooke. The evidence had seemed clear enough, and D'Arcy's lofty refusal to condescend to explain had made matters worse. And now the facts were known the swell of St. Jim's steadily declined to come off his dignified perch.

"It won't do," said Tom Merry. "Pass the jam, Manners. It won't do." "The jam won't?" asked Manners. "No, ass! I was thinking of Gussy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry smiled as his chums chorled. The mere mention of Gussy was enough to excite merriment in No. 10.

"It's funny—" admitted Tom. "It is—it are!" agreed Monty Lowther. "Gussy's proper place is on the cinema. I've told him so often."

"All the same, they've got to make it up," said Tom. "It's up to us to heal the breach."

"Better go to Mr. Wiggs in Rylcombe for that," suggested Monty Lowther thoughtfully.

"Eh? Why?"

"He's a tailor."

"What the thump—"

"My dear chap, a tailor is the best man to mend breeches!"

"You silly ass!" hooted Tom Merry. "Keep that for the comic column in the 'Weekly.'"

"I will," said Lowther, with a nod.

"As I was saying, it's up to us—" continued the captain of the Shell.

"Why up to us specially?" inquired Manners.

"Well, we're the leaders of the School House—"

"Hear, hear!"

"And the kids look up to us to do things for them—"

"Do they?" said Manners doubtfully. "Well, they ought to, if they don't," said Tom Merry. "We're their kind uncles, whether they see it or not. Now, about Gussy—"

Tap!

"Talk of angels!" said Lowther, as the elegant form of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy appeared in the doorway. "Trot in, old top!"

Arthur Augustus trotted in.

"Looking for tea?" asked Tom Merry cheerily. "Sit down!"

"Thank you vewy much, deah boy, but I have had my tea," said Arthur Augustus. "I will sit down, however."

"Oh! You've had your tea in No. 6, after all?"

"Oh, no! I am not diggin' in No. 6 at pwesent. Julian was kind enough to ask me to tea in No. 5. I am doin' my pwep in that studay at pwesent, you know."

"Where's Blake?"

"I weally do not know, Tom Mewwy. I take no interest whatever in John Blake's movements," said Arthur Augustus stiffly.

Monty Lowther closed one eye at his chums—the eye that was furthest from Arthur Augustus.

"Gussy, old man," he said, with great gravity, "have you reflected upon the seriousness of the line you're taking?"

"I twust so, Lowthah."

"You're leaving those three thoughtless youths without their natural guide, philosopher, and friend," said Lowther. "Yaas, but—"

"What is likely to become of them without you to look after them, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry, taking his cue from Lowther.

"I have reflected on that, Tom Mewwy."

"Think of the scrapes they'll get into, deprived of your advice and tact and judgment," said Manners.

"Yaas, I know," said Arthur Augustus, looking quite distressed. "I feah that they will get into feahful difficulties. But it weally cannot be helped."

"For their sakes, Gussy—"

"To err is human, to forgive divine," said Manners.

"Yaas; but—"

"Think of the weird neckties they may buy if you're not there to superintend," said Lowther.

Arthur Augustus gave the humorist of the Shell a rather suspicious look. There was a limit to the extent to which even Gussy's noble leg could be pulled.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Shurrup, Lowther!" said Tom Merry hastily. "Now, look here, Gussy, suppose you let us make it up for you—"

"Imposs, deah boy! Pway do not mention the mattah again."

"But—"

"I feah that it is a mattah I cannot discuss, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "It is a question of dignity, and a fellow is bound to consider his dig."

"But you're not considering Dig, or Blake, or Herries either," objected Lowther, who never could let slip the chance of a joke, good or bad.

"I was not wefewwin' to Wobert Digby, Lowthah. I wegard your remark as fwivolous," said Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass severely upon Montague Lowther.

Lowther affected to collapse in his chair under that severe glance, and Arthur Augustus frowned. He had a feeling that he was not being taken with proper seriousness in Study No. 10.

"I came heah to speak to you, Tom Mewwy," he said, rather hastily. "Will you do me a favah, deah boy?"

"Fifty!" said Tom Merry cheerily. "You'd like me to take a message to Blake?"

"Certainly not! I am not likely to send a message to a fellow I do not know. You wemembah that I had a wov with a fellow named Pilchah last week?"

"The chemist's kid in Rylcombe?"

"Yaas. He had the feahful cheek to wun aftah me, and I had to wun away because I had a new coat on. I have looked for him several times since, and have not thwashed him yet—"

"Oh!"

"However, I have now awwanged to meet him," said Arthur Augustus. "I should like you to come as my second."

"Why not Blake?"

"I wepeat that I no longah know John Blake! Will you act as my second when I fight Pilchah, Tom Mewwy?"

Tom glanced at his chums.

"It's really Blake's job, as your best chum," said Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Blake wouldn't like us to butt in, taking his job off his hands," said Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"I'll ask Blake," said Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus rose to his feet.

"Pway do nothin' of the kind, Tom Mewwy. I wefuse to allow Blake a voice in the mattah at all. I am sowwy I wequested you—"

"Here, hold on, Gussy—"

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy quitted the study abruptly. Tom Merry half rose, and sat down again.

"I suppose I'd better go," he said doubtfully. "The ass ought to take one of his own pals, of course, but—"

"After tea will do," yawned Manners. "Oh, yes!"

And Tom Merry finished his tea serenely, while Arthur Augustus D'Arcy went further along the Shell passage—in search of a second.

CHAPTER 3.

Plenty of Seconds!

"**T**ALBOT, deah boy!"

Talbot and Gore and Skimpole had finished tea when Arthur Augustus dropped into their study.

Talbot nodded to his visitor with a smile, and Gore grinned. Skimpole blinked at the Fourth-Former very seriously through his big spectacles.

"Am I intewwuptin' you?" asked Arthur Augustus politely.

"Not at all," answered Talbot cheerily. "Go ahead, old chap!"

"I am goin' down to Wylcombe to meet that boundah Pilchah and thwash him," explained Arthur Augustus.

"Oh!" ejaculated Talbot.

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"I wequiah a second. Will you do me the honah to come?"

"I'd be pleased, only—" Talbot paused. "Won't Blake expect—" He paused again.

"Pway do not mention that fellow to me, Talbot."

"That what?"

"That person," said Arthur Augustus. "I have dwoopped his acquaintance, and I wefuse to speak to him. I see nothin' whatevah to cackle at, Goah!"

"Don't you!" grinned George Gore.

"Certainly not!"

"Well, I do, old top; and I'll cackle, if you don't mind. Ha, ha, ha!" roared Gore.

"Weally, Goah—"

"Pray allow me to make an observation, D'Arcy," said Skimpole, in his solemn way. "Does it not occur to you, my dear fellow, that your present line of conduct is somewhat ill-advised, and, in fact, considerably obstinate and reprehensible?"

"Bai Jove!"

"I should recommend you," continued Skimpole, "to avoid procrastination in approaching your former associates with a view to reinstating them upon the footing of intimacy they formerly occupied."

"Gweat Scott!"

"Go it, Skimmy!" said Gore admiringly. "Give him the whole dictionary while you're about it!"

"My dear Gore—"

"I wegard you as an ass, Skimpole!" said Arthur Augustus.

"That is not an unusual phenomenon, my dear D'Arcy," said Skimpole gently. "It is a well-known psychological fact that persons with asinine attributes are prone to suspect the existence of these attributes in others—"

"Pway wing off, Skimmy; you are weally makin' my head ache, Talbot, deah boy, may I twouble you?"

"Oh, certainly," said Talbot. "But really, old chap, oughtn't you to make it up with Study No. 6? I don't know what the trouble is, but—"

"I have no objection to explainin', Talbot. That wascal Wacke—"

"Oh, Racke?" said Talbot.

"Yaas. That wottah bowwowed my coat, you know, to pay a visit to the Gween Man, and Blake and the west saw him goin' in, and thought it was I, you know. It was like their feahful cheek to think anythin' of the kind, of course."

"But if they knew the coat—"

"Yaas; but when I told them I hadn't been anywha neah the Gween Man, they did not believe me."

"They preferred the evidence of their own eyes!" suggested Gore.

"Yaas."

"But now they know it was Racke in your coat, I suppose?" said Talbot.

"Yaas; and they have expressed their wegwet for the mistake, which was the pwopah thing to do."

"Then what is the trouble now?"

"My word has been doubted!" said Arthur Augustus sternly.

"Oh!"

"Awful!" murmured Gore.

"I feah that you are speakin' sarcastically, Goah, but I sciously wegard it as vewy howwid."

"But—" began Talbot again.

"I have forgiven them, you know," said Arthur Augustus. "I twist I am not the sort of fellow to beah gwudges. But it is quite impos for me to wesume acquaintance with fellows who have doubted my word. You see, a fellow owes somethin' to his own dignity."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Gore.

"Weally, Goah—"

"Of course, it was too bad," said Talbot. "But as they are sorry—"

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"Yaas, they are sowwy; but that does not altah the fact, you know. Pway let the mattah dwoop, old fellow. Will you come along with me to meet Pilchah?"

"Oh, certainly."

"I shall be weady in about a quartah of an hour, if that will suit you," said D'Arcy.

"Ready now, if you like."

"I have to change my clothes first, deah boy. I am goin' to put on some bld clobber for fightin' in."

"Oh, I see. Right-ho! I'll wait."

"Thank you vewy much, deah boy."

Arthur Augustus quitted the study, followed by a loud chuckle from George Gore. Talbot of the Shell strolled down to the School House doorway to wait for Gussy. The quarter of an hour elapsed, but the swell of the School House had not put in an appearance. There never was any depending on Arthur Augustus when he was changing his clothes. It was an operation that occupied all his thoughts, to the exclusion of all other considerations.

Tom Merry & Co. came along while Talbot was waiting.

"Seen Gussy?" asked Tom.

Talbot smiled.

"I'm waiting for him. He's changing his clobber, to go on the war-path."

The Terrible Three chuckled.

"I'm his second," added Talbot.

"Eh? So am I," said Tom Merry.

"Hallo, what's that?" Blake & Co. were on their way out, and they stopped as they heard the Shell fellows' remarks.

"Gussy going on the war-path?"

"That's it," said Tom. "It seems that Pilcher has ventured to come between the wind and his nobility, and Pilcher has to be slain. We're going to see the slaughter."

"The cheeky ass!" exclaimed Blake indignantly. "He hasn't said a word about it to us."

"Couldn't he come for a second to No. 6?" said Herries warmly. "I've a jolly good mind to punch his nose!"

"Here the duffer comes!" growled Digby.

Arthur Augustus came up, looking much less natty than usual, though he was still quite elegant. Gussy's oldest clothes never looked anything but elegant.

"Weady, Talbot?"

"Quite!" smiled Talbot.

"Quite!" said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I have asked Talbot—"

"You asked me?"

"Yaas; but—"

"And what about us?" demanded Blake.

Arthur Augustus appeared deaf to that question.

"Pway come on, then, deah boys," he said, addressing Tom Merry and Talbot.

"Right-ho!"

Arthur Augustus walked gracefully down the steps, accompanied by Talbot and the Terrible Three. Blake & Co. promptly followed.

They reached the gates and passed out, and in the road Arthur Augustus turned to his former chums with a frown upon his brow.

"May I inquiah what you fellows want?"

"We're your seconds," explained Blake.

"You are nothin' of the sort!"

"Bow-wow!"

"Weally, John Blake—"

"Rats!"

"I object to your pwesence, John Blake!"

"I don't mind," answered Blake affably. "Go on objectin'!"

"Weally, you boundah—"

"Are we going on?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yaas, but—"

"What time are you meeting Pilcher?"

"Half-past six!"

"And it's about two minutes to the half-hour now," said Tom, glancing up at the clock-tower. "Better get a move on!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus walked on hastily. Study No. 6 grinned and followed on, and it was a party of eight that arrived on the village-green, where Master Pilcher was found waiting.

CHAPTER 4.

Mr. Lathom is Shocked!

PILCHER looked a little alarmed at the arrival of that crowd of St. Jim's juniors. Grimes, the grocer's boy, was with him, apparently as his second; and Grimes looked rather war-like. But Arthur Augustus hastened to explain.

"It's all wight, Pilchah! Tom Mewwy and Talbot are my seconds, you know, and Mannahs and Lowthah have come to see fair play. The other boundahs are some fellows who insieted upon buttin' in."

"Ass!" said Blake.

"Fathead!" said Herries.

"Chump!" said Digby.

"I wefuse to weply to appwobwious remarks fwom fellows I do not know!" said Arthur Augustus coldly. "If you are weady, Pilchah—"

"Oh, I'm ready!" grinned Pilcher. "There's a quiet corner over here, behind them trees. Kim on!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The party moved off to the quiet corner, and Master Pilcher threw off his jacket and spat on his hands, preparatory to the combat. Arthur Augustus handed his jacket to Talbot, and his tie to Tom Merry, thus dividing the honours between his two seconds.

"What about gloves?" asked Tom.

"Have you bwought any gloves, Pilchah?"

"Ain't got any!" answered Pilcher affably.

"Bai Jove! I am sowwy to have to fight you without gloves, Pilchah; I weally do not want to hurt you—"

"That's all right—you couldn't!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Who's keeping time?" asked Talbot.

"Leave that to me," said Blake, taking out his watch.

"I wefuse to allow you to act in the mattah, John Blake!"

"That's for the seconds to decide!" answered Blake coolly. "You ought to know the ropes by this time, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Time!" said Blake.

Arthur Augustus yielded the point. The two adversaries faced one another and shook hands, and the combat began.

It was not Arthur Augustus' intention to be very severe with Pilcher. That cheeky youth had "chivvied" him, and, of course, had to be reduced to a proper state of respect; but Gussy intended to deal with him as gently as possible.

Unfortunately, Master Pilcher proved a more formidable antagonist than D'Arcy had foreseen. He did not possess so much science as Gussy, but he had any amount of activity, and heaps of pluck. In the first round, Arthur Augustus' noble nose came into violent contact with a plobeian fist, and the patrician nose suffered considerably thereby. Then Arthur Augustus warmed to his work, and in the second round Pilcher went to grass with a streaming nose.

He came up gamely for the third round, however, and it was a case of hammer-and-tongs, with plenty of punishment on both sides.



"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. His eyes were fixed on the one remaining footpad. His beard and whiskers had fallen off, and in spite of the disguise and mud on his features, Monty Lowther of the Shell was plainly recognisable. "Lowthah, you wottah!" (See page 13.)

Tom Merry & Co. and Grimes stood round, looking on with great interest.

Gussy, to his amazement, went to grass in the fourth round. But he came up cheerily for the fifth.

Although it was a quiet corner of the village-green that had been selected for the combat, it was not long before the fight drew observers to the spot.

Village boys gathered round, and some carters from the Red Cow, to enjoy the scene.

They cheered both sides with great impartiality.

There was soon a large crowd on the spot; indeed, by the time the fifth round was in progress half Rylcombe seemed to be there.

The crowd and the buzz of voices drew the attention of a gentleman who was coming along the road by the green, that gentleman happening to be Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's.

Mr. Lathom blinked at the combatants through his glasses, and uttered an exclamation of horror. He hurried to the spot.

"D'Arcy!" he exclaimed.

"Bai Jove!"

The combatants dropped their hands at once.

Pilcher cared nothing for the arrival of the St. Jim's Form-master, but it was a more serious matter to the juniors.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Blake.

"D'Arcy! I am surprised to see you engaged in this—this ruffianly conflict!" exclaimed Mr. Lathom, greatly shocked. "Your nose is bleeding. Cease this at once!"

"Yaas, sir!"

"Oh, my eye!" murmured Pilcher.

"I am sowwy, Pilcher," said Arthur Augustus politely. "I am undah my Form-mastah's ordahs, you know! Anothah time—"

"What do I hear?" exclaimed Mr. Lathom angrily. "If you should venture to renew this disgraceful proceeding, D'Arcy, I shall report you to the Head! How dare you fight on the village-green, and without gloves, too! I am ashamed of you!"

D'Arcy coloured.

"I—I weally had no other wesource, sir!" he stammered.

"Oh! If this boy attacked you—" said Mr. Lathom, more mildly.

"Oh, no, sir!" said Arthur Augustus at

once. "It was an awwangement, sir—just a scwap, sir—"

"Nonsense! Put on your jacket at once, and I will take you back to the school with me," said Mr. Lathom. "I shall cane you for this, D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, sir!" said Arthur Augustus resignedly.

"Tain't his fault, sir!" said Pilcher sturdily. "I chivvied 'im the other day, sir, that's 'ow it is!"

"That is no excuse!" said Mr. Lathom severely. "Put on your jacket at once, D'Arcy! Your state is disgraceful! As for you others—Blake, Herries, and Digby, you will take a hundred lines each!"

"Oh!"

"You Shell boys will be reported to your House-master!" added Mr. Lathom. "You will all return to the school with me at once!"

"Oh!"

"Come immediately!"

The juniors exchanged dispirited glances.

It was quite useless to attempt to make Mr. Lathom understand that it was "only a scrap," and that there wasn't really any

harm done. The little gentleman was very shocked, and very annoyed. Arthur Augustus donned his tie and his jacket, and held out his hand to Pilcher.

"I am satisfied, if you are, deah boy!" he said gracefully.

Pilcher grinned. "Same 'ere," he said, "and I'm sorry I chivvied you in your noo coat the other day. Only my fun, you know!"

"Pway don't mench, deah boy!"

"Come!" snapped Mr. Lathom.

"I am weady, sir!"

Mr. Lathom marched off with D'Arcy, followed by the rest of the juniors. Pilcher and Grimes looked after them very curiously.

"My word!" said Pilcher.

"Wouldn't care to be in their shoes," remarked Grimes. "And on those blokes to belong to that there school, and be chivvied by that fussy little cove in the 'igh 'at!"

"I believe you!" said Pilcher.

And the two worthies strolled off, congratulating themselves that they did not belong to St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 5.

Hands Off!

"I'm awfully sowwy, deah boys!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that remark in the junior Common-room that evening in the School House at St. Jim's.

He addressed the Terrible Three and Talbot, taking no notice of Blake & Co., who were near at hand. Apparently he was not sorry for them.

"All serene," said Talbot, with a smile.

"What happened to you, deah boy?"

"Report to Mr. Raiton, and a hundred lines each," said Tom Merry.

"Can't be helped."

"A hundred lines," remarked Manners thoughtfully, "is a hundred lines."

"No doubt about that!" granted Lowther.

"Why grouse?" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "It's all in the day's work."

"I am awfully sowwy, deah boys. It is weally too bad. Of course, I had no ideah that Mr. Lathom would drop on us. I have been caned. Weally, these Form-nastahs are vewy dense! They do not seem to compwehend an affiah of honah."

"They don't!" smiled Talbot.

"I would offah to do your lines for you, deah boys, but I am afwaid Mr. Wailton would recogmise my hand."

"Not to mention the spelling," remarked Lowther blandly.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"What about us?" growled Herries.

"We've got a hundred lines each through your playing the goat."

"I vewy much like your lines as well deserved, Hewwies!"

"What!"

"It is a pwopah punishment for buttin' in wheah your pwesence was not required, you know."

"This is what Gussy calls gratitude to fellows for standing by an old pal!" observed Digby.

"Wats!"

"Catch us seeing you through a scrap again!" growled Blake.

"Wubbish!"

"Look here, you ass—"

"Pway wewvain fwom addressin' me, John Blake! I have already requested you to do so."

"Fathead!"

Arthur Augustus walked away.

"Dear old ass!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Still keeping it up? Well, we'd better do those blessed lines, I suppose. Raiton will double them to-morrow if they're not done. It's really high time Gussy made it up with his own study. He can't expect to be

allowed to land other studies in scraps like this. You ought to manage it somehow, Blake. You're his keeper, you know!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Blake gruffly. "Gussy's all right."

"What!"

"Let Gussy alone!" said Digby warmly. "He's not such an ass as some silly asses in the Shell, anyhow."

"Not by half!" said Herries.

"Why, you cheeky duffers—" began Lowther indignantly.

"Bosh!"

"I tell you he's a shrieking ass, and we might have expected to get landed in a scrape along with him!" howled Lowther.

"Rubbish!"

"Rats!"

"Bow-wow!"

"Here, come on, and let's get those lines done!" exclaimed Tom Merry, laughing.

"But these cheeky chumps—"

"Come on, I tell you!"

And Tom caught Monty Lowther by the arm and dragged him out of the Common-room.

They met Arthur Augustus on the landing, on their way to the study. Arthur Augustus glanced curiously at Lowther's somewhat excited face.

"Anythin' w'ong, deah boys?" he asked.

"That idiot Blake—"

"What!"

"That cheeky ass Blake—"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"I've a jolly good mind to wallop him for his cheek!" exclaimed Lowther warmly.

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Blake could make wings wound you!"

"What!" howled Lowther.

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

"Come on, Monty!"

"Wait a minute! I'm going to roll this silly idiot down the stairs!"

"Bai Jove!"

"And as for that idiot Blake—"

"You uttah ass, Lowthah! Blake has more bwaains in his little fingah than you have in your sillay head!"

"Why, I—I'll—"

"Come on!" chuckled Tom.

He dragged Lowther along the passage, followed by the chuckling Manners. The Terrible Three settled down to their impositions, and Monty Lowther, when his wrath had subsided, chuckled.

In spite of the deep breach in Study No. 6, it was evident that there was something left of the ancient amity; and Arthur Augustus and Blake & Co. intended to allow one another to be "slanged" by no one but themselves.

For all others it was a case of "hands off!"

CHAPTER 6.

Something Like a Scheme!

A COUPLE of days later Tom Merry looked in Study No. 5 in the Fourth just before tea-time.

Julian and Kerruish, Hammond and Reilly, who shared that study, were all at home, getting tea—and an elegant junior reclined in the armchair and watched them doing it.

"Gussy here?" asked Tom.

"Yes," said Julian, with a smile.

"Heah I am, deah boy," answered Arthur Augustus.

"You seem to be at home here, old bean," the captain of the Shell remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Gussy's diggin' with us now, you know," explained Harry Hammond.

"And we're jolly glad to have him."

"You are vewy good, Hammond, deah boy."

"Pleased as Punch, bedad!" said Reilly. "Gussy's a nice little boy—"

"Weally, Weally—"

"He talks just like a picture-book, you know," said Reilly. "I'm teachin' him sinse on the subject of Home Rule for Ireland—"

"Wats!"

"Yes, rather—rats!" said Kerruish.

"We have Home Rule in the Isle of Man, and it doesn't do us any harm that I know of."

"Sure, it's different there," said Reilly.

"My deah fellow," said Arthur Augustus, "if I evah become Pwime Ministah, I shall insist upon Ireland havin' Home Wule, and makin' the best of it. Mulvaney minah agwees with me on—"

"Sure, Mulvaney's an ass—and you're another!" said Reilly. "Sure, I punched Mulvaney's nose only this morning—"

"And, sure, he's punched yours!" grinned Julian.

"My only hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I haven't come here for an argument about Orange and Green. I came for Gussy. Gussy, we want you to come to tea in No. 10."

"Thank you, deah boy; but I am havin' tea with these chaps."

"Oh, don't mind us!" said Dick Julian. "Tea's rather skimpy this evening, and you may do better in No. 10."

Arthur Augustus hesitated.

Now that he was estranged from Study No. 6, he had been made heartily welcome in No. 5—as, indeed, he would have been in almost any study in the School House. But he felt that he must be careful not to come too heavily upon the hospitality of Study No. 5, and he felt a certain delicacy about offering to pay his footing there. So he nodded, and rose to his feet.

"Vewy well! If you fellows will excuse me—"

"Right-ho, old top!" said Julian.

"Thank you vewy much, Tom Mewwy. I shall be honahed to accept your kind invitation."

Tom Merry grinned.

"We shall be the honoured parties," he answered. "Come on!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus accompanied the captain of the Shell along the passage.

"We have some other fellows to tea," Tom Merry remarked. "Friends of yours, you know."

"Vewy good."

"Here we are!" said Tom cheerily, throwing open the door of Study No. 10 in the Shell.

Arthur Augustus started as he looked into the study.

There were three guests present, and they were Blake and Herries and Digby of the Fourth Form.

"Trot in, Gussy!" called out Manners.

"Tea's just ready," said Lowther.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did not trot in. He halted on the threshold, with a frown on his noble brow.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—" he began.

"Come on, Gussy!"

"Undah the cirs, Tom Mewwy, I wewet that I am compelled to decline your vewy kind invitation," said Arthur Augustus stiffly.

"Now then, Gussy—"

"Pway excuse me, deah boy," said D'Arcy, in his most stately manner.

And he turned and walked back along the passage.

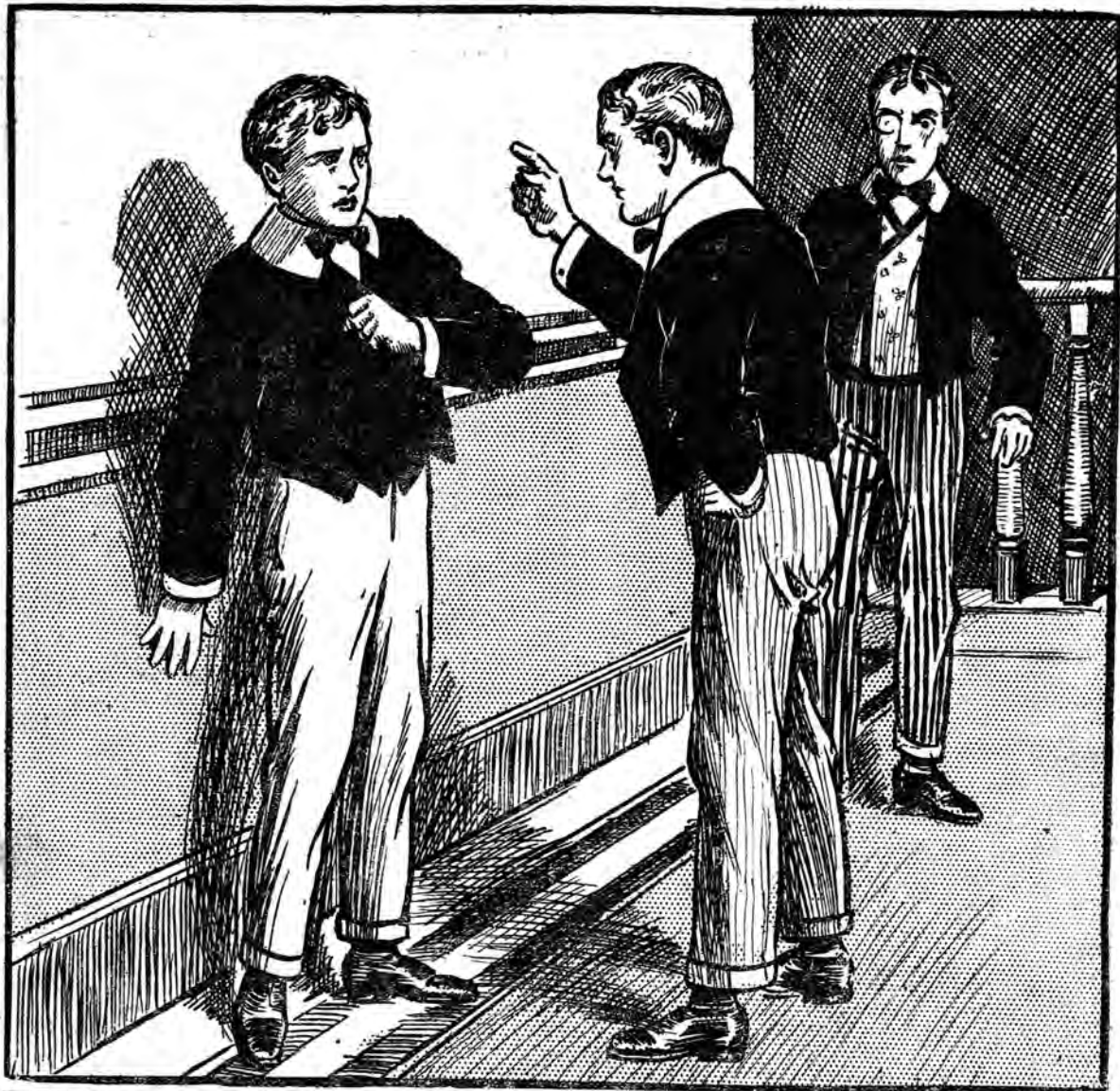
"Oh!" said Tom.

"Take him by the neck and yank him in," suggested Monty Lowther.

Blake gave a snort.

"I've a jolly good mind to," he said.

Tom Merry came into the study with a rueful grin.



A startling scene burst upon the view of the astonished Gussy. Tom Merry was standing before the shrinking figure of Blake, with an upraised finger pointing at the Fourth-Former. "Pay up now, you fraud!" he growled. (See page 14.)

"It's no go!" he remarked.

And the Terrible Three and their guests sat down to tea without the presence of Arthur Augustus.

It had been Tom Merry's kindly idea to bring the four old friends together at tea in No. 10, where, under the genial influence of tea and toast, he hoped that the clouds would roll by. But Arthur Augustus was evidently not to be caught in such an easy trap.

"I'm beginning to get fed up with the silly ass," Blake remarked, as he started on the toast. "It would serve him right to give him his head, and let him run on his own silly way."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Can't be did," he answered. "You've got to bring him round somehow; and it's up to you fellows, as you were in the wrong in the first place. We'll think of a way sooner or later."

"There's nothing doing," said Herries. "I offered to let him take my bulldog Towser out for a run. You'd have thought that would bring him round, wouldn't you?"

"Hem!"

"It didn't," said Herries. "He simply said, 'Bother Towser!' " Herries gave an indignant snort. "Bother Towser, you know—my dog Towser."

"There are unenlightened persons who don't appreciate even Towser, I believe," Monty Lowther remarked solemnly.

"Oh, don't be a funny ass!" grunted Herries.

"If you fellows could think of a stunt," said Digby, "we'd be jolly glad to make the silly ass come round."

"I'm your man," said Lowther. "I've thought of a jolly good idea."

"You're such a funny duffer," said Blake disparagingly. "But what's the idea, anyway?"

"Appeal to his gratitude," said Lowther.

"How, fathead?"

"Rescue him from a deadly peril at the risk of your lives. That is certain to bring him round."

Blake & Co. stared at the Shell fellow.

"Potty?" asked Blake.

"Must be," said Herries.

"Poor chap!" said Digby sympathetic-

ally. "Don't you think you ought to see a mental specialist, Lowther?"

"Lend me your ears, children," answered Lowther, unmoved. "I've thought out the stunt, and it's a jolly good one. You rescue Gussy from some deadly danger—"

"How?" roared Blake. "Is he going to walk into some deadly danger just to give us the chance of rescuing him?"

"Exactly."

"Does this come on often?" inquired Digby, evidently inferring that Montague Lowther was suffering from an intellectual derangement.

"Ass!" said Lowther. "It would have to be worked, of course. Suppose Gussy was set on by a gang of footpads—"

"Where are you going to dig up footpads?" grunted Blake.

"Here!"

"Eh—where?"

"In this study," said Lowther. "Although not brought up to the business, of course, we three would make pretty good footpads, for one occasion only."

"Oh!" said Blake, comprehending. "You mean a jape?"

"Has that just dawned upon your mighty brain?" inquired Monty Lowther sarcastically.

"Oh, don't give us any more of your sarc!" said Blake gruffly. "Let's hear the idea—if any!"

"Well, then, suppose Gussy takes a little walk one evening and he's set on by three ruffianly footpads—us, with whiskers on. You fellows are passing along the road by accident, and you rush to the rescue, and—"

"And give the footpads a jolly good hiding!" said Herries, with a nod.

"Good—we could do that."

"You jolly well couldn't!" said Manners.

"I can tell you, Manners—"

"Oh, give a chap a chance to speak!" exclaimed Lowther. "You rush up and drive off the footpads—we'll let you drive us off, of course—you couldn't do it otherwise—"

"Couldn't we!" exclaimed Herries warmly. "I can tell you—"

"No, of course you couldn't, you ass!"

"Well, my opinion is—"

"Never mind your opinion, Herries; it's not worth stating. We'll arrange to let you drive us off, and there you are, left with Gussy—rescued and grateful, and so on. He simply couldn't help coming round then."

"Not a bad idea," said Tom Merry.

"Not bad," assented Blake. "Of course, we'd have to be careful not to let Gussy smell a rat."

"Well, he's rather dense, at the best of times, you know—"

"I don't know anything of the kind."

"Look here, Blake—"

"Order!" murmured Tom Merry. "Let's settle the giddy plot. We'll all be jolly careful not to let Gussy smell a rat, whether he's dense or not. We can put up a bit of a sham fight to make the thing look real—"

"Not too much sham," said Herries. "Better have it as realistic as possible. If they were real footpads we should pitch into them and wallop them."

"In this case, though—"

"No good spoiling a ship for a ha'porth of tar," said Herries. "Better make it real."

"You thumping ass, do you think we're going to let you wallop us?" howled Lowther.

"I don't see how you'd help it, if we started."

"You'd jolly soon see, if you began!" growled Lowther.

"If you mean—"

"Rats!"

"Order!" roared Tom Merry. "We haven't met here to gas and rag, have we?"

"Well, if Herries—"

"If Lowther—"

"Order!" We'll put up a sham fight, and let Gussy think it's real," said Tom Merry. "That's all right. Now, about the details. We'll get some fellow to take Gussy for a walk, and leave him on the road. We'll be there, got up in all the whiskers of the School House Dramatic Society. We'll rush Gussy over, and handle him rather roughly, to make him understand that it's real—"

"Not too roughly," objected Blake.

"No fear," said Herries. "We're not going to have you fellows ragging Gussy!"

"Well, just roughly enough to make it real," said Tom judiciously. "Then you fellows wade in, and after a sham fight, we run off. Then Gussy comes round, thanking you and all that for the heroic rescue, and everything in the garden is lovely. It's a good stunt."

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"Not bad!" said Blake. "We'll try it."

And the tea and toast had been long finished before the plotters had finished elaborating the details of the plot which was to restore Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to his old place in Study No. 6—if all went well.

CHAPTER 7. Attacked by Footpads!

"B" USY. D'Arcy?" Levison of the Fourth asked that question as he joined Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in the quadrangle an hour or two after the discussion in Tom Merry's study.

The Terrible Three had gone out of gates, Lowther carrying a bag in his hand. And a few minutes later Blake & Co. had strolled out, with a great air of nonchalant carelessness.

When they were all safely off the scene, Levison of the Fourth had approached the swell of St. Jim's, and addressed him.

Arthur Augustus shook his head in response to the question.

"Not at all, Levison," he replied.

As a matter of fact, D'Arcy was far from busy. His glance had followed Blake & Co. as they left, a little restlessly. Possibly the swell of the Fourth was finding himself a little solitary on the perch of his lofty dignity.

"Come for a walk?" asked Levison.

"I—I was thinkin' of goin' in to prep."

"Oh, come down to Rylcombe with me, old fellow," said Levison persuasively.

"I'd like you to come, awfully. I'd like you to give me some tips about a new hat I'm getting, if you would."

"My deah fellow, I am quite at your service," said Arthur Augustus unsuspiciously.

"Come on, then."

The two Fourth-Formers walked down to the gates, Levison smiling, and Arthur Augustus looking rather thoughtful. His thoughtful expression made Levison uneasy for a moment; he wondered whether Gussy was "tumbling." Levison of the Fourth had entered quite cheerily into the little plot that had been hatched in Study No. 10, partly from a friendly desire to bring about peace and goodwill in Study No. 6; partly, perhaps, from a spirit of mischief. But he was soon reassured on the subject of D'Arcy's thoughtfulness.

"I should not recommend you, deah boy, to buy a new hat in Wylcombe," said Arthur Augustus.

"Eh?"

"Bettah leave it for a half-holiday, and go oval to Wayland," said D'Arcy. "I will come with you with pleasuah, and help you select it. In such mattahs it is vewy desivahle to have an expert opinion; and I flattah myself that I am wathah well informed on the subject of toppahs."

"Oh—ah! Yea."

"Bettah still, get it in town if poss," counselled Arthur Augustus. "A toppah is a thing that should, not be bought in too gweat a huwvy. It is not as if you were buyin' a dog or a bike, you know."

"Q-q-quite so!" gasped Levison. "I—I'm not exactly going to buy the topper—I mean, not now. Besides, the shops are shut in Rylcombe. I—I want your opinion."

"I see. I am vewy pleased, old fellow, to place my knowledge on the subject at your service."

"Thanks awfully!"

"Not at all."

And Arthur Augustus discoursed on the subject of toppers as he walked down the shady lane with Levison with great

interest—at least to himself. It was a subject to which Arthur Augustus had given deep thought, and he was not a selfish fellow, by any means; he was prepared to place his expert knowledge at anybody's service.

He hardly noticed that Levison turned off into the footpath through the wood, which was already growing dusky.

"I don't think we'll go as far as the village," Levison remarked. "Let's sit down here and rest a bit."

"Certainly."

Still deep in the subject of toppers, Arthur Augustus sat on a log by the path. Levison listened—perhaps not very attentively. He was surreptitiously looking round that lonely spot, and he grinned as he caught a movement in a thicket near at hand. The footpads were ready for business.

"Did you see me drop my handkerchief, D'Arcy?" asked Levison suddenly.

"Eh? No."

"Wait a minute for me."

With that, Levison ran back along the winding footpath, and disappeared behind the trees.

Arthur Augustus sat on the log and waited.

He had not been waiting more than two or three minutes, when there was a rustle in the thickets, and a hoarse voice shouted:

"Collar 'im, Bill!"

"Bai Jove!"

The swell of St. Jim's sprang to his feet.

Three rough-looking figures rushed out of the thicket, and the next moment Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was seized by three pairs of hands, and borne heavily to the ground.

His hat flew off, and Arthur Augustus gave a loud yell as he bumped into the grass.

"Yawwooh!"

"Down 'im!"

"Bust 'is 'ead if he lifts a 'and!"

"Wot!"

"Oh ewumbs!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

There was little chance of resistance. He was stretched in the grass, gripped by the three ruffians, and one of them was flourishing a cudgel over his head.

Arthur Augustus blinked up at them in amazement and alarm.

Never had he beheld three such low-looking ruffians. They wore thick beards and whiskers, and ragged caps pulled low over their brows, and their clothes would not have done credit to a dustheap. Their faces were quite muddy where they were not covered by whiskers. Three such dirty and stubbly ruffians had probably never been seen before in all the county of Sussex.

"You uttah wuffians!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Welease me at once! Do you heah?"

"Your money or your life!" growled the ruffian with the cudgel.

"I wefuse to give you eithah, you howwid wottah—I mean—"

"Brain 'im, Bill!"

"Help!"

"And over your spondulics!" roared Bill, brandishing the cudgel. "Bump him—I—I mean, thump him, if he don't 'and over the cash!"

"I wefuse— Oh ewumbs!"

Arthur Augustus gasped for breath as the ruffians rolled him and bumped him in the grass. Bill made several swipes at him with the cudgel, but missed.

"Yawwooh! Gwoogh! Help! Weseah!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

And in response to his yell there came a rush of feet and a shout:

"Go for 'em!"

Never had Arthur Augustus been so

glad to hear the voice of his old chum Jack Blake.
 “Wescue!”
 “We’re coming!”
 “Give ‘em beans!”
 And, with a rush, the rescuers hurled themselves upon the footpads.

CHAPTER 8. Very Realistic!

CRASH!
 Bump!
 Yell!
 “Oh, my hat!”

Arthur Augustus sprawled breathlessly in the grass, while his rescuers dealt with the footpads.

Herries had collared the ruffian with the cudgel, and got his head into chancery. The other two were rolling in the grass, overturned by Blake and Digby, who were punching them heartily.

It was not only that Blake & Co. felt it necessary to be realistic, but they were rather carried away by the excitement of the occasion. Indeed, they really seemed to suppose that they were dealing with genuine footpads. And the footpads were hitting out in return, which certainly added to the realism, but unfortunately made the rescuers more excited and in earnest than ever.

“Go for the wottahs, deah boys!” gasped Arthur Augustus, quite forgetting that he was not on speaking terms with Study No. 6. “I’ll help you in a minute, as soon as I’ve got my breathe!”

Tom Merry and Manners jerked themselves away from Blake and Digby, and ran, according to programme. It was really time to run, for their beards and whiskers were coming off in that exciting rough-and-tumble.

But “Bill” and Herries were in a close grapple, and fighting valorously. Herries had thought that a little genuine walloping was called for, and Monty Lowther returned the walloping with interest, and in two minutes both had forgotten that it was a “stunt,” and were hammering one another in the most realistic way possible.

Arthur Augustus scrambled to his feet. “Hold on to the wuffian, Hewvies, old chap!” he gasped. “I’m comin’!”

D’Arcy rushed to help Herries, and Blake had the presence of mind to put his foot in the way. D’Arcy measured his length in the grass again with a howl. “Hook it, you ass!” Blake whispered fiercely.

“Herries, you chump!” breathed Digby.

Recalled to realities, the combatants separated, breathing in gasps, and glaring wrath. Arthur Augustus jumped up again.

“Bai Jove!” he yelled.
 His eyes were fixed on the face of the sole remaining footpad.

Lowther’s head had been in chancery, and the wig and beard and whiskers that had adorned his face were somewhere in the grass, trampled under foot.

In spite of the mud that had been daubed upon his features for additional disguise, Monty Lowther of the Shell was plainly recognisable.

He started to run, but it was too late. “Lowthah!” shouted D’Arcy.

“Oh, my hat!” groaned Blake.

“It is Montay Lowthah!” yelled Arthur Augustus. “They are not footpads at all; it is only a wotten jape! You uttah ass, Lowthah! What do you mean by playin’ such sillay twicks?”

Blake & Co. looked at one another.

The scene had been, after all, too realistic; even Herries understood that now. Too much realism had been as

bad as too little; the whole game was given away, with a vengeance.

“Is it—is it Lowther?” stuttered Blake. “Dear me! Fuf-fuf-fancy it’s being Lowther!”

“F-f-fancy!” stuttered Dig.

“Bai Jove! Weally—”

“I—I shouldn’t wonder if the other two were Tom Merry and Manners,” stammered Blake.

“Never mind; we—we rescued you, all the same, Gussy!” murmured Dig.

“Don’t forget that!”

Arthur Augustus drew himself up.

He groped for his eyeglass, found it, and jammed it into his eye, and surveyed his dismayed rescuers with a cold, icy glance.

Gussy was not a suspicious youth. But really he could not help “tumbling” now that he had recognised Lowther.

“I am surprised at this!” he said coldly.

“S-s-surprised that we came to—to rescue you!” murmured Blake reproachfully.

“Did you weally think they were footpads, Blake?”

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“I—I—”

“Did you not awwange the whole sillay game with those Shell boundahs, Blake?”

“Oh! I—I—you see—hem—”

“Did you not get Levison to bwing me heah so that you could play this sillay twick upon me?”

“Hem!”

“Hum!”

“Ah!”

“I twust,” said Arthur Augustus icily, “that you do not wegard me as such an ass as to be taken in by a sillay twick like this!”

Blake & Co. were dumb. There was no denying it; they certainly had taken their noble chum for just such an ass.

“I shall speak to Tom Mewwy and those othah boundahs vewy severely about this,” said Arthur Augustus; “also to that uttah ass Levison. As for you fellows, pway allow me to wemark that I stwongly object to pwactical jokes bein’ played on me by fellows I do not know!”

“Gussy—”

“I am Gussy only to my fwiends!” said the swell of St. Jim’s freezingly.

“Look here—”

“Wats!”

Arthur Augustus gathered up his hat, and turned on his heel and walked away in the direction of St. Jim’s.

Blake & Co. looked at one another in grim silence. The plot had not been a success.

Three tattered figures came out of the thickets. The Terrible Three, too, understood that the “stunt” had been a ghastly failure.

“Well, this is a go!” said Blake, at last.

“All Lowther’s fault!” said Herries.

“All your fault, you silly owl!” exclaimed Lowther. “Why didn’t you keep to the programme?”

“Didn’t I?” hooted Herries. “Didn’t I punch you—?”

“You ass, do you think I was going to let you punch me? I’ve a jolly good mind to wallop you now!” exclaimed the exasperated Lowther.

“I’ve a jolly good mind to mop up the footpath with you!” said Herries. “Spoiling everything, after all the trouble we’ve taken—”

“You spoiled it all, you born idiot!”

“You did, you crass dummy!”

“I’ll jolly well—”

“So will I—”

“Here, stop that, you chumps!” roared Tom Merry.

But the interrupted combat was in full blast again, and Herries and Lowther were grasping one another, and hammering and trampling, each in a state of towering wrath—owing to the other having spoiled everything!

“Stop it, you silly asses!” howled Blake. “You crass idiot, Lowther! Isn’t it bad enough to spoil everything, without kicking up a row afterwards?”

“Oh, draw it mild!” exclaimed Manners warmly. “You spoiled everything—you silly Fourth Form fags!”

“Why, you cheeky ass—”

“You impertinent fag—”

Another fight was in progress the next moment.

“For goodness’ sake drag ‘em apart!” growled Tom Merry. “I think you fellows might be satisfied with macking up everything!”

“Who mucked up everything?” hooted Dig.

“You did!”

“You did, you mean!”

“Don’t talk rot, Dig!”

“Who’s talking rot?”

“You are, and—”

“You’re talking silly piffle, you mean, and I’ve a jolly good mind to give you what your idiotic pals are getting; and I will if you sniff at me like that—and—”

And they started.

Levison of the Fourth, sauntering back along the footpath, was surprised, but interested, to see three separate deadly combats in progress. Certainly the plot that had been hatched in Tom Merry’s study could not, in any way whatever, be considered a success.

CHAPTER 9. At It Again!

TOM MERRY & Co. did not bestow much of their attention upon Arthur Augustus during the next day or two.

Neither did Blake and Herries and Digby.

The hapless result of their kindly machinations had had a discouraging effect upon them. Also, there were some personal damages to be recovered from.

The plot had failed lamentably; Study No. 6 had not been reunited, but the breach seemed wider than ever. And six juniors were feeling the effects of the unfortunate dispute that had

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followed the failure of the plot. Moreover, Blake & Co., exasperated by a lofty smile on the face of Arthur Augustus when he glanced at their damaged faces, had seized their old chum and bumped him in the passage. Bumping was not an agreeable operation to the swell of St. Jim's, especially by fellows he did not know. His wrath was great; and he came near sending a series of challenges to mortal combat to his former comrades. Fortunately, Dick Julian dissuaded him from taking that drastic step.

Arthur Augustus was still "digging" in Study No. 5; since the estrangement he had not set his aristocratic foot inside Study No. 6, excepting to remove his books. It really began to look as if the friendship of the four inseparables was a thing of the past.

When Tom Merry, having recovered his good humour, and the swelling on his nose having gone down, mooted the subject in Study No. 10, he found a plentiful lack of enthusiasm on the part of his study-mates.

"Bother Gussy!" said Manners.

"Blow him!" said Lowther.

"But—" said Tom.

"Bother all the Fourth Form, and especially Study No. 6," said Lowther, with growing emphasis. "I'm fed up with them!"

"Same here," said Manners.

"Let them make up their silly rows without our help," added Lowther.

"But they won't, or don't, or can't," said Tom mildly.

"Then let 'em do the other thing."

"Didn't we agree that it was up to us—" recommenced the captain of the Shell.

"Bosh!"

"Tommy-rot!"

"Ahem!" murmured Tom.

He gave it up.

The "scrap" in the wood had not been forgotten yet, and was not really likely to be forgotten so long as Lowther had a "mouse" under his right eye, and Manners a swollen nose. Moreover, Study No. 6 felt rather sore, too, and did not seem keen on further co-operation with the Terrible Three. When Tom Merry mentioned the matter to Blake that youth grunted.

"Bother Gussy!" he said. "I dare say you mean well, Tom Merry, but you're such an ass—"

"What!"

"And Manners and Lowther are such a pair of howling chumps, you know—"

"Look here—"

"You see, you only make matters worse!" explained Blake kindly. "I know you mean well, and you can't help being a silly chump—but there you are!"

"Are you looking for another eye to match the one you've got already?" asked the captain of the Shell warmly.

"Bow-wow!"

And they separated before more damage was done.

Tom Merry frowned; but he soon smiled again. He allowed another day to pass, which made a great deal of difference to the damage caused in the scrap, and likewise to the tempers of the juniors concerned. And when the Shell came out after lessons that day Tom observed that Blake had stopped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy outside the Fourth Form-room.

"Dig's had a remittance," Blake was saying, "and it's going to be an extra ripping spread."

"That does not concern me, John Blake!"

"I mean, we want you to come."

"Thank you vewy much; but I fear I shall not be able to accept your invitation."

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tion," answered Arthur Augustus, with elaborate politeness.

"Why not, fathead?"

"I do not know you, John Blake!"

Monty Lowther came up.

"Don't you know this chap, D'Arcy?" he asked, with an air of surprise.

"I do not, Lowthah!"

"Then I'll introduce him—Jack Blake, from Yorkshire—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from the juniors in the passage.

"Blake, this is the Honourable Arthur Augustus Adolphus Aubrey D'Arcy, of that ilk!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Now you know one another!" said Lowther affably.

"I wegard you as an ass, Lowthah!" said Arthur Augustus stiffly, and he walked away. Even a formal introduction failed to make him know Jack Blake.

Blake gave a grunt.

"How's a chap to keep patience with such a howling ass?" he asked, addressing the Terrible Three. "We've got up a ripping spread for him, and he won't come!"

"I'll tell you what to do, then!" said Lowther thoughtfully.

"Well, what?" grunted Blake.

"Ask me instead!"

"Eh?"

"I'll come!"

"Silly ass!" was Blake's reply, and he joined Herries and Dig, and they went into the quadrangle.

Monty Lowther looked pained.

"Lot of good trying to help these fags, isn't it?" he remarked. "Never mind; I'm going to do them a good turn. It's up to a chap as a scout to do good turns. I've got another idea!"

"Better than the last, I hope?" said Manners.

"I hope so!" murmured Tom Merry.

"The last was a jolly good idea," said Lowther warmly. "If those Fourth Form fags hadn't mucked it up by playing the goat—"

"But they did," said Tom soothingly.

"Think of a scheme that they can't muck up by playing the goat, old top!"

"Yes, that's certainly necessary," assented Lowther. "But it isn't easy. I can give 'em a good idea, but I can't give 'em the brains to understand it. No good telling them that, of course!"

"Not much!" said Tom, laughing.

"But it's really a good stunt this time," said Monty Lowther, brightening up. "I've thought it out in the Form-room to-day—"

"I noticed that Linton was ragging you for inattention."

"Well, I can't think out stunts and pay attention to Linton at the same time. But I've thought it out. We'll explain it to those Fourth Form duffers at tea in No. 5."

"Are we going there to tea?" asked Manners.

"Yes; Blake said they had an unusually good spread, so I don't see why we shouldn't. We'll pay our footing with this stunt. Besides, there's only one sardine left in our study, and that isn't enough for three."

"That settles it," said Tom Merry, laughing. "We'll drop in on No. 6 and honour them with our company."

And at tea-time the Terrible Three walked into Study No. 6, wearing their blandest smiles.

"You fellows want anything?" asked Herries.

"Yes!"

"What, then?"

"Tea!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Herries, rather taken aback.

"We've got an idea for you about Gussy!" said Lowther.

"Keep it!" said Blake. "You're welcome to tea, but for goodness' sake don't

give us any of your ideas, Lowther! We've done nothing to deserve that that I know of!"

"Hear, hear!" said Herries and Digby.

But over tea Monty Lowther insisted upon explaining; and after a few sniffs and grunts, expressive of a general disdain for ideas emanating from the Shell, Blake & Co. condescended to take the matter into consideration. And from the chorus of chuckles that might have been heard later in Study No. 6, it appeared that the chums of the Fourth were, after all, much taken with Montague Lowther's latest "stunt."

CHAPTER 10.

The Amateur Shylock!

"PAY UP, you fraud!"

Arthur Augustus jumped.

Never since he had been a St. Jim's fellow had he heard Tom Merry speak in that angry tone.

He quickened his footsteps.

The swell of St. Jim's was coming up the stairs when Tom's voice broke on his ears—a voice very different from Tom's usual tones.

As he came into the passage, a startling scene burst upon the view of the astonished Gussy.

Tom Merry, with a black frown on his face, was standing before Blake, with an upraised finger pointing accusingly at the Fourth-Former.

Blake's attitude was remarkable.

He was shrinking back against the wall, and seemed almost overcome with humiliation and chagrin.

It went directly to Arthur Augustus' heart to see his old chum in that attitude of fear and dejection. Evidently there was something very wrong indeed.

Neither of the juniors seemed to observe Arthur Augustus approaching. At all events, they did not glance in his direction.

"Pay up, then!" continued Tom Merry, in the same bullying tone. "Do you think you can borrow money ad lib and never square?"

"Give me time!" stammered Blake.

"I've given you time enough!" growled Tom Merry. "I think you're a fraud, Blake—an utter fraud!"

"Bai Jove! How dare you call Blake a fraud, you uttiah wottah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, bursting upon the scene, his eyes gleaming with anger and indignation.

Tom Merry glanced at him then carelessly.

"Don't you come butting in, D'Arcy, where you're not wanted!" he said.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Let me alone! I'm dealing with Blake, and if he doesn't pay up the money he owes I'm going straight to the House-master about it!"

"I wegard you as an uttiah wottah, Tom Mewwy, to address Blake in such a mannaah!"

"Mind your own business, can't you?" growled the captain of the Shell. "Do you want Blake to swindle me?"

"You are perfectly well aware that Blake is utterly incapable of swindling anybody, you wottah!"

"This doesn't look like it! Why doesn't he pay up?"

"Give me time!" muttered Blake.

"Rats! That's only an excuse!" Tom Merry knitted his brows. "Where's the money?"

"I—I— Herries and Dig own you as much as I do," mumbled Blake.

"I'm going to speak to Herries and Digby, too," said Tom Merry savagely.

"They've got to square. Didn't I expect the money back? Did you think I was giving it to you?"

"Nunno; but—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Where are Herries and Digby?"

snapped Tom Merry. "I'm going to put it to them plain, the same as I have to you."

"In—in the study," faltered Blake.

"But—but—"

"That's enough!" Tom Merry turned on his heel, and strode away towards Study No. 6. Without troubling to knock at the door, he hurled it open and went in.

Arthur Augustus stared at Blake. That youth was leaning against the wall, his chin lowered on his breast, in an attitude of utter dejection.

D'Arcy opened his lips to address him, and then suddenly remembered that he no longer knew John Blake, and closed them again.

Blake groaned.

"Hallo! What on earth's the matter?" asked Talbot of the Shell, coming along the passage from the stairs.

"N-nothing!" stammered Blake.

"But what—" Talbot eyed D'Arcy, and then eyed Blake, very much puzzled. "You look as if something was the matter, Blake."

"It's—it's nothing! Don't worry."

"Oh, all right!"

Talbot walked on, and was astonished as he went to receive a wink from Jack Blake—a wink of the eye that was away from Arthur Augustus, and unseen by that noble youth. And Talbot grinned as he went on to his study, quite relieved.

Blake sank back into his attitude of dejection, but he roused himself suddenly, and moved away towards No. 6. High voices could be heard in that study.

Arthur Augustus could contain himself no longer.

"Blake!" he exclaimed.

Blake did not seem to hear; he walked, or, rather, limped on dejectedly. Arthur Augustus hurried after him, and tapped him on the shoulder. Blake looked round, but did not speak.

"Blake, old fellow—"

"Oh, leave a chap alone!" said Blake irritably. "Isn't it bad enough to be in trouble, without being worried, too?"

Arthur Augustus gulped something down.

"I did not mean to worry you, Blake," he said mildly. "I—I—I'm wathah worry myself. Do you owe Tom Mewwy money?"

"Didn't you hear him?" snapped Blake.

"Yaas; but I am vewy surprised to see Tom Mewwy actin' in such a wotten way about it. I should nevah have thought it of him!"

"You never know a fellow till you find him out!" said Blake bitterly. "Do you think I'd have borrowed money of him if I'd known that he would act in this way?"

"But why not pay him, deah boy?"

"How can I, when I'm stony?"

"But—but a friend would lend you the money—"

"Herries and Dig are stony, too. There's nobody else that I should care to borrow of."

D'Arcy winced.

"What about me, deah boy?" he murmured.

Blake stared at him.

"You! You're not a friend of mine," he said.

"Nunno; but—but—"

"Oh, give us a rest!"

Blake swung on sulkily to the study and went in. Arthur Augustus stood for a moment or two looking very distressed, and then followed him. His face flushed with anger as he looked into Study No. 6.

Herries and Dig were fairly cringing under Tom Merry's eye. They were muttering excuses, which the Shell fellow refused to listen to.

"Enough of that!" exclaimed Tom hotly. "This is my last word! Either you pay up this evening before prep, or I go to Mr. Railton. Your House-master will make you pay your debts fast enough, if he has to write to your people about it."

"For goodness' sake don't go to the House-master!" gasped Dig.

"Don't!" pleaded Herries. "I—I—We—we can raise the money—say, next week—"

"Last week, didn't you say next week?"

"But—but I mean it—"

Tom Merry burst into a mocking laugh.

"That's enough," he said. "I've told you what I'm going to do. Pay up before prep, or have it out with Railton!"

"I say—"

"Give us a chance—"

"Rats! You're all frauds in this study, that's my opinion. Look out for squalls if you don't pay up before prep, that's all!"

And Tom Merry stamped out of the study, bumping into Arthur Augustus as he passed through the doorway. The swell of St. Jim's drew back haughtily.

"Don't touch me, you wottah!" he exclaimed. "You disgustin' Shylock, I should wegard your touch as a contamination! You are an uttah and inwedeemable wottah, Tom Mewwy!"

Tom Merry passed on without answering. Arthur Augustus looked into Study No. 6 again, and hesitated. He had been going to Study No. 5, as usual; now he seemed to have forgotten that he was a denizen of Study No. 5. After a few moments of doubt and hesitation, the swell of St. Jim's came into Study No. 6, and closed the door after him.

CHAPTER 11.

"And All Was Calm and Bright"

BLAKE & Co. did not seem to observe the presence of their former chum. They were standing in a troubled and dejected group, engaged in discussion in low tones.

"If he goes to Railton—" muttered Dig.

Blake gave a groan.

"It will show up this study," he muttered miserably. "Railton's frightfully down on a fellow owing money. If—if there was time, I could sell my bike—"

"No time for that," said Herries. "I—I wonder if we could borrow the money somewhere?"

"Who'd have expected Tom Merry to act like this?" said Blake bitterly. "I'd never—"

"Never!" said Dig.

"It's our own fault, if we borrow money of him," said Herries. "But—but what on earth are we going to do? I simply can't face it with Railton."

"I can't, either," said Blake. "I—I suppose he meant what he said?"

"He looked like it."

"We—we might borrow a little here and a little there, and—and make it up somehow—"

"Blake, deah boy—"

"Eh, who's that?" Blake looked round angrily. "What the thump are you doing in this study, D'Arcy?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Can't you go to your own study?" demanded Herries.

"This is my stunday, Hewwies."

"Study No. 5's yours!" snapped Dig. "You've been there for nearly a week. You've no right to come back here now. It's jolly mean to come here crowing over fellows in misfortune, too."

D'Arcy turned scarlet.

"Weally, Dig—"

"Oh, let him do as he likes," said Blake wearily. "I don't care. So long

as he doesn't presume to speak to us, I suppose he can stay."

"Blake, old fellow—" murmured D'Arcy.

"Don't call me 'Blake, old fellow!'" snapped Blake. "Keep your fancy names for fellows you know!"

"But, weally—I say—"

"Look here, we don't know that chap, and we're not going to have him chipping into our affairs!" said Herries warmly.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Oh, never mind him!" said Blake. "What are we going to do, that's the question, with that thundering Shylock badgering us for money? Have you fellows got anything?"

"I've got four D!" growled Dig.

"I've got less than that," said Herries. "If the utter beast would wait till next week—"

"You heard what he said."

"Then what in the name of goodness are we going to do?"

"I don't know!" muttered Blake, throwing himself dispiritedly into the armchair.

"How much do you owe Tom Mewwy, you fellows?" asked Arthur Augustus gently.

"Don't ask questions!"

"But, weally—"

"Oh, dry up!"

"Weally, you fellows, I should like to help you out of this scrape," said Arthur Augustus, in great distress. "I had a fivah yestabday, you know, and I have four pounds left. Would that be enough?"

"Lots!" growled Blake.

"I would lend it to you with pleasuah."

Blake snorted.

"We may have come down pretty low," he said. "I dare say you think we have—"

"Not at all, deah boy—nothin' of the kind—"

"But we haven't come down low enough to borrow money of fellows we're not on friendly terms with!" sneered Blake. "If you think so, you're jolly well making a mistake."

"But—but—but we—we used to be friends, you know!" gulped Arthur Augustus. "I—I should vewy much like to lend you the money for old acquaintance' sake—for the sake of auld lang syne, you know, deah boys."

"Rot!"

"Ahem!" murmured D'Arcy.

"Give us a rest!" snorted Herries.

"I weally wish you would accept—"

"Well, we won't, and there's an end of it!" grunted Blake. "If you belonged to the study, and were a chum of ours, like you used to be, it would be different, of course. As the matter stands—"

"Yes, as the matter stands—" said Dig, with a nod.

"You can take your money and yourself out of the study, and the sooner the quicker!" said Herries, quite brutally. "Like your thundering cheek to offer to lend money to fellows you don't know, I think."

Arthur Augustus' sensitive lip quivered. "Pewwaps you are wight, Hewwies, old chap," he said. "But—but I am vewy anxious to help you out of this scwape—"

"I don't see why, as we're not your friends."

D'Arcy winced.

"Weally, Hewwies," he murmured, "I—I— You fellows treated me vewy badly, you know; but—but pewwaps I have been wathah-too-too dwastic with you. I—I have thought several times weally, that—that pewwaps I could over look the mattah—"

Snort!

The snort was not very encouraging, but Arthur Augustus went on manfully.

"Suppose we let bygones be bygones, old fellows?" he said, with a gulp. "I—I am wathah sowwy we fell out. I have been wowwed several times by knowin' that you chaps would be bound to land yourself in some swape without me lookin' aftah you—"

Blake & Co. just controlled themselves. As Arthur Augustus made that statement, they very nearly spoiled the effect of the scene by bursting into a roar of laughter. Fortunately, they didn't!

"Let the dead past bury its dead, you know," said Arthur Augustus. "I am quite weady to bury the hatchet, if you fellows are. I can't say fairer than that, can I?"

"You mean you want to make it up?" asked Blake grudgingly.

"I—I mean I am quite willin' to make it up. Bai Jove, I don't mind admittin' that I should like to make it up, old chap!"

There was no resisting that. Blake had intended to keep it up a little longer, but he couldn't! He melted.

"Gussy, old chap, you're a brick!" he said. "Let's forget that there ever was a row, and go on the same as before, what?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus joyfully.

"Done!" said Herries and Digby together.

"I am vewy glad, deah boys—"

"Good!" said Blake. "We'll have a gorgeous supper in the study to welcome home the prodigal son—"

"Hear, hear!"

"But you're forgettin' Tom Mewwy, deah boys—"

"Oh—ah, yes, of course!"

"You must let me lend you the money to pay that feahful wottah—"

Blake & Co. exchanged glances.

"Hum!—hah!—hem!" said Blake.

"Of—of course! A—a couple of pounds—ahem!—will do it—"

"Heah you are, old chap!" said Arthur Augustus cheerily. "You fellows go and settle with that boundah while I go to the tuckshop."

"Good!"

The clouds had rolled by.

CHAPTER XII.

Re-United!

TOM MERRY looked up with an inquiring grin as Blake and Herries and Dig came into Study No. 10 in the Shell.

"Well?" he said.

"Well!" said Manners and Lowther.

"All serene!" said Blake.

"Right as rain!" said Herries. "Gussy played up like a little man!"

"At present he's got simply an awful opinion of you, Tom Merry," said Dig.

Tom laughed.

"I don't mind, if it's all serene now," he said.

"Oh, it's all right! Gussy's gone to lay in the tuck for the feed of reconciliation—"

"Good egg!"

"I suppose I can't ask you, in the circumstances—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And—and he's lent us two pounds, so that you won't go to the House-master about us—"

The Terrible Three shrieked.

"I'll put it somewhere safe," said Blake.

"I'll give it back to him later, when we explain that we've been pulling his silly old leg. This was really a ripping stunt of yours, Lowther."

"Glad you think so!" said Monty Lowther graciously.

"Lucky Tom Merry took it on, and not Lowther, though," said Herries.

"Lowther would have mucked it!"

"You ass—"

"Well, you would!" said Herries.

"Tommy did it a treat, though, and he's made Gussy think he's a flinty-hearted humbug—one better than Shylock in the play."

"Nice for me!" said Tom, with a grin.

"I suppose Gussy will cut me after this."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sure to!" said Blake. "But he'll come round when we explain. And we'll enlighten the old duffer as soon as he's settled down in Study No. 6, and all is calm and bright."

And Blake & Co. returned to their study in great spirits.

Tom Merry was not mistaken. When he saw Arthur Augustus D'Arcy again, that lofty youth gave him the coldest of marble eyes.

His opinion of the amateur Shylock of St. Jim's was really indescribable in words.

But that opinion changed, naturally, when an explanation was made in Study No. 6 a few days later.

It was with considerable astonishment that Arthur Augustus learned that the whole Shylock scene had been arranged for his benefit, in order to bring him round in the way he should go. But as he had made it up with his old chums, and was once more a chummy member of the select circle in Study No. 6, the swell of St. Jim's felt that there was nothing to be done. He did not feel inclined to break up the happy family once more, and he generously refrained from doing so. He gave his study-mates a very severe lecture instead, to which they listened with due humility, though several disrespectful winks were exchanged in the course of the lecture.

But the clouds had rolled by; and in Study No. 6 all was, as Blake described it, calm and bright. In that celebrated study the last had been seen of the Cold Shoulder.

THE END.

(Another grand story of Tom Merry & Co. next week, entitled "A STERN CHASE!" Order your copy EARLY!)

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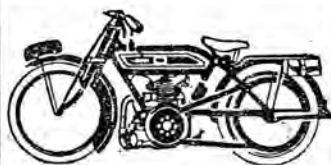
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JASPER STANDISH plans to have his revenge on his enemy, RICHARD HARMER, by kidnapping his son DICK and transporting him to SLAVE ISLAND. He makes a bargain with the owner, HANS MEPPLE, to this effect, and the Dutchman succeeds in carrying off Dick Harmer to the strange island, where he is made a slave. Here Dick meets ELAINE STANDISH, a charming little slave, and on one occasion he saves her from being brutally whipped. One day the two escape from their prison and flee to the other side of the island; but Meppel and his overseers track them with a bloodhound, and they are brought back. The Dutchman announces his intention of making an example of the girl. He proclaims a public holiday throughout the island, and invites Standish to witness the "sport" in his private arena, which is constructed on the plan of an old-time Roman circus.

(Now go on with the story.)

In the Arena!

FROM where the rickshaw brought Standish into first view of the arena, it was possible to look down over the palisade, and he saw that in its centre was a sanding ring of quite one hundred and fifty feet in diameter.

It was sunk some twelve feet beneath the lowest of the many tiers of seats stretching right round the ring, and around its top were stout iron bars.

Standish shuddered. There was no question as to the object of the grill being there. He had half-thought that Hans Meppel was exaggerating when he spoke of his arena, and of slaves who had offended being given to wild beasts.

The place had been purposely built for the carrying out of such exhibitions of fiendish cruelty and wickedness. The iron bars were there to protect the sightseers from whatever kind of savage animals Meppel was accustomed to make use of to devour his unhappy victims.

Jasper Standish had grown hardened during the long years he had spent in unjust imprisonment, but he was not so immune from human feeling that he did not experience a sensation of horror now.

He wanted to order the slave pulling his rickshaw to turn back, yet, somehow, could not voice the words. He was fascinated with curiosity and the grim ruthlessness of the thing, and he knew that he must take his seat and watch, though he shuddered through the whole terrible performance.

Again he questioned Hans Meppel's

reason; nay, hardly questioned it now, for he was sure that there was a kink of insanity in the huge Dutchman's brain. The man imagined himself a modern Caesar, and evidently tried his best to live up to his obsession, no matter what the cost in the sufferings and lives of others.

Standish saw that already three-quarters of the seats, which he estimated would accommodate quite a thousand or more people, were full.

Every slave upon the island—men, women, and children, white, yellow, and black—seemed herded into the seating-space not still unoccupied. Standish guessed that one or more of their fellows were destined to die in the arena, and they were here to witness the "example" Meppel had spoken of.

The overseers and their children and womenfolk began to pass through the entrance and crowd into the seats still vacant.

Standish had never set foot in Spain, or he might not have wondered so greatly at the delight with which these people anticipated watching fellow-beings being tortured and done to death. Had he but known, the spectacle was very like that to be witnessed at any bull-fight in Madrid or elsewhere in that country.

When people are led to regard cruelty and bloodshed as sport, they are apt very soon to take real pleasure in watching it. It was so with the Romans in the days of the gladiatorial combats and the persecution of the Christians.

At a matter of fact, much that was going on in the daily lives of those who peopled Slave Island was akin to the dark ages.

For instance, no sort of firearm was to be seen in possession of the overseers. Whether this was just a whim of Meppel's, or whether he forbade weapons of the kind being brought there in case they got into the hands of the slaves, and he was unexpectedly assassinated, it is hard to say; but the fact remained.

When the overseers hunted, they used bows and arrows, slings, knives, or swords, and as Standish studied those now in charge of the slaves, he saw that every one was armed with these latter weapons, evidently to be in a favourable position quickly to kill any signs of rioting or mutiny that might occur amongst the slaves' ranks whilst the so-called sports were in progress.

The Dutchman conducted Standish to a magnificently-decorated box, built to face the arena, and set aside for his private use.

His appearance therein was greeted by

a cheer from the overseers; and tersely-breathed orders, or, perhaps, it would be more exact to say threats, brought the slaves in a multitude to their feet, and they were forced to hail the arch-tyrant with cheers, too.

Standish seated himself beside the burly foreigner, and waited for whatever was to come with a forced indifference which was belied by his pallor and his tightly-set lips. Here we can leave him for the moment, and return to Dick Harmer.

It was immediately after he had been brought back to the settlement that the lad had been bastinadoed, and, although his feet had been lacerated, and for two days he had been quite unable to stand upon them, he was affected now only with a slight limp.

He had been marched from the cell he had been occupying in the prison and brought here early this morning, and, after being compelled to help in the sanding of the arena, he had been given a seat in the front row just behind the iron grill running round the arena.

With every nerve on edge, the boy waited and watched the door leading to one of the chambers in the basement of the great structure. One of the slaves had whispered to him that it was through here that anyone who was doomed to death was thrust by the guards and gaolers.

Hans Meppel's words as to Elaine being brought here and "made an example of" were repeating themselves again and again in his brain, and in the keenest anxiety and dread for the brave and staunch girl who had faced so much peril with him he riveted his eyes upon it.

Had the Dutchman spoken idly, or would he presently see Elaine forced through that sinister-looking grill, to be torn limb from limb by some savage denizen of the jungle?

Had his own fate hung in the balance Dick could not have been more concerned; indeed, with the fatalist-like pluck that was the natural inheritance of the British blood flowing in his veins, he would probably have been far less affected. As it was, he was white to the lips, and ever and again found himself violently trembling.

There was a mighty flourish of trumpets, and the sports commenced.

Into the arena strode two magnificent blacks, both stripped to the waist and glistening with some kind of oil. There was a wrestling match between them that was long and desperate, and ended in the loser being thrown to the sand with a

couple of ribs broken and his senses gone.

After this came more vicious sport—sport as it was known to Meppel and his equally-villainous hirelings and companions. Again it was two gigantic negro slaves who took the arena, but this time they fought each other with swords, and showed a skill suggesting they had been carefully trained especially for the exhibition.

Each carried a shield and wore a metal helmet. It was an ancient gladiatorial battle over again, and hugely delighted Hans Meppel and his men.

At length, both were so badly wounded that they could scarce stand upon their feet. Then men with whips—scourgers—rushed into the arena and lashed at the combatants' naked backs, urging them to fresh efforts.

Shuddering, Dick Harmer turned away his head, and it was only afterwards that he learned the fight ended in both men collapsing from loss of blood and exhaustion and being carried from the ring.

There came a deafening sound of trumpets, and Dick again turned his eyes towards the arena.

Then a sight met his gaze that caused him to start up in horror.

As if the trumpet-calls had been a signal, the iron grill across the great sanded space had been thrown open, and, amid a tense, expectant hush, had rushed into the arena a gigantic black bull, bearing upon its horns the figure of a girl—Elaine!

Dick Harmer stood like a statue, his eyes fixed upon the snorting and stampeding animal and the girl. He saw that she was bound hand and foot and lashed to the animal's horns, and the lad knew that it might be only the matter of moments ere it lowered its mighty head and gored her to death.

The bull abruptly slackened the mad pace at which it had been tearing round the ring; but it was not to be allowed to quieten down.

Into the arena some overseers forced half a dozen male slaves dressed as bull-fighters, though they had no weapons with which to defend themselves or attack the animal, and merely carried red cloaks with which to enrage it.

As they waved these the animal was driven to fury. It rushed at first one, then the other, causing the slaves to scatter for their lives. Then, as if suddenly angered by realising the presence of the burden upon its horns, the bull bellowed and reared its head, and Dick heard Elaine cry out faintly in terror.

Her cry acted upon him like an electric shock. He came out of the spell of horror that had held him inactive, and was galvanised into life.

Quick as a flash he snatched a sword from the belt of an overseer beside him. Before the man could recover from his astonishment, the lad had gripped the weapon between his teeth—had taken a leap that enabled him to clutch the top of the iron grill running round the arena—had swung himself astride it, dropped to the coping on the opposite side, and taken the further twelve-feet drop to the sand below.

He stumbled to his hands and knees, but in a trice had scrambled up and whipped the sword from between his teeth.

With a frantic shout, and brandishing the weapon, he rushed straight at the bull, though in despair he told himself

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that he must be too late, for the animal was in the very act of lowering its head to gore its helpless victim.

Reprieved!

TOO late! And yet—was he?

But for the hoarse cry that came from Dick's throat and the limping run he made across the sands, the bull in another second would have driven its horns deep into the human burden lashed to its head. The lad's mad shout caused it to pause, however, swing up its head, and glare at him in surprise.

He did not pause. All the sterling British pluck that was his was roused, and, impeded only slightly by the tenderness of his recently-bastinadoed feet, he continued his desperate rush for the gigantic black brute.

The bull bellowed in fury as it suddenly seemed to understand that, whilst others had fled from it, this slip of a boy was actually going to attack it.

It lowered its head and rushed to meet him, and in that tense and thrilling moment the silence of death hung over the packed amphitheatre.

It was as if the thousand-odd people who watched caught their breath as one, and held it, waiting with every nerve keyed up to its highest pitch to see what would happen.

Even Hans Meppel, usually stolid enough where the perils or sufferings of others were concerned, clutched hard at the arm of Jasper Standish and stared down to the scene being enacted upon the sand, excited, perhaps a little awed.

Ah! The bull was upon him—had run him down! And, yet no! Just in time, but only just, Dick Harmer had leapt on one side, and then his sword flashed as he made a deadly lunge at the bull.

A roar of pain and rage welled up from the coarse, thick throat of the animal, showing that Dick's thrust had got home, though it was apparently not seriously.

The bull showed no signs of tottering, but wheeled about with a surprising agility for a beast of its bulk, and once more it rushed full tilt at the intrepid boy.

Again Dick Harmer struck out with his sword; but this time he missed, or almost so, the blade merely inflicting a slight wound on the bull's foreleg, which drove it to renewed fury.

Its eyes were bloodshot and glaring with madness. In its animal brain was the lust for blood—the desire to rend and kill.

For a moment it did not seem inclined to attack Dick again, though its instinct of self-preservation warned it that it must watch him closely, and its wrathful gaze was upon him. It appeared again to realise the weight of the burden lashed to its horns, and to feel hampered by it, and for the second time it made to lower its head to gore at the girl and try to rid itself of her slender body.

Dick bounded forward, and for the second time the brute was cheated of its prey. On this occasion the infuriated rush it made at the lad was doubly quick, and it took him more or less by surprise.

He had expected it to pause again and give him time to leap away ere it bore down on him.

Its lowered head—or rather the feet of the helpless and half-swooning girl bound to its head—caught Dick's shoulder as he attempted to fling himself

out of danger, and with a thud he measured his length in the sand.

With a bellow of triumph, the bull checked its career, wheeled round, and, probably forgetting that the girl must necessarily be gored first, tried to use its horns upon him. Dick was in a sitting posture in a trice, and, though it was touch and go, the bull found him its match.

Before the cruel horns could do their work, Dick had thrown himself just out of their reach, and, as the bull swept past him, he managed to drive some six inches of his blade under its foreleg.

Fortunately for Elaine, the agony caused it to rear its lowered head. The roar it uttered was deafening, and echoed and re-echoed over the arena.

Dick was upon his feet before it could wheel round again, and he was at it with a run that met it just as it was turning.

It was doubtful if any of the onlookers could be sure what happened then. To them, lad and bull were so mixed up that they seemed to blend into one.

They heard the animal give yet another roar of pain and rage, saw Dick's sword buried almost to the hilt near its shoulder, saw its great body collide with him and hurl him beneath its stampeding hoofs.

Whether or no they struck him no one could have said, yet it seemed not, and that he escaped by a miracle, for hardly had the animal passed over him than he was scrambling to his feet.

Dick's sword had been left in the body of the bull, and it was plain had inflicted a fatal wound. The animal went for some eight to ten yards at a furious rush, then wallowed like an ill-balanced ship in a heavy sea, and collapsed to its knees.

Once it raised its head and bellowed, but only once! The head, with its now unconscious burden, slowly drooped, and finally fell limply forward with a jerk. It rolled over upon its side, a quiver shook its limbs, and then it laid quite still in death.

Elapsed a breathing space. Scarce able to credit the evidence of their eyes, overseers and slaves alike stared, dumbfounded.

It seemed impossible that the young, if sturdy, British boy could have killed the enraged and maddened bull, and, still more, apparently saved its intended victim from any serious injury, and remained himself next to unscathed!

But it was an accomplished fact. There he stood, breathing sharply, and pale because of his anxiety for the girl, but as handsome and full of life as he had been when he had scaled the grill and leapt into the arena.

No one thought of stopping him as Dick stepped quickly to the dead bull and cut Elaine's bonds with his sword. He knelt by her side, having freed her, and supported her head upon his arms.

Then the amazed silence that had hung over the amphitheatre was broken. It seemed that simultaneously everyone who watched cheered the plucky boy.

The slaves shouted their admiration, and far from checking them, the overseers joined in. The latter were bad men, one and all, but they could respect courage such as the boy had shown.

"Aoh, himmel! Put he vass the teufel of a lad!" Hans Meppel grunted, stroking his beard; and even he was impressed. "The girl must die in some o'ther way; but he haf given us such sport dot I shall him punish nod."

Jasper Standish sat staring down into the arena for a moment, then he turned

quickly and addressed his Herculean companion.

"You are still intending to kill the girl?" he exclaimed, surprised.

"Why not? She has all the discipline of the island defied! Jah, shut a moment, and I will think of some amusing way in which she can be despatched."

"You callous villain!"

Hans Meppel started in amazement, and stared at Jasper Standish as though he could not credit the evidence of his ears.

Had the man really called him a villain, and callous into the bargain—he who had but to say the word to have him made a slave for the rest of his life, or even end his days down in the arena beneath them!

He could hardly believe it, yet from the expression of Standish's face he knew that he made no mistake.

"Take care, mynheer!" he said, his eyes gleaming angrily. "It is no wise to insult a man with mein power!"

Jasper Standish shrugged his shoulders. He knew that to show the least fear of the man would be fatal, and he was perfectly cool.

"My dear Meppel," he said, with his characteristic drawl, "I scarcely meant it as an insult, and, after all, why take it as such? You obviously delight in

what you are sitting here to watch, and, all said and done, you are callous and a pretty hardened scoundrel. But it is not for me to despise you because of that, for I am no saint since I was shut up unjustly in Blankmoor prison. By Jove, though, I am sportsman enough to consider that the girl should be given a chance of life after the terrible fate she has escaped."

"A matter of opinion," Hans Meppel sneered, still stroking his long beard and regarding Standish coldly.

Again the latter shrugged, but his indifference was not exactly genuine.

What was coming over him? he asked himself. He had thought that every spark of human sympathy and pity had been crushed out of him years ago; yet here he was finding himself sorry for the pathetic little figure held in the strong arms of the lad below.

The girl was curiously like someone he had known at some time in the past, he thought. Who was it she so strongly resembled?

Perhaps it was this likeness that caused his strange anxiety for her to be relieved from death.

"Let her off, Meppel," he urged. "Hark how even your own overseers are cheering! Look at their faces, and

see the admiration they cannot help feeling for the dare-devil bravery the boy has shown! Do you think it would add to your popularity if you made all his plucky efforts, come to naught and had her done to death, after all?"

"Perhaps you are right," the Dutchman admitted; and as he had been letting his thoughts run in a very similar channel, he spoke with surprising suddenness. "But why should you wish id? Dot iss what puzzles me."

Jasper Standish shook his head.

"I can't say; but I do wish it," he answered simply.

The door across the arena, through which the guards and scourgings came, swung sharply open, and several overseers, their swords drawn, made for the boy and his unconscious companion.

Hans Meppel rose to his feet, and took up from where it had stood beside his seat a ponderous megaphone.

"Tell the poy to t'row down hiss sword, and no harm shall come to him or the girl!" he thundered through it, his voice carrying to the farthest points of the great amphitheatre. "I haf decided to spare t'em both!"

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