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MONTY LOWTHER HELPS THE COLONEL TO SOUP !

(An amusing incident from the magnificent, complete story of Tom Merry & Co.—"The St. Jim's Hotel-keepers!"—Inside.)

FROM SCHOOL TO HOTEL! Tom Merry & Co. have turned their hands to many jobs in the past with more or less success, but their latest occupation bids fair to outshine all the others. Certainly they occasion no little surprise as—



THE ST. JIM'S HOTEL-KEEPERS!

A Splendid New Extra-Long Complete Story of Tom Merry & Co., the Cheery Chums of St. Jim's.

BY
Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1. No Luck for Trimble!

"O H, well hit, sir!" "Good shot, Figgy!" The ball came speeding over the green turf, red-hot from George Figgins' bat. After it pelted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, his cheeks flushed, his monocle trailing at the end of its cord.

Fast as Gussy ran, however, the ball travelled faster. It disappeared under the ropes, and Arthur Augustus pulled up, panting, and signalled a boundary.

That was not the first boundary-hit that Figgins had made. The New House skipper was in first-rate form, and he was giving the School House fieldsmen plenty of leather-hunting.

Now that there was no further need to run, Arthur Augustus retrieved the ball at his leisure. He threw it in, and then mopped his perspiring brow with a cambric handkerchief.

"Bai Jove!" he panted. "Those New House beggahs are givin' us plenty of wunnin' about to do!"

"Never mind," interposed a pleasant girlish voice. "It will be your turn presently."

Arthur Augustus turned, and bestowed the charming smile he always reserved for members of the fair sex.

It was Doris Levison, the pretty and vivacious sister of Levison, of the Fourth, who had called to him. Doris was ensconced in a deck-chair, enjoying the cricket. In her neat tennis frock, and white shoes and stockings, she made an exquisite picture in an ideal setting.

Doris smiled up at Arthur Augustus.

"All alone, deah gal?" inquired the swell of St. Jim's. "Fatty Wynn, an' Kerr, an' Wedfern were with you a few minutes ago. You don't mean to say they have had the shockin' bad mannahs to desert you?"

"They've gone to the tuckshop for refreshment," smiled Doris. "They begged me to go with them, but ginger-beer and tarts don't appeal to me at the moment. I'm too interested in Figgins' batting. The New House are doing splendidly, aren't they?"

Arthur Augustus nodded, and his eye sought the distant score-board.

"Eighty for four wickets," he announced. "That is quite a respectable score, an' Figgins must have made at least half the wuns. He's still goin' stwongly, too. Now, if only Tom Mewwy would let me take a turn at bowlin'—"

"Look out, Gussy!"

It was a warning shout from Gussy's comrades in the field. Again the ball came speeding towards the boundary, and Arthur Augustus had to sprint a dozen yards to save it. He dived for it in the nick of time and threw it in; and Levison, who was bowling, signalled to him to stay where he was. Thenceforward, Arthur Augustus had no eyes for the charming Doris. The batsmen kept him busy.

But there was no danger of Doris Levison being left to languish alone. Beside her was a vacant deck-chair, and

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into it dropped Baggy Trimble, the plump Falstaff of the Fourth. That deck-chair was not constructed to accommodate fourteen stone of ponderous humanity, and it creaked ominously, with a sagging of canvas as Trimble's huge bulk descended into it.

"Hallo, Doris!" said Baggy genially.

Doris Levison eyed the fat junior with extreme disfavour.

"Miss Levison to you, please!" she said coldly.

But Trimble was impervious to rebuke.

"I say! I've been waiting all the afternoon for a chance to speak to you," he said. "But every time I came towards your chair those New House bounders turned and glared at me, and shook their fists. Where have they gone, Doris—I mean, Miss Levison?"

"To the tuckshop," said Doris. "They will be back at any moment," she added significantly.

But Baggy, scanning the horizon, saw no sign of the New House cricketers returning; and he proceeded to make himself comfortable.

Trimble was too obtuse to see that he was not wanted—that Doris Levison resented his company being foisted upon her in this way. Trimble believed himself to be good-looking—quite handsome, in fact. He deemed himself an Apollo, whereas he was merely an apology! Further, he believed he had a taking way with him, and that members of the fair sex showed a predilection for his society.

Certainly, Doris Levison showed no such predilection. She half-rose and moved her deck-chair a yard away from her unwelcome companion. That ought to have been a sufficient hint to Baggy Trimble; but it wasn't. The fat junior drew his own chair directly alongside that of the girl.

"I can't think what you see in watching this sort of cricket, Miss Levison," said Trimble. "It's awfully tame. The batting's feeble, and the bowling's worse. If it wasn't for personal jealousy on the part of the other fellows, I should be playing for the School House, and then you'd see some real cricket—not this kindergarten stuff!"

Doris Levison smiled in spite of herself. Trimble's vanity was colossal; it was also amusing.

"But I didn't come here to talk cricket," Baggy went on.

"Indeed?"

"No. I want to speak to you about this week-end party that's going down to Gussy's place."

Doris raised her eyebrows. It was a fact that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was taking a large party to Eastwood House for the week-end, with the Head's permission. It was to be a long week-end—Friday evening till Tuesday morning—and the chosen chums of Arthur Augustus were keenly looking forward to it. But the arrangements had not been broadcast, and Doris wondered how Baggy Trimble had come to know about it.

Her curiosity on this point was soon satisfied.

"I—I happened to hear you all jawing about it in Gussy's study," explained Trimble.

"You were eavesdropping?" said Doris, with a scornful curl of her lip.

"Nunno—not at all! I happened to be passing the door of Study No. 6, and it stood half-way open, so I couldn't help hearing what was said. Besides, Gussy's got such a

powerful voice, you know. He always bellows his secrets for all the world to hear."

Doris Levison said nothing. Another mighty hit of Figgins' claimed her attention. She clapped her hands and joined in the general applause.

"Never mind the cricket, Miss Levison," said Baggy impatiently, sidling closer to his charming companion. "Look here, there's a big party going down to Eastwood House this evening. There's the two D'Arcys, major and minor; there's Merry and Manners and Lowther, and Figgins and Kerr and Wynn, and Blake and Herries and Digby. Then there's yourself; and Gussy's cousin Ethel is coming down from London by the four o'clock train to join the party. And Lord Eastwood is sending a couple of touring cars to St. Jim's this evening to pick you all up."

Doris Levison stared. Trimble's knowledge of the arrangements was both extensive and comprehensive. The fat junior seemed to know as much about the plans as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy himself.

"There are thirteen in the party," Trimble went on. "I've pointed out to Gussy that thirteen is an unlucky number. You know what happens when thirteen people sit down to a picnic? Either it starts raining cats and dogs and spoils the show, or else a mad bull comes charging on the scene, and scatters the picnickers, and tramples the grub. Thirteen's a fearfully unlucky number. Don't you think so, Miss Levison?"

"I'm not superstitious," said Doris shortly.

"But—but supposing there's an awful smash-up on the road, and one of the cars turns a somersault and lands in the ditch?"

"You are very cheerful!" said Doris, smiling slightly.

"But calamities of that sort are bound to happen when you've got a party of thirteen," said Baggy Trimble. "I remember once in London getting on a No. 13 bus, and there were thirteen passengers inside, and at thirteen minutes past three, just as we were passing No. 13, Piccadilly—"

"I am not a bit interested in your reminiscences!" broke in Doris.

"Oh, really—" Baggy felt that he was not making much headway with this very aloof and disdainful young lady. But he hurried on to his main theme.

"I warned Gussy what would happen if he took a party of thirteen to Eastwood House," said Baggy. "I told him it was asking for trouble, and I urged him to make the party up to fourteen by including me."

"Oh!" murmured Doris. "And what did he say to that?"

Baggy Trimble scowled.

"He fairly snapped my head off, and said he wouldn't dream of it. He refused point-blank, in fact. It's a jolly shame! Don't you agree, Miss Levison?"

Doris shrugged her shoulders.

"D'Arcy has a perfect right to choose whom he likes," she said. "It is his party, and you have no claim to be included."

"But—but I'm one of Gussy's oldest pals!" protested Trimble. "I've stood by him through thick and thin, through storm and shine. I've coached him in cricket; I've got him out of no end of scrapes; I've stuck closer than a brother, as the saying goes. And now he turns round and gives me this smack in the face! Talk about rank ingratitude!"

Doris Levison made no reply; she was intently watching the cricket. If Baggy Trimble imagined that he would be able to play on her sympathy he imagined a vain thing.

"Now, I want to ask you, Miss Levison," he went on, "if you would—ahem!—put in a good word for me."

Doris turned her head at that. She bestowed a look upon Baggy Trimble which ought to have wilted him.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"Simply this. You've got a lot of influence with Gussy: you could twist him round your little finger if you wanted to. He has turned down my request, but he wouldn't turn down a request that came from you. So I want you to ask Gussy if I can join the party. Tell him it's your earnest wish, you know, and then he won't dare to say no."

The colour mounted to Doris Levison's cheeks. Her eyes flashed at her fat companion.

"You—you cad!" she exclaimed hotly.

At that precise moment, Fatty Wynn and Dick Redfern arrived on the scene, having duly refreshed themselves at the tuckshop. They appeared suddenly at the back of the two deck-chairs, just in time to hear that heated exclamation of Doris Levison's. They realised at once that Trimble had been annoying their girl chum; and they exchanged grim glances.

Dick Redfern touched Doris lightly on the shoulder.

"Would you mind paying close attention to the cricket for a few moments, Doris?" he asked quietly.

Doris gave an understanding nod, and focused her gaze upon the game. And then two hands descended suddenly

upon Baggy Trimble, and each of his fat ears was seized and squeezed in a vice-like grip.

"Ow, ow, ow!" yelled Baggy, as he was hauled out of the deck-chair by his ears. "Leggo, you rotters! What's the game?"

Dick Redfern and Kerr, a stern-faced pair of inquisitors, proceeded to march Trimble away. Fatty Wynn brought up the rear of the procession.

They came presently to the pavilion steps.

"Now, you fat cad," muttered Redfern between his teeth, "we're going to give you the bumping of your life for pestering Miss Levison!"

"I wasn't—I didn't—I never—" began Baggy wildly.

But his protestations were futile. Three times in succession Baggy Trimble smote the hard, unsympathetic steps of the pavilion, and the avengers left him sitting there, blinking dazedly around, and wondering if an earthquake had hit him.

Justice having been done—it had been considerably overdone, from Trimble's standpoint—the three New House fellows rejoined Doris Levison, and watched George Figgins chastise the School House bowling.

CHAPTER 2.

Trimble to the Rescue!

BAGGY Trimble picked himself up, felt himself all over to make sure he was still in one piece, and rolled disconsolately away.

"Beasts!" he growled, shaking his fist covertly at Redfern and Kerr and Wynn, who were chatting with Doris Levison.

But neither the utterance of that epithet, nor the fist-shaking, brought much consolation to Baggy's mind.

The fat junior was feeling sore and disappointed. He was sore from his recent bumping; he was disappointed at having failed to induce Doris Levison to plead his cause with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. That noble youth had refused point-blank to admit Trimble to the cheery company of guests who were going to spend the week-end at Eastwood House. Trimble's room was preferred to his company, and Arthur Augustus had told him so, firmly and forcefully. The swell of St. Jim's was usually politeness itself, but he felt that politeness was wasted on Baggy Trimble.

Having failed to get any change, as it were, from Arthur Augustus, it had occurred to Baggy that it would be a good idea to get Doris Levison to act as his intermediary, and whisper a word in Gussy's ear, requesting that Baggy might be permitted to join the party. Arthur Augustus had spurned Trimble, but his chivalry would compel him to lend a more willing ear to a request that came from the charming Doris. Had she put in a plea on Baggy's behalf, there was no doubt that Arthur Augustus would have granted it.

But Doris Levison had failed to turn up trumps. She had turned indignantly upon Trimble, and called him a cad. And then those New House beasts had come on the scene, and Baggy had been yanked out of the deck-chair and bumped until every bone in his fat body was shaken.

After these rebuffs it might be expected that Baggy Trimble would have given up all hope of worming his way into the Eastwood House party. Arthur Augustus had failed him, and Doris Levison had failed him, and there seemed to be no way in which Trimble could achieve his object.

But he was not beaten yet. There were other strings to be pulled, Baggy reflected, as he rolled away from the cricket-ground.

Miss Ethel Cleveland, the charming cousin of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, was arriving by the four o'clock train.

Cousin Ethel knew that a special half-holiday had been granted on this particular Friday. She knew, also, that there was to be a House match. So she had wired to Arthur Augustus, pointing out that it would not be necessary for her to be met at Rylcombe Station. Cousin Ethel was well aware that a junior House match was a very important affair, and she would not have interrupted it for worlds. She was quite capable of seeing herself up to St. Jim's from the station.

Baggy Trimble knew that the girl would be arriving alone, and he made up his mind to go down to the station to meet her.

Where Doris Levison had failed, perhaps Cousin Ethel would come up to the scratch. At any rate, Trimble resolved to try the effect of his eloquence upon her.

The fat junior was anxious—desperately anxious—to spend the week-end at Eastwood House, where guests were entertained handsomely, and where no curb was put upon their appetites. Eastwood House, in fact, resembled a land flowing with milk and honey. It was a place where Baggy Trimble would be in his glory.

Already, in his mind's eye, Baggy saw the oak-pannelled dining-room and the long table groaning beneath the weight

of the goodly viands, and the serving-maids gliding to and fro. He was not likely to see these things with any other eye than his mind's eye, but in his mind's eye Baggy saw them very clearly. His eyes sparkled and his mouth watered at the prospect.

The fat junior looked at his watch. It was half-past three.

"Just time to spruce myself up a bit and get down to the station," he murmured.

And he hurried away to the Fourth Form dormitory, where he went through the process known as a "cat-lick," and changed his collar, and brushed his hair, and set a silk hat on his bullet head.

Baggy then blinked into a full-length mirror, and he was well satisfied with what he saw. The reflection showed him a stout youth—rather more plump than the Adonis of Greek mythology; but this was an asset rather than a drawback, in Baggy's opinion. He felt confident that Cousin Ethel would be favourably impressed when he dawned upon her vision.

With a final jerk at his necktie, Baggy rolled out of the dormitory, and set out on his mission.

The afternoon was hot, and Baggy was not a quick walker. It was not surprising, therefore, that the train should be already in when he rolled on to the little station platform.

Only one passenger had alighted—a graceful, girlish figure, carrying a small dressing-case, strapped to which was a parasol.

The girl was in conversation with a porter. There was a cloud on her pretty face, and she seemed troubled and perplexed.

The porter, who was a new man, was not aware of the girl's identity, and he was inclined to be officious.

"Ticket, please!" he said firmly.

Cousin Ethel—for it was she—shook her head.

"I tell you I have lost my handbag," she said. "It was very stupid of me, I know, but I left it in the train at Wayland, where I had to change. My ticket is in the bag. If you will kindly make inquiries—"

"That's all very well, miss, but I can't let you pass without a ticket."

Cousin Ethel clicked her lips with vexation.

"How can I hand in my ticket when I have left it behind at Wayland?" she asked impatiently.

"Then I must trouble you for the amount of the fare," said the new porter. "Where have you come from, miss?"

"From London. But I cannot pay the fare over again, because I have no money."

"Left that in your handbag as well, I suppose?" suggested the porter, with a trace of sarcasm in his tone.

"Naturally. I always carry my money in my handbag."

The porter frowned.

"I don't want to be hard on you, miss, but I've got my duty to do," he said doggedly, "and I must insist on havin' the amount of the fare."

Cousin Ethel breathed hard. She was not accustomed to being treated like this. As a rule, the porters at Rylcombe Station treated her with deference and respect. But this new man seemed to be determined to make trouble.

"Can I see the stationmaster?" asked Cousin Ethel, after a pause. "He knows me quite well, and—"

"The stationmaster's havin' his tea, miss, and he wouldn't thank me for disturbin' him."

Cousin Ethel looked round desperately. She had a faint hope that one of her boy chums from St. Jim's might arrive on the scene and rescue her from her dilemma.

"Good-afternoon, Ethel!"

Baggy Trimble lifted his hat, with an ingratiating smirk. The fat junior had been standing within earshot all the time, drinking in the conversation.

The presence of Trimble on the platform only added to Cousin Ethel's discomfiture. She realised that there was no help to be expected from that quarter. In any case, she would not have cared to be under an obligation to Baggy Trimble.

But this was one of those rare occasions when Baggy happened to be in funds. One of his aunts, under the delusion that to-day was Baggy's birthday, had opened her heart—and her purse—and sent her plump nephew a pound. Half of that sum had already been expended at the school tuckshop; but Baggy still had ten shillings in his possession, and he saw a chance of putting the money to excellent use.

"I understand that you're in a fix, Ethel?" he said.

The girl nodded curtly.

"I left my handbag in the train at Wayland," she explained. "My ticket was in it, also my money. And the porter insists that I pay my fare over again."

"How much?" asked Baggy promptly, turning to the porter.

"Six-and-six," was the reply.

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And Baggy Trimble straightway produced three florins and a sixpence, whilst the porter drew out a receipt-book.

"No, no!" said Cousin Ethel, intervening. "I don't wish you to do this for me, Trimble."

"Oh, really, Ethel! It's quite all right, I assure you," said Baggy, with another of his fat smirks. "I shall be only too pleased to settle this little matter—quite an honour, you know!"

Cousin Ethel looked decidedly uncomfortable. But Baggy Trimble seemed determined to play the Good Samaritan, and the girl had no wish to be churlish. She watched Baggy hand over the money to the porter, and she took it to be a generous and good-hearted action on the part of the fat junior. She did not know now, but she was to learn later, that Baggy's action was not entirely disinterested.

The porter scribbled a receipt, and handed it to Trimble, who handed it, in turn, to Cousin Ethel.

"Thank you very much!" said Ethel simply. "I am indeed grateful! I shall refund you the money the moment I recover my handbag."

Baggy Trimble chuckled.

"You can say good-bye to that handbag, Ethel," he said. "If you left it in a railway-carriage, you can safely wager that somebody has bagged it. The travelling public is awfully dishonest, you know."

Cousin Ethel turned to the porter.

"You will make inquiries about my handbag?" she asked him.

"Certainly, miss," said the porter, more agreeable now. "I'll telephone to Wayland about it at once."

"Thank you! And should you be able to recover it, will you send it up to me at the school? My name is Ethel Cleveland."

The porter made a note of the name.

"Unless the bag has been made away with, you should have it in a few hours," he said.

And he went off to telephone.

Baggy Trimble turned to Cousin Ethel, and relieved her of her dressing-case. Together they passed out of the little station.

"Jolly lucky that I happened to turn up when I did—what?" said Baggy. "You were in a fine old fix, Ethel!"

The girl was on the point of reminding Baggy that she was "Miss Cleveland" to him. She resented the fat junior's familiarity. But she remembered that Baggy Trimble had come to her rescue at a very opportune moment; so, instead of rebuking him, she merely nodded.

"Had a good time in London, Ethel?" inquired Baggy affably.

"Yes, thank you!"

"Where did you stay?"

"With an aunt, in the suburbs."

"Ugh! That must have been pretty tame. I generally stay at the Ritz or the Waldorf when I'm in town. My pater always has a suite of rooms reserved, you know."

"Does he?" murmured Ethel.

"Yes; we always do things in style. I'm a very popular figure in London society—especially in the West End ball-rooms. You ought to see me dance the Charleston!"

Cousin Ethel found it difficult to refrain from laughing aloud. The idea of Baggy Trimble in a ball-room, charging here and there like a rhinoceros, was decidedly comical.

"I understand there's going to be dancing at Eastwood House this week-end," Baggy went on. "We ought to have a jolly good time!"

"We?" queried Ethel, raising her eyebrows. "I—I did not know you were in the party."

"I hope to be," said Trimble, with a smirk. "Gussy hasn't actually invited me yet—I believe it may have slipped his memory. He's too keen on this silly old House match to bother about more important things. Would you be good enough to jog Gussy's memory, Ethel, when we get to St. Jim's? Say to him, 'You've forgotten to invite Trimble. We simply can't leave Trimble out; he'll be the life and soul of the party!'"

Cousin Ethel stopped short suddenly in the roadway. She stared at Baggy Trimble with a stare that was almost a glare.

"You—you wish me to ask my cousin Arthur to invite you to Eastwood House?" she gasped.

"Yes, if you'd be so kind, Ethel."

"But—but—"

"One good turn deserves another, you know!" said Trimble, with one of his irritating cackles. "I helped you out of a fix just now, and here's a chance for you to step in and make it quits. I'm awfully keen on coming to Eastwood House, and if you would just give Gussy the tip—"

Cousin Ethel clenched her hands. Clearly now she could see why Trimble had come to her rescue on the station platform. His action had not been disinterested, after all. He had an axe to grind; and now, with his usual lack of tact, he had betrayed his mean motives.



Two hands descended suddenly upon Baggy Trimble, and each of his fat ears was seized and squeezed in a vice-like grip. "Ow-ow-ow!" yelled Baggy, as he was hauled out of the deck-chair by his ears. "Leggo, you rotters! What's the game?" (See Chapter 1.)

The girl walked on, and Baggy Trimble panted and puffed at her side.

For a moment Cousin Ethel made no reply to Baggy's audacious request. She was minded to refuse it; but she could not very well do that, now that she was under an obligation to Trimble. And Trimble knew that she could not very well refuse, and he revelled in the knowledge.

"You'll mention the matter to Gussy, won't you, Ethel?" he urged.

"Very well," said the girl slowly, after a long pause. "I will speak to my cousin on the subject, as you wish. But I think you are taking a very mean advantage, Trimble."

"Oh, really——"

"In any case, I cannot promise that you shall be one of the Eastwood House party. I can only promise to ask Arthur. The matter must rest entirely with him. If he refuses, I cannot press the point."

"Oh, he won't refuse!" said Trimble confidently. "Coming from you, the request will carry weight; and Gussy wouldn't dream of offending his pretty cousin by turning it down. So it's me for Eastwood House to-night! He, he, he!"

A frown came over Cousin Ethel's usually sunny face. And not another word or look did she bestow upon Baggy Trimble during the rest of the walk to St. Jim's. Though had she been a boy she would gladly have bestowed a kick upon his portly person!

CHAPTER 3.

Trouble for Trimble!

"COUSIN ETHEL!"

"Hurrah!"

There was a cheery greeting for D'Arcy's charming cousin when she arrived on Little Side. Ethel had parted company with Baggy Trimble at the school gates, and she was glad to be rid of him.

Tom Merry & Co. lifted their caps to Cousin Ethel, and greeted her very cordially. Doris Levison rose from her deck-chair to greet her girl chum, and they shook hands

warmly. Cousin Ethel then took the vacant deck-chair at Doris' side, and settled down to watch the cricket.

"How is the game going?" she inquired.

"New House all out for a hundred and thirty," said Doris. "Figgins made seventy, not out."

"Splendid!"

Cousin Ethel's eyes sparkled. She had a warm corner for George Figgins, and was delighted to hear of his success with the bat. Her delight was tinged with regret at not having been present to see Figg's innings.

"And the School House?" queried Cousin Ethel.

"Batting now," said Doris. "Can't you see your illustrious cousin at the wicket?"

"Why, of course!" said Ethel, smiling. "How many runs has Arthur made?"

"None, as yet. He seems none too comfortable against Wynn's bowling. Besides, Tom Merry cautioned him to go steady. Three good wickets are down already, with only a dozen runs on the board."

"My goodness! Is Tom Merry out?"

"Very much so," said the School House skipper ruefully, overhearing the question. "Fatty Wynn spread-eagled my stumps before I could get set. Fatty's in deadly form this afternoon. He tells me he's just had half a dozen jam-tarts at the tuckshop. Some fellows wouldn't feel like bowling after that; but Fatty's always at his best after a feed. He's taken three wickets already, and—— Hallo, there goes Blake's!"

Jack Blake, who partnered Arthur Augustus D'Arcy at the wickets, was bowled "all over the shop" by the demon bowler of the New House. Blake turned, and surveyed the wrecked wicket with a wan smile; then he started on the long trail back to the pavilion.

"Four wickets down!" groaned Monty Lowther, buckling on his pads. "This isn't cricket; it's a massacre!"

"Go and stop the rot, Monty, for goodness' sake!" urged Tom Merry.

Monty Lowther sallied forth to take Blake's place at the wicket. From his very first ball he survived a confident appeal for "leg-before." The next ball missed Monty's off-

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stump by a hair's breadth; and the next—the last ball of the over—he almost chopped into his wicket. But he survived the over by a miracle, and now it was the turn of Arthur Augustus to face Figgins.

Figgins was not nearly so deadly a bowler as Fatty Wynn, and Arthur Augustus, playing with more confidence now, pulled him to leg for a couple, and then repeated the performance. Figgins was then indiscreet enough to send up a full-toss, and Arthur Augustus opened his shoulders, and drove the ball clean over the ropes for six—a Herculean swipe!

"Bravo, Gussy!"

"Well hit, sir!"

Arthur Augustus flushed with pleasure as he heard Cousin Ethel's voice among the applauders.

Things were looking brighter now for the School House; but they still had a long way to go before they could pass their opponents' score.

Figgins took himself off bowling—Arthur Augustus had been making a chopping-block of him—and put on Dick Redfern. But the runs still came merrily.

Fatty Wynn, however, was still in fine fettle, and the batsmen treated him with marked circumspection. Monty Lowther was particularly unhappy against him, and no surprise was occasioned when Monty's middle-stump was presently whipped out of the ground.

"I never saw that one," confessed Lowther, when he rejoined his chums. "It came down with the speed of a blessed cannon-ball!"

"Never mind," said Cousin Ethel sweetly. "You kept your end up awfully well."

Monty Lowther blushed at that graceful feminine compliment.

"Who is the next victim to be sacrificed on the altar of Fatty Wynn's bowling?" he asked, looking round.

"I'm next man in," said Levison major. "But there's not going to be any sacrifice, if I can help it!"

"Play up, Ernest!" said Doris loyally.

And Ernest Levison played up with a will. The fact that his sister was amongst the onlookers acted as a sort of inspiration, and there was a roar from the School House partisans when Levison on-drove Fatty Wynn to the boundary.

Even the redoubtable Fatty had lost his sting at last. Perhaps the effects of the jam-tarts had worn off, and he wanted some more! At all events, his bowling no longer had any terrors, and Levison and Arthur Augustus batted freely and forcefully, and sent up the score by leaps and bounds.

It was all School House now, and Figgins' hopes of a victory grew more and more remote. He tried all his bowlers, and the bowlers tried all their wiles, but in vain. Levison and D'Arcy, playing glorious cricket, hit off the necessary runs, and the School House won with five wickets to spare.

The retiring batsmen came in for a great ovation.

"Well played, Arthur!" said Cousin Ethel warmly, as Arthur Augustus came up to greet her. "That's one of the best innings I've seen you play."

Arthur Augustus laughed breathlessly.

"I was wathah lucky, deah gal," he said modestly. "Anyway, we've licked the New House, an' that's all that mattahs. Now, for tea! That knock has given me such an appetite that I could eat a donkey's hind leg off!"

"Better start on your own leg, then, Gussy!" suggested the humorous Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah— But for the pwesence of the ladies I should feel inclined to box your yahs!"

"Pax!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Monty will have his little joke. Let's get in to tea. The cars will be calling for us in about an hour."

Those envied ones who belonged to Gussy's week-end party trooped into the building, chatting gaily with Cousin Ethel and Doris Levison as they went.

Baggy Trimble watched them go, and the fat junior managed to beckon Cousin Ethel aside for a moment.

"Have you asked him yet, Ethel?" he whispered.

Cousin Ethel's face clouded over as she recalled her promise to Trimble. In the excitement of the cricket she had forgotten that unpalatable business. She had forgotten, also, the loss of her handbag. These troubles returned now to harass her, and she began to feel quite unhappy.

"No, I have not asked Arthur yet," she said, in reply to Trimble's question. "I have not had an opportunity."

"Well, don't forget," muttered Baggy. "It—it's a bargain, you know!"

Before the girl could reply, Arthur Augustus turned and hailed her.

"Come along, Ethel! Don't let that fat boundah detain you."

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Cousin Ethel hurried after the others.

"Twimble's got a f'wightful nerve to take you aside an' thwust his confidences into your yah," said the swell of St. Jim's indignantly. "If he was annoyin' you—"

"He was not annoying me exactly," said Cousin Ethel.

But Arthur Augustus, noting the distressed look on the face of his pretty cousin, was not so sure about that.

"What did he want with you, deah gal?" he asked.

"I'll explain over tea," said Ethel.

The party was soon installed in Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage. It was rather a tight squeeze for thirteen, but nobody seemed to mind. Jack Blake and Herries and Digby prepared the tea, and those for whom there was no room at the table found accommodation on the window-sill. Monty Lowther enthroned himself in state on the coal-scuttle. It was a very cheery party, with one exception. Cousin Ethel did not seem her usual bright self. She joined in the chatter and the laughter, but Arthur Augustus was quick to notice that her gaiety was rather forced. When the tea was served, he seated himself beside her and turned to her with cousinly solicitude.

"I twust there is nothin' w'ong, deah gal?" he murmured.

"Nothing," Ethel assured him. "That is to say, nothing much."

Arthur Augustus frowned.

"Has that fat boundah Twimble been badgewin' you?"

"If he has," interposed Tom Merry, "we'll give him the bumping of his life!"

"He's already had one bumping this afternoon," said Fatty Wynn, "for annoying Miss Levison."

"My hat! If Trimble's setting out to annoy our lady guests, we'll jolly well burst him!" said Manners truculently.

Arthur Augustus pressed Cousin Ethel for an explanation of what was wrong, and the girl saw that he insisted upon knowing.

"I did a very stupid thing this afternoon, Arthur," she explained. "Travelling down from London, I had to change at Wayland, and I left my handbag in the carriage. It contained my railway-ticket and my money."

"Bai Jove!"

"When I got to Rylcombe there was a new porter—a rather officious person—who refused to let me pass without giving up my ticket, or paying the amount of the fare. Of course, I could do neither. I was in a very awkward dilemma, and Trimble came to my rescue."

"Trimble!" echoed the juniors, in astonishment. They had never suspected the fat junior of being a Good Samaritan.

Cousin Ethel nodded.

"Trimble insisted on settling with the porter," she said, "and, of course, I was very grateful to him."

"Natuwally," said Arthur Augustus. "This shows Twimble in quite a new light. I had nevah thought him capable of a chivalwous an' gentlemanly action."

Cousin Ethel smiled faintly.

"Unfortunately, the matter did not end there," she explained. "We walked up to the school together, and Trimble exacted a promise from me—that I would ask you, Arthur, if he could join our party for the week-end."

"Gweat Scott!"

Arthur Augustus was on his feet now, his eyes flashing angrily.

"The—the uttah wottah!" he exclaimed.

And from all round the study came indignant exclamations, which would have made Baggy Trimble's ears burn had he been listening at the keyhole.

"The awful cad!" ejaculated Tom Merry, in disgust. "What Trimble has done amounts to blackmail in a mild form."

"I'll go and interview the fat boundah at once!" declared Arthur Augustus wrathfully.

Cousin Ethel laid a detaining hand on her cousin's arm.

"I don't wish to make trouble, Arthur," she said quietly.

But Arthur Augustus was fairly boiling over with righteous indignation.

"What was the amount of the fare, deah gal?" he inquired.

"Six-and-sixpence."

"I will see that Twimble is wepaid at once, an' I will take the opportunity of tellin' him exactly what I think of him!" he exclaimed.

"And we'll come with you, Gussy!" said Tom Merry and Jack Blake spontaneously, jumping to their feet.

Headed by the incensed Arthur Augustus, the trio rushed from the study and went in quest of Baggy Trimble. That egregious youth was run to earth in the quadrangle. He was strolling beneath the old elms, conjuring up a glorious vista of fun and feasting at Eastwood House. Not for one moment did the fat junior doubt that he would be invited. He felt serenely confident that Cousin Ethel's request on his behalf would work the oracle.

But Trimble's confidence was shattered rudely—at one fell swoop, so to speak. Arthur Augustus and Tom Merry and Jack Blake bore down upon him; and the swell of St. Jim's hastened to make good the liability which Cousin Ethel had incurred. The juniors then told Baggy Trimble exactly what they thought of him; and they told him so forcibly and violently that Baggy was left for dead, as it were, with all the breath bumped out of his fat body. He sprawled on the ground, with his hair awry, and his collar and tie streaming loose, and an expression of dazed anguish on his face.

In that painful moment it dawned upon Baggy's fuddled mentality that the best-laid schemes of mice and men—and prize porpoises—often go astray. Certainly Trimble's latest scheme had gone astray with a vengeance!

It seemed that Baggy Trimble was not, after all, destined to be the life and soul of the Eastwood House party!

CHAPTER 4.

Lord Eastwood's Dilemma!

ST. JIM'S revelled in the prospect of a long week-end.

Coming so soon before the summer holidays, this concession on the part of the Head was in the nature of a surprise-packet. Nobody had expected such a treat, and it was all the more welcome on that account.

The St. Jim's fellows were free to go where they liked and do what they liked—within reason, and provided they gave notice of their intentions beforehand. Those who lived within a reasonable radius of the school were permitted to go home for the week-end. Others, whose homes were far afield, had planned picnic-parties and cycling tours and other pleasant functions.

The animated scenes on Friday evening, the hustle and

instead of a week-end in the country!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "Where's the rest of your luggage, Gussy? You'll need at least a dozen toppers, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I have awwanged with Taggles, the portah, to see to my hatboxes," said Arthur Augustus. "An' I shall not need a dozen toppahs, Lowthah. Six will be quite suffish."

"Oh, my hat!"

Merrily the party trooped out into the quadrangle, where young Lord Conway greeted them with a pleasant smile and handshakes all round.

Cousin Ethel's pretty face, however, was still slightly clouded, despite the fact that Baggy Trimble had been dealt with, and would pester her no more.

The girl was thinking of her lost handbag. Not only had it contained several Treasury notes, but the bag itself had a sentimental value. It had been a birthday-present from Lord Eastwood. Cousin Ethel was now in the unhappy position of having to explain to his lordship that she had lost the bag through carelessness.

It seemed that the handbag was indeed lost, for there had been no news of it.

Just as the touring-cars were moving off, however, one of the porters from Rylcombe Station appeared in the St. Jim's gateway. He carried something in his hand, and Cousin Ethel brightened up as she recognised her property. "My handbag!" she exclaimed. "It has turned up, after all!"

"Whippin'!" said Arthur Augustus. "Kindly slow up a moment, Conway."

The car came to a halt, and the porter, recognising Cousin Ethel, handed over the bag. He was lavishly "tipped" by Arthur Augustus, and the car moved on, with Cousin Ethel now as sunny-faced as any of the passengers.

Result of "Scarlet Streak" Competition No. 10.

£10 WON BY "GEM" READERS!

IS YOUR NAME HERE?

In this competition no competitor sent in a correct solution. THE FIRST PRIZE OF £5 has therefore been divided between the following two competitors whose efforts each contained one error:

A. Davies, 95, Margrove Park, Boosbeck, S.O., Cleveland, Yorks.
E. Yendley, 1, Bellavale Tce., Newtown Kelly, Coalisland, Co. Tyrone, Ireland.

THE FIVE PRIZES OF £1 EACH have been divided among the following six competitors, whose solutions each contained two errors:

D. Cragh, Casual Wards, Eastville Institution, Bristol.
Miss M. Gunn, 15, Waverley Park, Edinburgh.

A. Jones, Vine Cottage, Dudley Road, Ventnor, I.O.W.
R. W. Kernick, 105, Stockfield Road, Acocks Green, Birmingham.
H. Mills, Pipes Mill, Stoneleigh, Kenilworth, Warks.
A. Vokes, 6, Carlingford Terrace, Radstock, Somerset.

The correct solution was as follows:

Livingston Scott is a tall man with a pointed beard, and is very wealthy. He is a great chum of Mr. Crawford's, and is delighted to do all he can for Bob, when that young fellow comes for assistance. Scott owns a mine, and his workmen make various attempts to rescue Mary, who has fallen into the hands of the Monk.

bustle, the sounds of merry schoolboy laughter, were reminiscent of breaking-up day.

When tea was over in Study No. 6 and the juniors had packed such belongings as they would require for the week-end, a couple of handsome touring-cars swung in at the school gates.

Lord Conway, the elder brother of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, drove one of the cars, and a private chauffeur was at the wheel of the other.

"Heah we are, deah boys!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, glancing from the window. "The cabs have awwived, an' my bwothah Conway is dwivin' one of them. I wathah hoped my patah would show up, but I expect somethin' has detained him at the house."

"Ripping cars!" said Jack Blake, peering over his chum's shoulder.

"Yaas. You'll find them vevy cosy an' comfortable, deah boys an' gals. Are we all weedy?"

There was a general nodding of heads.

"Off we go, then!"

Arthur Augustus led the way, carrying a big suitcase. There were three exquisite and elegant suits in that case—one for each day of the week-end. Tom Merry & Co. were content to wear the same clothes from Friday night until Tuesday morning; but such a happy-go-lucky arrangement did not commend itself to the swell of St. Jim's. Gussy believed in looking spruce and smart on all occasions. He did not agree with the poet that

"A sweet disorder in the dress,
A happy kind of carelessness,"

was either necessary or desirable.

"Gussy looks as if he's setting forth on the grand tour,

From his study window Baggy Trimble watched the departure of the Eastwood House party, with malice and all uncharitableness in his heart. Baggy scowled darkly as the touring-cars swung through the school gateway and throbbed along the dusty road.

"Lucky beggars!" he growled. "If only I had played my cards a bit better I might have been with them! I had half a mind to ask Lord Conway if I could join the party, but he would only have said 'No.' For some peculiar reason Conway seems to dislike me."

It was always a matter for wonder with Baggy Trimble that people disliked him. In his own opinion Baggy was a most estimable fellow. He could only conclude, on reflection, that others were jealous of his good looks and charming personality.

"Eastwood House is off so far as I am concerned," he grumbled. "But I'm dashed if I'm going to mooch about at St. Jim's all the week-end. Talbot and Gore are going down to Colonel Lyndon's place, and I'll see if I can get an invite. If that fails, p'raps Bernard Glyn will have me at Glyn House. I'm a great favourite with his sister Edith. And if that fails, too, I shall go off on my own to-morrow morning and spend a day at the seaside."

Thus resolved, Baggy Trimble shook a fat fist at the two touring-cars as they finally vanished from view.

It was a fairly long run to Eastwood House; but the roads were comparatively clear of traffic, and the cars ate up the miles in great style.

There was a cheer from the passengers when Lord Eastwood's fine old mansion, set in the midst of a wooded park, came into sight.

Lord Eastwood himself was standing on the front steps, and he greeted his guests with that courtly and kindly air

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which Arthur Augustus had inherited. But the juniors did not fail to observe that there was a cloud on his lordship's brow. He seemed to be worried about something.

"I twust ewewythin' is all wight, patah?" said Arthur Augustus anxiously, as he shook hands with his sire. "You appear to be wathah wowwied."

Lord Eastwood smiled.

"I have just encountered some trouble, my boy," he confessed, "but it is nothing really serious. At all events, it need not interfere with the week-end enjoyment of you and your friends."

But Arthur Augustus was not to be thus easily reassured.

"Will you tell me what the twouble is, patah?" he urged. "I don't wish to be inquisitive, but perhaps I may be able to do somethin' to help."

"I will explain the situation over dinner," promised Lord Eastwood.

And Arthur Augustus was obliged to possess his soul in patience until that cheery function arrived.

During the interval the guests wandered through the spacious park in the cool of the summer evening.

George Figgins took Cousin Ethel under his wing and escorted her down to the shimmering lake, where they sat together on a rustic bench, thoroughly happy in each other's company.

Tom Merry & Co. strolled under the old beeches with Doris Levison, chatting gaily on a variety of topics; and the rest of the juniors and young Wally D'Arcy disported themselves at their own sweet will.

Eastwood House was liberty hall to the St. Jim's fellows, and no restraint was set upon their movements.

Presently the booming of the dinner-gong called the wanderers in, and they were ushered into that lofty, oak-panelled dining-room which Baggy Trimble had dreamed of occupying.

Lord Eastwood sat at the head of the table and smiled upon his schoolboy guests. Next to him, on either side, were Lord Conway and Arthur Augustus.

Whatever the nature of the trouble which had descended upon his lordship, he contrived to show a smiling front to the assembly, and it was not until the meal was well advanced that he recalled his promise to Arthur Augustus.

"I promised to explain to you what was on my mind, Arthur," he began. "I have no wish to make a secret of it, and if your friends are at all interested—"

"We are!" admitted Tom Merry.

"Rather!" chimed in Wally D'Arcy. "If you are in a fix of any sort, pater, p'raps we can come to the rescue."

"There's quite a crowd of us here, and we are at the service of our host!" said Jack Blake.

"Hear, hear!"

Lord Eastwood smiled at these expressions of loyalty.

"Briefly, the facts are these," he explained. "I am, as you are doubtless aware, the owner of a number of private hotels on the South Coast. Under my appointed managers, everything has gone smoothly at these hotels for some time. Lately, however, there has been trouble at Ocean View, which is the hotel I own at Stormcliff."

"What sort of twouble, patah?" inquired Arthur Augustus.

"I am coming to that. Letters of complaint have reached me, from certain staying guests at Ocean View, regarding the rudeness and unsatisfactory conduct of the manager. The latter—a Mr. Forrester—is a man in whom I have always reposed the fullest confidence and trust. He came to me, primarily, with the highest credentials, and I had no hesitation in placing this particular hotel under his charge. It was something of a shock to me, therefore, to receive these letters in complaint of his conduct. I have always insisted that my managers shall be polite and courteous above all things. I never overlook gross discourtesy to a guest. And so, satisfied that the complaints against Forrester were well-founded, I dismissed him from his post, sending him a cheque for a month's salary in lieu of notice."

Arthur Augustus nodded his approval.

"I quite agree with your action, patah," he said. "Wude-ness on the part of a hotel managah is not to be tolerated."

"No jolly fear!" chimed in Wally. "Sack 'em on the spot if they're rude—that's my motto!"

Lord Eastwood could not refrain from smiling at this expression of worldly wisdom from his youngest son.

"Forrester has gone," continued his lordship; "but, unfortunately, the matter has not ended there. The members of the hotel staff have not taken kindly to Forrester's dismissal. He appears to have been very popular with them. And they have sent me what they call an ultimatum—though I prefer to call it a threat—that unless Forrester is reinstated within twenty-four hours, they will abandon their posts."

"In other words, go on strike?" said Tom Merry.

"Exactly!"

"Well, of all the cheek——" began Manners.

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"When did you weceive their ultimatum, patah?" inquired Arthur Augustus.

"By the first post this morning," replied Lord Eastwood.

"That means that unless Fowwester is wecalled by to-morrow mornin', they will leave their jobs an' walk out of the hotel?"

"Such, I take it, is their intention," said his lordship. And his face became grave.

"Why, this is mutiny!" exclaimed Wally D'Arcy indignantly. "I wouldn't stand for it, pater, if I were you. Let them jolly well go, and engage a new staff to take their places!"

Lord Eastwood smiled.

"That is easier said than done, Walter. If you knew anything of the almost insuperable difficulties of engaging cooks and waiters and maids at a moment's notice, you would not have mooted such a suggestion. We are now at the height of the summer season, and there are very few competent hotel servants out of a billet."

"Then what will happen if the staff of Ocean View leaves you in the lurch?" asked Cousin Ethel.

"That is precisely what is worrying me," answered Lord Eastwood. "The hotel is practically full of guests, and you can well imagine the chaos and consternation that will ensue if they wake up in the morning in an hotel without servants. There will be no breakfast for them, no attention, no service of any sort."

"Then the guests will go on strike!" said Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah!" protested Arthur Augustus. "This is not a mattah for flippancy. The patah is in a fine old fix; an' unless the managah is bwrought back, I don't quite see what can be done."

Lord Eastwood frowned.

"I have no intention of being coerced by the staff, and compelled to comply with their audacious terms," he said firmly. "Forrester has been dismissed, and, I think, justly so, and to reinstate him because the staff chooses to point this pistol at my head would be an act of weakness."

"Yaas, but——"

"It is indeed a dilemma," said Lord Eastwood, "and I can see no way out—as yet. If the worst comes to the worst, the hotel will have to be closed down. But there! I do not wish to cast a cloud over your week-end, my dear boys. Whatever developments may arise in connection with this unfortunate affair, I want you to remember that you are here for your enjoyment. Should I be called away to Stormcliff, as is probable, Lord Conway will take my place here as host."

"Delighted!" murmured Lord Conway.

Shortly afterwards the dinner-party dispersed, and many of the guests were looking very thoughtful. But there was no face which betrayed such thoughtfulness and concern as the face of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

CHAPTER 5.

Tact and Judgment Wanted!

"PENNY for them, Gussy!" said Tom Merry. The St. Jim's guests, with Cousin Ethel and Doris Levison, were strolling in the grounds of Eastwood House, under the early stars, when Tom Merry made that munificent offer.

Arthur Augustus had been pondering deeply for some moments. His head was bent as he walked, and there was a frown on his noble brow. He scarcely seemed to hear Tom Merry address him.

"Penny for them!" repeated Tom.

"Are Gussy's thoughts worth as much as that?" asked Monty Lowther. "Personally, I should say a farthing would be a very sporting offer!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus looked up at the sound of the laughter. "I have been weflectin', deah boys," he said slowly.

"Wondering which fancy waistcoat to wear to-morrow?" asked Blake.

"Weally, Blake! My weflections have been concerned with more important mattahs than dwess!"

"Impossible!" said Lowther solemnly.

"I have been thinkin' about this thwateened stwike of the hotel staff," said Arthur Augustus, darting a frown at Lowther. "If it comes off, it will be wathah a sewious mattah. You see, deah boys, you can't wun an hotel without a staff."

"Can't you, really?" said Digby sarcastically.

"No, Dig; it is utahly imposs. If there is no staff, who is goin' to look aftah the guests?"

"They could fend for themselves," suggested Herries.

Arthur Augustus turned his monole upon the speaker.

"I wegard that suggestion as asinine, Hewwies. Most of the guests at Ocean View are wathah superiah persons, an' they would pwobably object to makin' their own beds, an' pwepawin' their own meals, an' doin' all the sewubbin' an' sweepin'."

"Ha, ha! It's just possible they would!" chuckled Tom Merry.

"If the staff walks out to-morrow mornin'—as they've threatened to do unless the managah is wecalled—the hotel will be at a standstill. It will be a disastah—in fact, twagedy is not too stwong a word to apply to such a situation."

"It's a tragedy that can't be averted, so far as I can see," said Figgins.

"Yaas, Figgy; but then, your wange of vision is wathah limited, isn't it? You cannot see farthah than your own nose."

"What!" shouted Figgins, mightily incensed.

"It takes a far-seen' fellow to gwasp a situation of this sort," went on Arthur Augustus calmly. "There is no weason why the twagedy should be allowed to happen. Even now, at the eleventh hour, there is a way of avertin' it."

"Summon the Cabinet!" said Monty Lowther. "Then we'll confer with the giddy strike leaders."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Great Scott!"

The juniors stared at their elegant chum. Cousin Ethel and Doris Levison were looking quietly amused.

"You—you propose to butt in, and try and stop the strike, Gussy?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Yaas; but I do not like the expression 'butt in.' I pwefer to call it a timely intahvention. With my patah's permish, I shall twavel down to Stormcliff first thing in the mornin', by cah, an' weason with the hotel staff, an' point out to them that to go on stwike would be stupid an' disloyal, an' playin' it wathah low."

"That's what Gussy calls tact and judgment!" chuckled Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you talk to them like that, Gussy," said Jack Blake, "they'll pitch you down the hotel steps."

"Of course, I shall not put it as bluntly as that," Arthur Augustus hastened to explain. "But I shall make it cleah to the staff that the ideah of a stwike is all w'ong, an' that they cannot possibly benefit themselves in any way by

CAMEOS OF SCHOOL LIFE.

No. 4.—THE SCHOOL CONCERT.

THE large and spacious concert hall,
Is packed to suffocation,
By fags and seniors, great and small.

Schoolboys of every station,
A special concert has begun,
Tom Merry's bright experiment;
And fellows flock to see the fun,
And share the mirth and merriment.

Amid loud shouts of "On the bawl!"
Arthur Augustus rises;
"Yaas, Let Me Like a Soldiah Fall!"
He'll sing, Jack Blake surmises,
And Gussy's so-called tenor voice
Starts warbling the refrain;
Making the listeners rejoice,
Or groan as if in pain!

George Alfred Grundy follows then,
His voice booms forth like thunder;
He sings of "Drake and his merry men,
Who kept the Armada under,
And we can picture "G. A. G."
Aboard a battle-cruiser;
Master and monarch of the sea—
Best Admiral on view, sir!

When Marie Rivers sings a song,
With feeling and sincerity,
She wins applause from all the throng;

We cheer her with celerity,
For Marie's voice is full and clear,
Like that of lark or linnet;
In fact, it really would appear
That nightingales weren't in it!

A comic song by Gerald Cutts,
We're then compelled to suffer;
"I am the nuttiest of the nuts,"
He sings—conceited duffer!
Then old Kildare gets on his feet,
And gives us "Glorious Deron";
And the time passes all too fleet,
Until it's past eleven!

Our concert proves a huge success,
Beating all records hollow;
And we await, with eagerness,
Another one to follow!
For concerts have a happy way
Of banishing your troubles;
"A merry heart goes all the day,"
And cares are pricked like bubbles.



"Lowthah, you are a cwass ass!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, brother!" murmured Monty.

And there was a fresh peal of laughter.

Arthur Augustus glared at the humorous Lowther, and he would certainly have proceeded to administer "a feahful thwashin'," but for the presence of the girls.

"Gussy's got a bwain-wave," said Manners. "He means to settle this strike off his own bat."

"Pweicisely!" said the swell of St. Jim's. "A vewy stwikin' notion—no pun intended, deah boys—has occurred to me. Situations of this sort can genewally be smoothed ovah, an' settled by the exercise of a little tact an' judgment—qualities with which I have been endowed fwom an early age."

"I've never noticed it—" Lowther was beginning, when Arthur Augustus froze him with a glassy stare.

"I feel sure that if a little tact an' judgment were brought to bear on the pwesent situation, the stwike could be averted," Arthur Augustus went on. "A personal appeal to the membahs of the hotel staff, uttated in a perfectly friently way, an' leavened with the two qualities of which I have spoken, should work the owacle—or, as the vulgah would say, do the twick. I pwopose to delivah that appeal myself."

takin' such a dwastic course. On the contwawy, they will be jeopardin' their jobs. I have no doubt they will pwove amenable to weason, an' will decide to wemain at their posts."

Arthur Augustus spoke confidently. He had great faith in those inherent qualities of tact and judgment which he claimed to possess. As a matter of fact, he rather fancied himself in the role of mediator, and he had no doubt in his ability to avert the threatened strike at the last moment.

Gussy's chums were not so confident. They could not quite see how the strike was to be avoided unless the dismissed manager was reinstated. And Lord Eastwood had no intention of reinstating him. He was satisfied that Forrester had been guilty of rudeness to guests, and unsatisfactory conduct; he had dismissed him, and there the matter ended, so far as Lord Eastwood was concerned. Certainly, his lordship did not mean to be coerced by the staff's threat to strike.

"What do you think of my ideah, deah boys?" inquired Arthur Augustus, turning to his chums.

"Well, I think it's worth tryin'," said Tom Merry thoughtfully, "but I'm rather doubtful whether it will succeed. The staff seem to have got their backs up about

Forrester being fired; and they've sent Lord Eastwood an ultimatum that they'll leave their posts within twenty-four hours, unless the manager is brought back. Sounds as if they mean business."

"Yaas. No doubt they are feelin' wathah waxy about Fowwester's dismissal, an' in the heat of the moment they have decided to stwike. But when I weason with them in the mornin'—"

Cousin Ethel spoke for the first time.

"I think, Arthur," she said, "that they are not likely to be turned from their purpose by the arguments of a schoolboy, however eloquent. Still, I agree with Tom Merry that your idea is worth trying. It can do no harm; and there is just a faint chance that it may do good."

"Thank you, deah gal!"

"But you are npt thinking of going down to Stormcliff alone?"

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"I don't want to dwag anybody else into it," he said. "It would be spoilin' your week-end."

"What nonsense!" said Cousin Ethel. "I should like to come to Stormcliff with you, Arthur."

"And I!" chimed in Doris Levison. "Even if the appeal to the strikers should fail, the car-run will be enjoyable."

"Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry. "Why can't we all go?"

"Gussy can do the chin-wagging, and we'll back him up—if he gives us a chance to get a word in edgeways!" said Jack Blake.

"Weally, Blake— Of course, deah boys, I should be vewy glad to have your support in this mattah; but, as I explained to Ethel, it will be cuttin' into your week-end, and—"

"Rats!"

"We're all coming along!" said Wally D'Arcy. "An early morning joy-ride to Stormcliff will be great fun. But you haven't put it to the pater yet, Gussy."

"I will ask him now," said Arthur Augustus.

And he hurried into the house.

Lord Eastwood was in the library. He stood at the open window, gazing out over the wooded park, with a clouded brow. His lordship was more upset by the impending strike than he had allowed his guests to perceive.

He smiled, however, when Arthur Augustus came in; and he listened patiently to the plan which his son propounded.

"If you will give me a fwee hand in this mattah, patah," concluded Arthur Augustus; "I feel confident of savin' the situation."

"H'm! I wish I could feel as confident, my boy," said his lordship. "The staff at Ocean View is hardly likely to be moved by your eloquence. However, I see no reason why you should not try out your plan; and if your friends are keen on accompanying you to Stormcliff, well—there is nothing more to be said. You would like to get away early, of course?"

"Yaas. I don't know at what time it has been awwanged for the stwike to come into opeation, but I take it that the twenty-four hours will be up about bweakfast-time. That bein' so, we ought to make an early start—say, seven o'clock."

Lord Eastwood nodded.

"I will instruct Robinson and Peters to have the cars ready at that hour," he said.

"Thanks awf'ly, patah!"

Arthur Augustus rejoined his chums in the drawing-room, whither they had adjourned for a final chat before turning in.

"It's all sewene, deah boys—an' gals!" said the swell of St. Jim's. "We start for Stormcliff at seven in the mornin'!"

"Good!"

"That means you'll have to turn out at three, Gussy," said Monty Lowther. "It takes you four hours to do your toilet."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus gave Lowther a withering look. Then, turning to the company, he proposed that they retired to their rooms forthwith, in order to be fit and fresh for the early morning excursion.

CHAPTER 6.

A Striking Situation!

"WOTTEN!" Arthur Augustus uttered that ejaculation, more in sorrow than in anger.

Gussy's peacemaking mission to Lord Eastwood's hotel at Stormcliff had not been crowned with success, as he had so confidently anticipated. On the contrary, it had ended in failure—utter and complete.

Arriving at Ocean View whilst breakfast was in progress, Arthur Augustus had summoned the members of the

staff together in the drawing-room, and he had addressed them at great length and with great eloquence. Gussy's chums had backed him up loyally in urging the staff to remain at their posts. Even Cousin Ethel and Doris Levison had brought their gentle persuasion to bear upon the would-be strikers. But the latter had stuck to their guns, and shown great firmness—or rather, obstinacy.

When the eloquence of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had exhausted itself, the head waiter of the hotel replied on behalf of the staff.

On one condition only, he said, were they prepared to remain at their posts. That condition was one which the St. Jim's juniors were powerless to accept. It was that Forrester, the late manager, should be reinstated at once.

The head waiter—a venerable old man, who had grown grey in his profession—spoke quietly and civilly, but none the less firmly. He protested against the dismissal of Mr. Forrester; and he argued that the complaints received by Lord Eastwood concerning Forrester's conduct were grossly exaggerated. Those complaints had been made by certain fussy and unreasonable individuals now staying at the hotel. There was a Colonel Sparkes, a fiery old martinet, who from the day he came to the hotel had complained fiercely about everything and everybody; and who would still have complained—according to the head waiter—if the place had been run by an archangel.

Then there were two elderly spinsters—the Misses Harri-dan—who had united their shrill voices to the thunderous one of Colonel Sparkes, and complained unceasingly about the hotel, the extortionate charges, the quality of the food, the slowness of the waiters, the impudence of the page-boy, and even about the weather—as if Mr. Forrester could be expected to control that!

These disgruntled individuals had led the hotel manager such a dance, and wrought upon his nerves to such an extent, that Mr. Forrester had lost patience with them, and told them if they weren't comfortable they could go elsewhere.

That did it, of course! Furious complaints were sent to Lord Eastwood, with the result that Forrester had been dismissed.

It was unjust and unfair, the head waiter contended. He did not blame Lord Eastwood, because his lordship, not being on the spot, did not realise what a shrewish pair the Misses Harri-dan were, or what an impossible person Colonel Sparkes was.

Matters had now come to such a pass that the members of the hotel staff had unanimously agreed to strike in sympathy with the dismissed manager.

Breakfast had been prepared that morning for the guests, as usual; but this was the last service that the staff proposed to render. They were now going to march out in a body; and they were not coming back until justice had been done, and Mr. Forrester was recalled.

And now, true to their threat, the staff had gone!

In an orderly procession, and carrying their belongings, they had trooped out of the hotel, leaving the St. Jim's party in the drawing-room, and the guests, all unconscious of what had taken place, finishing breakfast.

"Wotten!" repeated Arthur Augustus.

And the swell of St. Jim's looked so crestfallen at the failure of his mission, that Cousin Ethel laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Come, cheer up, Arthur!" she said. "You did your best—in fact, we all did our best—but nothing could alter the staff's decision to strike."

"Seems to me," said Tom Merry, "that they've got a genuine grievance. If what the head-waiter told us was true—and he seemed honest enough—then I've a sneaking sympathy with Mr. Forrester."

"Same here," said Blake. "This peppery colonel, and the fussy old maiden ladies, seem to have led him a dog's life, so can you wonder that Forrester lost his temper with them at the finish?"

"All the same," said Kerr, "the staff isn't justified in striking at twenty-four hours' notice, like this. They've gone the wrong way to work. They should have waited till Lord Eastwood heard their side of the case, and then no doubt he'd have recalled Forrester. But they didn't wait; they just hurled this strike threat at his head—and now they've gone."

"Yaas, they have acted vewy hastily," said Arthur Augustus. "They simply wufused to listen to weason. An' now the hotel is without a staff, an' the guests, pwesumably, know nothin' of the stwike."

"They soon will!" said Tom Merry, with a grim smile.

Even as Tom spoke, there was a loud clamour from the dining-room. Bells were being rung, loudly and clamantly, and voices were raised. One voice, as strident and powerful as that of Stentor of old, was heard above the rest.

"Waiter! Where has that pestering waiter got to, by George? For five solid minutes have I sat here, waiting for my coffee-cup to be replenished. It's disgraceful—it's scandalous! I've stayed at hundreds of hotels in my time, but

never have I known one where the service was so slack. Waiter! Show yourself, sir!"

In the drawing-room, the St. Jim's party exchanged smiling glances.

"That will be Colonel Fiery Sparkes, whom the head-waiter was telling us about," chuckled Monty Lowther.

"He seems slightly annoyed," murmured Doris Levison. "Listen!"

There was no need to listen. The booming voice of Colonel Sparkes might have been heard from the attics to the basement.

"Waiter! Answer my summons this instant, sir, or it will be the worse for you, by George!"

"But the waiter answered never a word; away on strike was he," misquoted Monty Lowther softly.

The St. Jim's juniors awaited developments. They soon came.

There was the sound of a chair being overturned, followed by heavy footsteps in the lounge. The colonel had come charging out of the dining-room, like a lion seeking what he might devour. He ramped, and he rampaged, and he continued to bellow for the waiter.

Presently the door of the drawing-room was thrown open without ceremony, and the purple face and bull neck of Colonel Sparkes were thrust into the room.

"Waiter! Are you in here, you evasive rascal? Oh!" The colonel broke off suddenly, at the sight of the St. Jim's juniors and their girl chums. His large, fish-like eyes goggled at them from beneath bushy eyebrows. "Where's the waiter?" he snapped out. "Good-mornin', sir!" said Arthur Augustus politely, ignoring the question.

Colonel Sparkes was too surprised to

**Will Stand
Up
Anywhere,
Chums.**



W. BARDSLEY.

A SUPERB STAND-UP CUT-OUT ACTION PHOTO OF W. BARDSLEY-

return the salutation. He just goggled. Presently, having recovered himself, he jerked out the query:

"New guests, what?"

"No, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Then what are you doin' here, by gad?"

"We are heah," explained Arthur Augustus, with dignity, "in the intewests of Lord Eastwood. We have just held a conference with the membahs of the staff, in ordah to twy an' persuade them not to go on stwike."

"On strike?" echoed the colonel, perplexed and still angry. "What nonsense is this, hey?"

"Unfortunately, sir, it isn't nonsense—it's fact," said Tom Merry. "The hotel staff has struck. They marched out in a body five minutes ago. But p'raps you couldn't see them from the dining-room."

Colonel Sparkes blinked ferociously at Tom Merry. His curling, military moustache fairly bristled in his wrath and astonishment.

"Is this a fact, boy? Are you tellin' me the truth?"

"I don't deal in lies," answered Tom Merry coldly.

The colonel stamped furiously on the floor.

"So they've struck, have they?" he roared. "They've had the unparalleled impertinence to desert their posts without warnin' the guests! The blackguards! They are all in this, I suppose—from the head-waiter down to that whelp of a page-boy!"

"That's so," said Monty Lowther. "There are no black-legs."

"And there are no blackguards, eithah," said Arthur Augustus, with some warmth. "They stwuck me as bein' a vewy decent lot, although wathah headstwong an' unweas-ona-ble."

"Tush!" roared the colonel. "The—the treacherous hounds, to leave us in the lurch like this! Tarnation to them! Why have they acted in this outrageous manner?"

"They resent Mr. Forrester's dismissal," explained Tom Merry.

"By George! I've never heard of such impudence!" stormed the colonel. "Is the place to be thrown into turmoil and chaos because of the dismissal of an insolent and incompetent jackanapes like Forrester? Those rascals must be brought back—at once!"

The juniors smiled. It was easy for the colonel to ramp and rage on the subject of the strike; it would not be easy to recall the strikers.

"We have done ewerythin' possible, sir, to avert this calamity," said Arthur Augustus. "We put forth all our powahs of persuasion—"

"Pah! What is the persuasion of a pack of schoolboys worth?" hooted the colonel, seemingly unaware of his rudeness in talking thus in the presence of two young ladies. "You should have summoned me, and I would have scotched this strike at once—nipped it in the bud instantly, begad! I'm a man of the world; I should have known how to handle these mutinous dogs!"

Monty Lowther was strongly tempted to say "Bow-wow!" He only checked himself in the nick of time.

"What's to be done now, hey?" demanded Colonel Sparkes, glancing round the assembly.

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders.

"It's a fine old tangle," he said, "and we prefer to leave the unravelling of it to a man of the world!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good for you, Tommy!" murmured Monty Lowther, with a chuckle.

The colonel gave a terrific snort, and glared at Tom Merry. Then he turned, and stamped out of the drawing-room.

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The other guests had by this time congregated in the lounge. That something had gone wrong with the administration of the hotel was now abundantly clear. They questioned Colonel Sparkes as he joined them, and the fiery old martinet explained what had happened. His explanation was peppered with fierce tirades against the strikers and all their works.

As for the St. Jim's party, it seemed that there was nothing they could do but to return to Eastwood House.

And then, just as they were thinking of departure, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had a sudden brain-wave. His eyes sparkled; he drew a quick breath. And whilst his school-fellows were moving towards the door, Arthur Augustus suddenly called them back.

CHAPTER 7.

St. Jim's to the Rescue!

"I SAY, deah boys! Hold on a moment! I've got a weally wippin' ideah!"

Jack Blake sniffed. Herries gave a snort. There was a grunt from Manners. Evidently Gussy's really ripping ideas were not held in much esteem by his chums.

"Let's hear it Gussy," said Tom Merry, patiently.

Arthur Augustus turned a flushed and excited face to his school-fellows.

"Now that the staff has definitely stwuck, deah boys," he said, "why not weplace them with volunteeahs?"

"Eh?"

"In the gweat national stwike, volunteeah labah kept things goin', an' saved the countwy. So why can't things be kept goin' at this hotel by volunteeah labah?"

"Oh!"

"There's only one objection to that," said Figgins. "Where's the volunteer labour coming from, you ass? You heard what your pater said about the difficulty of getting hotel servants at the height of the season. It's impossible."

And then Arthur Augustus sprung his startling scheme. "The volunteeah labah," he said, "will be supplied by us! I pwopose, deah boys, that we take the places of the stwikhahs, an' keep this hotel goin' until Tuesday mornin', when we must return to St. Jim's. By that time, the stwike may be settled."

The juniors stared at Arthur Augustus in blank amazement. For some moments, they were much too amazed to offer any opinions of their elegant chum's brainwave.

At last, Tom Merry found his voice.

"It—it's a staggering wheeze!" he exclaimed. "Quite the best brain-wave Gussy's ever had. Running an hotel would be great sport, and we'd give up our week-end gladly, to do it. But—but there are drawbacks."

"Name them, Tom Mewwy."

"Well, in the first place, we're only schoolboys, you know, and we've had no experience of running hotels."

"But we are vewy adaptable," said Arthur Augustus. "We have adapted ourselves to more difficult jobs than this, before now."

"True; but—"

"Patty Wynn is a first-rate cook. He could take oveh the kitchen, with sevaval fellows to help him."

Patty's plump face beamed like a full moon at the suggestion.

"You, Tom Mewwy, would make an excellent headwaitah, an' Mannahs an' Blake an' Lowthah, could serve at the tables."

"Where do I come in?" asked Wally D'Arey.

"You will fill the page-boy's shoes to perfection, Wally. An' Figgins could be a sort of commissioner. I have always thought that Figgay would make an ideal flunkey."

"You—you—" spluttered Figgins, in wrath.

"No offence meant, deah boy. Now, as to the post of managah, there is only one fellow heah with sufficient dignity an' appearence to do justice to that exalted posish."

"Thanks, Gussy!" said Monty Lowther, with a sweeping bow. "I feel awfully flattered."

Arthur Augustus frowned.

"I was not alludin' to you, Lowthah. I was alludin' to myself!"

"Oh!"

"As for the ladies," said Arthur Augustus, reflectively. "I do not know whethah they would like to take a hand in this biznai."

"Why, we should love it!" said Cousin Ethel, with enthusiasm.

"We should fairly revel in it!" said Doris Levison, no less enthusiastic. "I fancy the job of reception-clerk, myself. What do you fancy, Ethel?"

Cousin Ethel hesitated. A gay twinkle came into her eye.

"I think I should like to assist the—er—flunkey!" she murmured, with a sidelong glance at George Figgins.

Figgins grinned, and blushed. And Arthur Augustus eyed his pretty cousin with mild disapproval.

"I think you had bettah assist the managah, Ethel," he said. "The flunkey will not requiah a charmin' young lady to help him discharge his duties."

Arthur Augustus then proceeded to elaborate his great idea. He allotted a special task to each fellow; and already, in his mind's eye, he visualised himself as manager, strutting majestically to and fro in his most magnificent attire, supervising the work of the hotel, and giving an eye to the comfort of the guests.

The more Arthur Augustus expanded on his scheme, the more eager and enthusiastic did his schoolfellows become. Tom Merry, who had mentally prepared a string of objections to Gussy's startling plan, now forgot them.

When Arthur Augustus asked if all were in favour of his scheme, there was not a dissentient voice. On the contrary, everybody held up both hands.

A few moments later, Arthur Augustus was in deep and earnest consultation with Lord Eastwood. That gentleman was not surprised to hear that the strike threat had been put into effect, and that the mission to Stormcliff had proved a failure; but he was very considerably surprised when Arthur Augustus propounded his remarkable scheme.

"Are you agweeable, patah?" asked the swell of St. Jim's, at lenj.

The deep pleasant laugh of Lord Eastwood sounded over the wires.

"Really, my boy, this is an extraordinary proposition which you have put before me! I scarcely know whether to assent or dissent. Schoolboys running an hotel! Dear me! It sounds quite preposterous. I wonder what the guests will think?"

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"If they have any sense of gwatitude, they will be vewy gwateful to us for volunteein' our services," replied Arthur Augustus. "Unless the hotel is cawwied on by a voluntawwy staff, the guests will be obliged to leave at once. I assure you, patah, that we shall win this hotel as well as it was won befoah. At all events, we can keep the flag flyin' for the week-end, an' by Tuesday mornin' the stwikhers may have thought bettah of their hasty decision."

Lord Eastwood pondered the matter for some moments. He was rather dubious of the experiment which Arthur Augustus suggested. Still, if the hotel was to be kept going, that was the only way. The staff had struck; there was a voluntary staff of schoolboys, ready and willing to take up their duties, and to sacrifice their week-end at Eastwood House in order that the flag might be kept flying, as Arthur Augustus had put it.

If the experiment failed, the situation could be no worse than it was at present. The guests would depart, and the hotel would have to close down. This calamity would happen immediately, unless Lord Eastwood closed with his son's offer. But if the St. Jim's juniors were permitted to take over the hotel, the calamity would be deferred—perhaps avoided altogether.

"Are you there, Arthur?" inquired his lordship, coming to a sudden decision.

"Yaas, patah."

"You have my permission to take over the Ocean View. Whether you will be able to carry on successfully remains to be seen; certainly you do not lack confidence. You will, of course, explain to the guests that I have authorised you to take over the hotel?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I am afraid some of them will not take kindly to the idea of the hotel being run by schoolboys. But they have their remedy. There are other hotels in Stormcliff."

"Quite so, patah!"

"I will endeavour to run down by car to-morrow, to see how are you getting on," said Lord Eastwood. "If I am unable to get away, you may expect me on Monday morning. Tell your friends that I very much appreciate the way they have rallied round in this crisis. And—one moment, Arthur! Your brother Conway is here. He wishes to know if you would like his assistance in running the hotel. He would be pleased to supervise—"

"That is awfly decent of Conway, but with all respect to my bwothah, I think we can wub along all wight without his assistance. If we should want him, I will send a telegwam."

"Very well, my boy. I wish you every success in your enterprise. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, patah!" said Arthur Augustus cheerily.

And he replaced the receiver on its hooks, and hurried back into the drawing-room, where his friends were waiting.

They knew, from Gussy's radiant face, that he had been successful in working the oracle with his pater.

"All serene, Gus?" inquired Wally.

"Yaas, deah boy. The patah seemed a wee bit dubious at first, but I talked him wound. The hotel is now in our hands, and the tempowawy managah is now addressin' you!"

Monty Lowther made a graceful salaam.

"Before we get to business," went on Arthur Augustus.

"I will explain to the guests that we are takin' the places of the stwikhahs."

"Mind you talk to them nicely," smiled cousin Ethel.

The swell of St. Jim's stepped out into the lounge. Nearly a score of guests, of both sexes, were gathered there; and Colonel Sparkes was the stormy petrel of the assembly. He was laying down the law in his strident tones, and the others were nodding approval.

"Here's a pretty kettle of fish!" roared the colonel. "A fine state of affairs, by George! What's the old country comin' to, when people can walk out of their place of employment without so much as 'By your leave'? These precious strikers ought to be rounded up, and punished severely for their temerity, by gad! They have had the infernal audacity to walk out of this hotel, without consultin' us in any way!"

"Their action was—er—somewhat precipitate," murmured an old gentleman.

"Precipitate, sir?" roared the colonel. "It is monstrous—infamous! Do you like the idea of losing your lunch, sir?"

"Well, I don't mind very much," confessed the old gentleman. "The doctors say that an occasional period of fasting is beneficial—"

"Fiddlesticks!" snapped the colonel. "Stuff and nonsense! Do the doctors practise what they preach—do they subsist on dry toast and water? No, sir! A doctor enjoys a hearty lunch as well as the next man; and I'm not ashamed to admit that I enjoy mine! There's nothin' else to do in this beastly, one-eyed place, but eat and sleep."

There will be no lunch to-day for any of us, thanks to those confounded strikers! It's calamitous—outrageous, by George!"

The colonel paused after his fiery outburst, glaring round at his fellow-guests with the glare of a basilisk.

"Pardon me, ladies an' gentlemen," came the quiet voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I have pleasur in informin' you that lunch will be served at the usual hour."

All eyes were turned upon the speaker. The elder of the shrewish spinsters surveyed Arthur Augustus through her lorgnette.

"Why—how is this?" she ejaculated. "Has the staff returned?"

"No, madam. But arrangements have been made to caww on the work at the hotel."

"What!" barked the colonel. "And who is to carry it on, hey?"

"My schoolboy friends from St. Jim's, undah my supervision," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "We have decided, with Lord Eastwood's appwval, to take the places of the stivkahs."

At this, there was a gratified murmur from some of the guests. The old gentleman, in particular, seemed pleased. He nodded his hoary head in benign approval.

Colonel Sparkes, however, gave a violent snort. And the Misses Harridan seemed far from satisfied.

"What nonsense is this?" hooted the colonel. "A pack of schoolboys runnin' an hotel? Absurd! Preposterous!"

And he glowered at Arthur Augustus. That noble youth remained perfectly calm and composed. "Whilst admittin' that we have had no previous expwience of wunnin' an hotel, we are confident of our ability to do so, in a competent an' satisfactowy mannah," said Arthur Augustus.

"Bah!" snorted the colonel. "If this hotel is to be staffed by schoolboys—fledglings who have not long left their mothers' apron-strings—I shall pack my belongings, an' quit!"

Arthur Augustus smiled.

"You are at liberty to do as you like, sir, of course. I will give instructions for your bill to be made out, and my young bwothah, who is actin' as page-boy, will whistle a taxi for you, if you wish."

"Tush!"

The colonel's face assumed an even deeper shade of purple than it habitually possessed.

Arthur Augustus took no further notice of the irate martinet. He bowed courteously to the guests, and withdrew.

There was a strenuous programme of work to be got through, and the new hotel manager had no time to waste in bandying words with Colonel Sparkes. He rejoined his chums, and sent them about their allotted tasks; and the hotel fairly hummed with activity, like a beehive.

St. Jim's had come to the rescue; and the juniors, with Cousin Ethel and Doris Levison, plunged cheerfully and wholeheartedly into their novel duties.

CHAPTER 8.

All Hands to the Pump!

"RABBIT pie!" said Fatty Wynn

"Oh, good!"

"And jam roly-poly to follow!"

"Ripping!"

In the spacious kitchen at "Ocean View," Fatty Wynn was already at work, surrounded by a band of loyal helpers.

Wearing a white chef's outfit, and with his sleeves rolled up above the elbows, the fat junior presented a very business-like appearance. Herries and Digby, and Kerr and Lowther, were backing him up loyally—hanging on Fatty's lightest word, as it were.

Tom Merry—who had been appointed head-waiter—and Manners and Blake, his two subordinates, had looked into the kitchen to see how things were going. They grinned as Fatty Wynn made his pronouncement that there was to be rabbit-pie and jam roly-poly for lunch.

"Are you sure that's quite in order, Fatty?" asked Tom Merry.

"Eh!"

"It isn't usual to serve a hot lunch at a seaside hotel. There's generally a cold collation, and a hot meal in the evening."

Fatty Wynn gave a grunt.

"I don't see why we should blindly copy the other hotels," he said. "Anyway, it's the chef's privilege to decide what the meals are going to be, and I've decided on rabbit-pie and jam roly-poly, so there's nothing more to be said. Cousin Ethel telephoned to the butcher's, and they've sent the bunnies along."

"Nice, plump bunnies, too!" said Monty Lowther, who was engaged in the novel occupation of skinning one.

"We found the kitchen well stocked," went on Fatty Wynn. "There's everything we can possibly want."

"But—but the guests might object to rabbit-pie," protested Tom Merry.

"Let 'em!" said Fatty Wynn, cheerfully.

"But we're here to study the guests, you ass!"

"That's so," agreed Fatty. "I shall study them collectively, but not individually. I'm jolly well not going to ask each guest what he fancies for lunch! If I did, there would be a fine old muddle. That peppery colonel would want Indian curry; and the two maiden ladies would insist on jellied eels; and there would be demands for beef, and roast pork, and lamb cutlets, and cold chicken, and goodness knows what! I'm willing to work as hard as a blessed galley-slave, but I'm not going to study the whims and fancies of each individual guest. It can't be done. Rabbit-pie and jam roly-poly are going to be on the menu, and those who don't like it can do the other thing."

"Hear, hear!" said Kerr, who was also busily engaged in denuding one of the rabbits of its fur.

Tom Merry laughed.

"A cold lunch would be less trouble to prepare," he hinted.

Fatty Wynn, who had embarked on the pastry-making, wagged a rolling-pin at the captain of the Shell.

"Look here, Tom Merry, I'm capable of doing my own job without any advice or suggestions from the head-waiter. You've no right in my kitchen, really, but I'll overlook that. The—fact is, I've decided on rabbit-pie and jam roly-poly because they happen to be my favourites!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry and Manners and Blake roared at Fatty Wynn's whimsical confession. And Fatty's helpers in the kitchen laughed just as heartily.

"Buck up with those bunnies, you fellows!" said Fatty, as he busily trundled the rolling-pin.

"They're the very dickens to skin!" grumbled Lowther. "Do you think the guests would mind if we baked them in their skins?"

"Fathead!"

Whilst the work was proceeding, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked in.

The schoolboy hotel-manager had spent a very busy hour, arranging the sleeping quarters of his staff.

Most of the juniors were to sleep in the servants' rooms, which were particularly cosy and comfortable for rooms of that type.

Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus were to occupy the head-waiter's room, which was a rather more sumptuous apartment than the others; and Cousin Ethel and Doris Levison shared one of the guest-rooms.

In addition to seeing to these arrangements, Arthur Augustus had decked himself out in a magnificent dress-suit, the most elegant and expensive in his vast wardrobe. Solomon in all his glory would have looked a very shabby individual—quite a tramp, in fact, compared with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as he strutted into the hotel kitchen.

"Eweverythin' goin' on all wight, deah boys?" he inquired.

Fatty nodded, as he rolled out the pastry. Fatty was grunting and perspiring, but thoroughly enjoying himself. He was much more at home with a rolling-pin in a kitchen, than with a pen in a Form-room.

"Hallo! Gussy's wearing his glad-rags!" said Monty Lowther, looking up. "Beau Brummell would hide his face for shame, if he could see you now, Gussy. Would you like to help me skin this rabbit?"

"Weally, Lowthah, I wegard your wemarks as iwewe-went! I have no desiah whatevah to skin a wabbit! Such tasks do not come within the scope of an hotel managah's duty. Moreover, I must ask you to treat me with the respect due to my pwesent posish."

"To hear is to obey," murmured Lowther meekly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus turned his monocle upon Fatty Wynn.

"Do you think you will be able to manage all wight, Wynn, an' get lunch served sharp at one-thirty?"

"Yes—so long as there's no interference from fussy hotel managers!" said Fatty, blandly.

"Weally, Wynn—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus turned a crimson face to Tom Merry.

"You have no business to be loungin' in a kitchen, Tom Mewwy, where there is work to be done!" he said sternly.

"Eh? But I don't perform my walkin-on part till one-thirty, when lunch is served," said Tom.

"What about the tables in the dinin'-room?" demanded Arthur Augustus. "The bwakfast things must be cleared away, an' the tables laid for lunch."

"Is that a head-waiter's job?" asked Tom innocently.

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"Pway do not argue with me, Tom Mewwy! - Blake an' Mannahs will see to the tables, an' you will supervise."
 "These supervisors," growled Blake, as he turned to leave the kitchen, "have all the plums! They simply strut around as if the hotel belonged to them, and rap out orders to the underlings. Why didn't you make me a supervisor, Gussy?"
 "Pwoceed to your work, Blake!" commanded Arthur Augustus.

And Blake and Manners left the kitchen with Tom Merry. They were grinning.

Arthur Augustus lingered a few moments, to watch the energetic labours of Fatty Wynn and his helpers, then he sauntered away through the lounge, to the hotel entrance. Wally D'Arcy, attired in a page's uniform, was on duty there, and he clicked his heels, and saluted, as the resplendent Arthur Augustus stalked past.

Outside, on the front steps, George Figgins was sunning himself and chatting with Cousin Ethel. Figg was not in uniform, owing to the fact that the uniform of the regular commissioner was a hopeless misfit, the trousers being much too long and baggy, and the tunic too loose and bulging. Except for the commissioner's cap, which was only slightly too big for him, Figg was in his Etons, leaning negligently against a marble pillar.

Cousin Ethel was close beside him—a little too close, Arthur Augustus reflected.

"Figgins!"

The New House junior gave a jump.

"Have you no work to do, Figgins?"

Figg shook his head, and grinned.

"No new guests have arrived," he said; "and the present guests are out strolling on the prom, or enjoying a dip. I'm like Othello in the play—my occupation's gone."

"And you, Ethel?"

Cousin Ethel smiled.

"There appears to be nothing for me to do, at the moment," she said. "I have telephoned to various tradespeople, for Wynn, and I've asked Doris Levison if she wants any help. Doris is the reception-clerk; but there is nobody to receive!"

"Might as well go for a dip, before lunch," suggested Figgins.

Arthur Augustus frowned.

"You will remain at your post, Figgins! At any moment some distinguished personage may arrive at this hotel, and if there is nobody here to open the door of his Wolls-Woyce, there will be wuctions!"

Figgins yawned, and gazed wistfully out to sea, where happy bathers were revelling in the surf.

It was a glorious summer morning, hot and hazy, and a bath in the briny would have been delightful. But the new hotel manager was evidently determined to enforce strict discipline upon his staff.

"If you are bored with doin' nothin', Figgins," said Arthur Augustus, "I will take your place here for half an hour, while you go into the kitchen an' peel potatoes."

"Catch me!" grinned Figgins. "I'm a commissioner—not a scullery hand!"

Arthur Augustus frowned at this insubordination from one of his underlings. But his annoyance was only transitory. It was impossible to be anything but cheery in the charming company of Cousin Ethel. And Arthur Augustus lingered on the hotel steps, and was soon laughing and chatting as heartily as anybody.

CHAPTER 9.

A Lively Luncheon!

"HUH!"

Colonel Sparkes gave an emphatic snort.

It was lunch-time, and the dining-room of the Ocean View hotel was thronged with guests.

Some of them were rather apprehensive as to what sort of lunch the schoolboy cooks had prepared. They were frankly uneasy on the subject—haunted, as it were, by the nightmare of indigestion.

"Huh!" snorted Colonel Sparkes. "I'll wager that those young cubs have made a pretty fine hash of things, by George!"

Monty Lowther, standing beside the colonel's table, with a napkin over his arm, made bold to reply.

"No, sir, we've not made a hash," he said. "It's rabbit-pie for lunch."

The colonel fixed Monty with a baleful eye.

"Rabbit-pie!" he roared. "The dooce take it! Of all the detestable dishes, there is none I detest so cordially as rabbit-pie! I hate and loathe it, begad! You hear me, boy?"

Monty Lowther heard all right. The colonel's voice boomed through the dining-room like thunder. Some of the guests looked quite startled, accustomed though they were to the colonel's fiery outbursts.

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Tom Merry, the head-waiter, was chatting in low tones to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. That noble youth, immaculate in his spotless dress-suit, stood in the gangway between the rows of tables. His hands were clasped behind his back, and he looked a typical "maitre d'hotel."

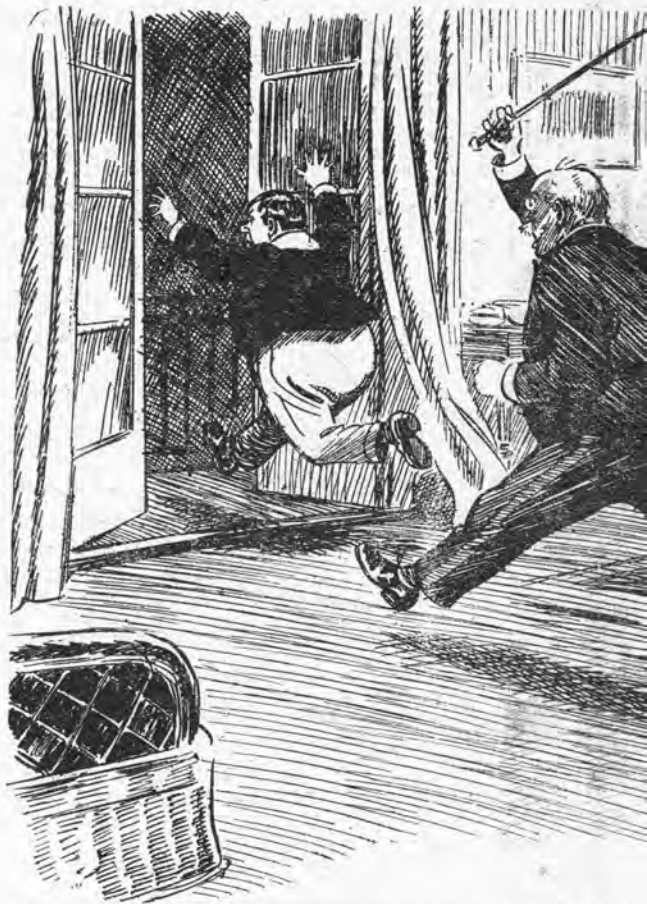
"The old boy seems a bit restive," murmured Tom Merry, referring to the colonel. "Shall I try and pacify him a bit, Gussy?"

"Yaas, deah boy, I think you had bettah. He is makin' a feahful wumpus."

Tom Merry stepped towards the colonel's table.

"Is anything wrong, sir?" he inquired, making a polite bow.

"Yes, begad!" flared the colonel. "Everythin' is wrong! The waiter tells me that you are servin' rabbit-pie for lunch. I detest rabbit-pie, sir—I abominate it like the plague! It is anathema to me, sir! I insist upon havin' somethin' which is less pernicious to the palate!"



Jack Blake found the electric switch, and the sudden blaze of light and making his way through the french windows which opened on the terrace and snatching up a malacca cane which was close at hand, rushed on. "It's Trimble!" gasped Blake.

"There is soup—" began Tom Merry soothingly.

"Then have it served, sir!" barked the colonel. "Do you suppose I'm goin' to sit here waitin' for my lunch till the cows come home? The other people are bein' served. Why should a most important guest be compelled to wait till last? It's a scandal, by George!"

Blake and Manners had already started to wait upon the other guests. They dexterously carried brimming plates of soup and set them upon the tables. It was their first experience as hotel waiters, but they rose to the occasion in great style.

Tom Merry turned to Monty Lowther.

"See that this gentleman is served immediately!" he rapped out.

"Very good, sir!" said Monty.

And he hurried to the end of the dining-room, where the plates of soup were being passed through an aperture by the kitchen hands.

"Waiter!"

Tom Merry turned, to find himself hailed by the two Misses Harridan. These elderly spinsters were toying with

their soup, and their noses were tilted scornfully in the air.

"This is not soup!" said one of them, in disgust. "It is merely hot water, flavoured slightly with tomato."

"Really, ma'am—" protested Tom Merry.

He knew that the soup was excellent, for Fatty Wynn was a past-master in the art of soup-making.

"Why is a hot luncheon being served?" demanded the other Miss Harridan, in a shrill voice. "On such a sweltering day a hot luncheon is ridiculous—absurd!"

The elderly spinster took another spoonful of soup, and made a dreadful grimace. Then she pushed her plate away.

"Ugh!" she ejaculated, with a shudder. "Never have I tasted such a vile concoction!"

Tom Merry hastened to pour oil on the troubled waters. Whilst he was endeavouring to placate the disgruntled ladies, Monty Lowther came along with the colonel's soup.



of illumination showed the marauder to be fully dressed and on to the balcony. The colonel scrambled to his feet, rushed pell-mell to the window, in hot pursuit of the fugitive Jack Blake. (See Chapter 11.)

Monty walked warily. Either by accident or design, the colonel's soup-plate had been filled to the brim, and Monty had to poise it very carefully, in order to avoid a spill.

The colonel, fretting and fuming at the delay in being served, had his back to the approaching Monty.

"When is my soup comin'?" he roared, addressing space. "Pon my soul, these schoolboys are the absolute limit! If I don't get my soup at once, I shall be in danger of losin' my temper, begad!"

The colonel got his soup immediately. He did not get it in quite the way he wanted it, but that was not the waiter's fault.

Colonel Sparkes swung round suddenly in his chair, to bellow for the waiter, without realising that the waiter was already at his elbow.

"Look out, sir!" gasped Lowther.

The warning came too late. Monty's arm received a sudden jog, the soup-plate tilted over in his grasp; and then—

Swish! Swoosh!

The soup descended in a miniature cascade. It swamped

and splashed down the colonel's shirt-front, and the hot spray shot up into his purple face.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Monty Lowther in blank dismay.

The colonel had been served with his soup at last! But, contrary to custom, he had taken it externally instead of internally!

The infuriated warrior bounded to his feet, upsetting his chair with a crash. He snatched up a serviette and dabbed at his face, and he danced up and down like a cat on hot bricks.

"Wow! Woop!" he roared. "I am severely scalded, begad!" The enraged colonel turned fiercely upon Monty Lowther. "You—you clumsy young jackanapes! Look what you've done! You have ruined my clothes!"

"It is all right, colonel," called one of the Misses Harridan. "Hot water does not stain, and this soup is nothing more or less than hot water!"

But the colonel was not to be comforted.

"It is not all right, madam!" he hooted. "It is very far from all right! Look at me, madam! Through the criminal carelessness of this blundering booby I am drenched to the very skin—soaked and scalded, by George! There will be a heavy reckoning for this outrage, begad! I shall sue the management."

"Pway be calm, my deah sir," interposed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who had lounged majestically to the colonel's table. "I witnessed this vewy distwessin' calamity, an' I am satisfied that the waitah was not to blame. He was about to serve your soup when you turned an' jogged his arm."

"How did I know he was standin' behind me?" roared the colonel. "Do you suppose I've got eyes in the back of my head? It was crass, criminal clumsiness on that young rascal's part!"

And the colonel levelled a shaking forefinger at Monty Lowther.

"You shall be served with some more soup, sir," said Arthur Augustus graciously.

"No, I shall not!" thundered the colonel. "I'll take dashed good care to see that this does not happen twice! Do not dare to mention the word soup to me again! I am goin' to change my clothes, and on my return I shall expect to be served with a satisfactory lunch. If I am not, I shall demand my bill, and leave this Bedlam of an hotel instantly!"

So saying, Colonel Sparkes stamped out of the dining-room, still dabbing at his face with the serviette.

Arthur Augustus smiled. Already, earlier in the day, the colonel had threatened to quit the hotel, but he seemed in no hurry to carry out his threat. Certainly the St. Jim's hotel-keepers would not have been sorry to see the back of him. The irate old martinet was a source of endless disturbance and annoyance to the other guests. Nothing ever pleased him, and it was scarcely to be wondered at that the colonel's unreasonable conduct had caused the long-suffering Mr. Forrester, the late manager, to lose his temper and, incidentally, his job.

In this particular instance there was perhaps some excuse for the colonel letting off steam. Even the most placid of persons would have become violent on receiving a baptism of scalding soup. Most of the colonel's complaints, however, were unfounded and unjustified.

After a short interval the colonel was back at his table, and Jack Blake served him with rabbit-pie.

Monty Lowther had discreetly "swopped" places with Blake. After what had happened, Monty deemed it prudent to give the colonel a wide berth.

The colonel had simmered down slightly, but only slightly. He sampled the rabbit-pie, and then he banged his clenched fist on the table and exploded afresh.

"Waiter!" he roared.

"Sir?" said Jack Blake respectfully.

"What is this abominable concoction you have brought me?"

"Rabbit-pie, sir."

"Huh! I have only your word for it. If you said rat-pie I should be inclined to believe you. There is a pronounced ratty flavour about this pie, begad! Taste it, boy, and see for yourself!"

Jack Blake made a deprecatory gesture.

"Not having eaten rodents at any time, sir, I should be unable to recognise the flavour," he said.

And Tom Merry, who was standing near, just managed to convert a chuckle into a cough in the nick of time.

"This is vile—positively vile!" mumbled the colonel, taking another mouthful of pie. "But a man must either eat or starve, so I'll struggle through my portion somehow. But if it should poison me—as it probably will—your cook will be called to account!"

And the colonel manfully attacked his portion of pie. As a matter of fact, it was delicious—done to a turn by the master-hand of Fatty Wynn. And the baked potatoes and green peas were delicious.

Tom Merry strolled away, pausing at the various tables to ask if there were any complaints.

Most of the guests seemed agreeably surprised at the quality of the food which had been set before them. Second helpings of rabbit-pie were constantly called for, and the schoolboy waiters were kept very busy.

Tom Merry halted at the table where the Misses Harridan were lunching. The elder of the two spinsters had already eaten her pie, and she was leaning back in her chair, looking rather white and startled.

"Is anything wrong, ma'am?" inquired Tom Merry quickly.

"Yes. Tell me, waiter—and tell me truthfully—what were the ingredients of that pie which I have just eaten?"

"Simply rabbit, ma'am—finest English rabbit," said Tom.

The old lady fixed the head-waiter with a piercing look.

"It did not taste at all like rabbit," she said. "I ought not to have eaten it. Amelia"—she turned to her sister—"put down your knife and fork at once, before you are poisoned!"

"Good gracious!" gasped Miss Amelia, dropping her knife and fork with a clatter. "Can it be possible that—that this is not rabbit?"

"A dreadful suspicion has come into my mind, Amelia! Where is the kitchen cat?"

"What?"

"There was a cat here in Mr. Forrester's time—a black cat. It has mysteriously disappeared!"

"Heavens!" Miss Amelia gave a startled shriek. "You—you are not suggesting, my dear, that the feline creature has been skinned and put into this pie?"

The elder spinster nodded grimly.

"Judging by the taste of the pie, I should say that is precisely what happened," she said.

"Then we—we shall be poisoned!"

"Undoubtedly!"

And the spinsters exchanged horrified glances across the table.

Tom Merry scarcely knew whether to be angry or amused.

"I can assure you, ladies," he said, after a pause, "that there was nothing in the pie but good, honest English rabbit. I saw the pies made with my own eyes."

"But the cat! Where is the kitchen cat?" demanded the elder lady.

"It has probably found a fresh home," said Tom. "Any-way, it isn't in the pie; you can set your minds at rest on that score. I know they sometimes concoct some queer dishes in China, but our cook isn't a Chinese. I'll fetch him, if you like, and he will add his assurances to mine."

"Yes, fetch him," said Miss Amelia in a faint voice.

So Fatty Wynn was summoned from the kitchen to add his testimony to Tom Merry's that the rabbit-pie was indeed rabbit-pie, and that no black cat had been used as an ingredient.

Fatty Wynn was very indignant at the suggestion that his cooking could possibly poison anybody, and Tom Merry had to use all his tact to avert a "scene."

Eventually the fears of the Misses Harridan were allayed. Fatty Wynn went back to the kitchen, bursting with indignation, and Tom Merry resumed his tour of the dining-room.

When he returned to the colonel's table he saw that the old martinet had finished his portion of pie.

"Waiter," rumbled the colonel, "I have eaten my pie at great personal risk and am now prepared for the worst. What is the next course?"

"Jam roly-poly pudding, sir."

"Huh! It is sure to be uneatable. I could not face a jam-pudding made by schoolboys! But, as my appetite is unappeased, I suppose I had better have another portion of that abominable rabbit-pie."

"Very good, sir."

Tom Merry motioned to Jack Blake, who replenished the colonel's plate.

When the second portion of rabbit-pie had been disposed of, the colonel felt that he had gone so far along the road to being poisoned that he might as well go the whole hog. So he bellowed for a portion of jam roly-poly; and then, either because he had grown utterly reckless, or because the pudding was nicer than he had anticipated, he roared for a second helping.

Lunch was over at last, and the trials and tribulations of the head-waiter and his assistants were also over.

When the guests had dispersed, the St. Jim's juniors assembled in the kitchen for their own lunch, and Cousin Ethel and Doris Levison joined them there.

It was a merry meal, and Monty Lowther related with great gusto to the kitchen staff how he had swamped the colonel with soup. The kitchen rang with laughter at that episode; and Tom Merry added to the general mirth when he described the fears of the Misses Harridan concerning the present whereabouts of the kitchen-cat.

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Lunch concluded with a special toast, in foaming ginger-pop, in honour of Fatty Wynn. And it was agreed on every side that the plump schoolboy chef had certainly deserved well of his country.

CHAPTER 10.

The Uninvited Guest!

"TUPPENCE, please!"

Baggy Trimble sat bolt upright, with a startled blink, as the stern voice of a chair attendant hailed him.

The fat junior had been reclining lazily in a deckchair on the beach at Stormcliff. Baggy was attired in a suit of tight-fitting flannels, and a straw hat banded with the St. Jim's colours screened his perspiring brow. For it was a baking-hot afternoon, and the sun beat fiercely upon the shingle.

Exertion of any sort did not appeal to Baggy Trimble on so sultry an afternoon. He was content to bask in a deckchair and be slowly melted to a grease-spot.

Having failed to coax a week-end invitation from any of his schoolfellows, Baggy Trimble had decided to set out on his lonesome and spend the day at Stormcliff, which was no great distance from St. Jim's. He had arrived at ten o'clock that morning and had spent most of his time lounging on the beach.

Baggy had no idea that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's party was in the locality. He naturally supposed them to be spending the week-end at Eastwood House. And they were equally unaware of Baggy's presence at Stormcliff, being too busy at the hotel to pay a visit to the beach.

"Tuppence, please!"

The chair attendant, armed with a roll of tickets, loomed over Baggy Trimble and eyed him grimly.

Baggy realised, with a start of dismay, that he was "stony." The few shillings he had brought with him to Stormcliff had been expended by this time—chiefly on strawberry-ices from the little refreshment kiosk close by.

As a matter of fact, Baggy was in a desperate plight. He had only taken a single ticket to Stormcliff, and he had no means of getting back to St. Jim's that evening—unless a miracle happened.

Baggy had fully intended to conserve enough money to pay for his return fare; but the ice-cream barrel had lured him like a moth to a candle, and Baggy's money—like the ices—had rapidly melted away.

Baggy blinked apprehensively at the chair attendant. He made a great business of going through his pockets.

"Ahem! I—I've no small change," he stammered. "You couldn't change a fiver, I suppose?"

"No, I couldn't!" was the curt reply. "Wot's more, I don't believe you've got a fiver to change. I've met your sort afore. I ain't walked this beach, man an' boy, for fifty years without learnin' to size people up. It strikes me very forcibly that you're a bilker!"

"Oh, really—"

"If you're an honest young gent, perjuice that fiver you was speakin' of, an' I'll take back wot I said about you."

Baggy Trimble groped feverishly in his breast-pocket for an imaginary wallet. Then he uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"Oh crumbs! My wallet's gone! I—I must have been robbed! I was warned not to come to this place. They told me that the beach at Stormcliff was swarming with crooks and pickpockets—"

"You fat young rascal!" roared the chair attendant. "Do you think you can bluff me with a yarn like that? You're a bilker, that's what you are—defraudin' the corporation of tuppence! If I was to call a policeman—"

"Ow!"

"You'd finish yer 'oliday in the local lock-up. We've got a short way with bilks at Stormcliff. But I think I'll deal with you meself."

So saying, the attendant laid a pair of big brown hands upon Baggy Trimble's deckchair. Then he gave a mighty heave, such as Samson of old must have given when he uprooted the pillars of the temple. Baggy Trimble shot forth like a stone from a catapult, and went sprawling on the shingle.

"Yarooooogh!"

Having dealt effectively with Trimble, the chair attendant passed on.

The fat junior sat up on the sun-baked shingle and groaned. He had landed so heavily that he felt sure there were some broken bones and one or two ribs displaced. On feeling himself all over, however, Baggy came to the conclusion that he was still in one piece, and he picked himself up and limped away towards the bathing-tents.

Beside one of the tents lay a sheet of tarpaulin, and Baggy stretched himself out on this. It was a protection from the stones, which felt like hot baked chestnuts under the scorching sun.

Reclining on the tarpaulin, Baggy pondered his present plight. He was not given to worrying over much as a rule. He had been in situations like this before, and had generally managed to wriggle out of them. But it was no joke to be stranded at a seaside resort without a penny.

How was he to get back to St. Jim's?

That was a riddle which would have baffled the Sphinx. It would be impossible to pass the barrier at Stormcliff Station without a ticket. It would be equally impossible to charter a taxicab, unless Baggy could convince the driver that he had the means to pay. As to walking and trusting to luck to get a free lift on the road, Baggy shuddered at the bare notion.

"If I don't show up at St. Jim's, to-night they won't be anxious about me," murmured the fat junior. "They'll suppose I've come away for the week-end, like lots of other fellows. But how can I spend the week-end in this place without a penny in my pocket? It would mean going without grub, and sleeping on the beach like a blessed tramp! Grooooh!"

Baggy's reflections were anything but cheerful. He was roused from them by the sudden appearance of a couple of bathers, who were stepping gingerly over the shingle, like cats on hot bricks. They were making for the tent which was beside Baggy Trimble.

Baggy blinked at the bathers. One was a rather elderly gentleman with a purple face and a bristling, military moustache. His striped costume gave him the appearance of a zebra. His companion was also an elderly gentleman, who gave little yelps of discomfort as his bare feet found contact with the burning shingle.

The two men passed into the tent without taking any notice of Trimble. Their conversation, as they towelled themselves, was plainly heard by the fat junior.

"Schoolboys' runnin' an hotel! Absurd! Preposterous!" It was evidently the purple-faced gentleman speaking. "I knew what it would be, sir—I knew they would make a hopeless hash of everythin', by gad! Fancy servin' hot rabbit-bie for lunch on a swelterin' day like this! It has given me violent indigestion—shootin', stabbin' pains back and front. It is fortunate that I am a mild-tempered man, sir, or those young rascals would hear of this!"

"Speaking for myself, colonel," came the voice of the other gentleman, "I considered the rabbit-pie excellent. Unfedged schoolboys they may be, but one of them knows how to cook. And the pudding—the jam roly-poly—was delightful!"

Baggy Trimble's mouth watered as he listened. Baggy was hungry. Strawberry ices, however delicious in themselves, are not of much use in filling an aching void. The mention of rabbit-pie and jam roly-poly wrung a plaintive sigh from the fat junior. He could scarcely bear to listen, and he was just thinking of getting up and walking away, when the conversation continued.

"I can only say, sir, that you are very easily satisfied!" barked the colonel. "I considered the lunch was abominable! Ow! This confounded indigestion is rackin' me, by George! And what do you think those impudent young rascals are givin' us for tea? Cakes and pastries, sir—jam-tarts and other sticky and indigestible compounds! As if we were still schoolboys, with schoolboys' appetites! I expressly asked young D'Arcy—who is runnin' the show—to have a lobster salad prepared. I have a weakness, sir, for lobster salad. D'Arcy said he would like to oblige me, but the food arrangements were in the hands of that disgustingly fat youngster, Wynn, and D'Arcy was powerless to countermand his orders. So we are to have cakes and pastries inflicted on us, sir, and the hotel is bein' turned into a kids' tuckshop! It's disgustin'—disgraceful! It's—Words fail me, sir!"

But words did not fail the irate colonel, apparently, for

he continued to explode verbal fireworks, and to abuse everything and everybody connected with the hotel. Most of all he abused the regular staff for having gone on strike.

Baggy Trimble sat bolt upright, his eyes saucer-like in his astonishment. He was fairly staggered by what he had heard.

So the St. Jim's fellows were here in Stormcliff, running an hotel in the absence of the staff!

There could not be the slightest doubt about it, for the colonel had mentioned both D'Arcy and Wynn by name.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Baggy, drawing a deep breath. "Fancy those fellows running an hotel! And I've been hanging around here all day without getting to know of it until now! Jolly lucky I happened to overhear this conversation! I shall know where to get a meal now, and accommodation for the night—for the whole of the week-end, perhaps!"

For a moment Baggy was in high glee. But presently his face clouded again.

His first impulse was to find out the hotel that the juniors were running, and to pitch a tale of woe and throw himself on their mercy. But he reflected that Tom Merry & Co. never had much sympathy to waste on him. They had heard Trimble's tales of woe before, and were seldom moved to compassion by them.

What the juniors would probably do if Baggy called on them now would be to have a whip-round for his return railway fare and promptly send him packing. They were not enamoured of Baggy's company, and it was extremely unlikely that they would ask him to spend the week-end with them as a non-paying guest.

Hungry though he was, Baggy realised that it would not be good policy to call at the hotel—not yet, at all events. He would bide his time. In the meanwhile, he would ascertain where the hotel was situated.

Baggy waited until the colonel and his companion had finished dressing. They were very long-winded about it; but they emerged from the bathing-tent at last, and, again ignoring Trimble, they made their way slowly up the sloping beach.

Baggy rose and followed them. He was careful to keep at a discreet distance, though he had them in sight all the time. They ascended a flight of steps to the promenade, and, crossing the road, mounted the steps of the Ocean View Hotel.

"So that's the place!" murmured Baggy, halting midway up the promenade steps, and peering over the top. "Looks an awfully decent show. I suppose it belongs to Lord Eastwood."

While he looked, Baggy suddenly caught sight of Figgins of the NeNW House. Figgins appeared on the hotel steps, bowed deferentially to the colonel and his companion, and relieved them of their towels and bathing-costumes.

A moment later, Figgins was joined by Cousin Ethel, and they stayed chatting together until the tea-gong sounded.

Baggy Trimble heard the gong distinctly, and he was seized with a sudden temptation to go across to the hotel, and beg to be allowed to join the guests at tea. But the thought that after tea he would probably be given marching orders, restrained him. He must await an opportunity of getting into the hotel unseen. Then he would pay a stealthy visit to the kitchen, and help himself to supplies; afterwards finding a spare bed-room, in which he could lock himself for the night. What would happen in the morning was a matter for conjecture. Still, sufficient unto the day were the problems thereof.

Baggy's opportunity did not present itself until eight o'clock in the evening. By this time he was almost desperate with hunger. More than once he had been on the point of going to the hotel, and risking the reception he would get from his schoolfellows.

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Boys!

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But Baggy had held out somehow, and at eight o'clock he was well rewarded for his long wait.

A cheery party of St. Jim's juniors, armed with towels and costumes, came trooping down to the beach.

Dinner had been served at seven. It was over now, and the schoolboy staff had also dined—lightly, however, for they proposed to enjoy a refreshing dip in the sea, now that the arduous duties of the day were over.

Laughing and joking, and escorting Cousin Ethel and Doris Levison in their midst, Tom Merry & Co. clattered down the stone steps on to the shingle. Gussy, as manager, however, had to stay behind and "look after the hotel," as Monty Lowther put it.

Baggy Trimble screened himself from view behind a boat and watched. He waited until the party had disappeared into the bathing-tents; then he scrambled to his feet, and rolled rapidly away to the hotel.

"Now's my chance!" he muttered, his eyes gleaming with excitement. "I can dodge that ass D'Arcy!"

A number of guests were seated round a little table in the winter garden, playing cards, when Baggy Trimble passed through into the lounge. They turned casual glances in the fat junior's direction, but did not seem at all startled. Evidently they mistook Baggy for Fatty Wynn.

Baggy made his way to the kitchen without encountering the manager. Baggy had a sort of sixth sense for locating kitchens and pantries and any places where food might be stored.

He fervently hoped that the kitchen might be unoccupied, and his hopes were realised. He rolled inside, and closed the door, and blinked around the spacious refectory.

The table had been cleared and scrubbed down by Fatty Wynn's assistants. The St. Jim's juniors had done their work thoroughly, and there was a wholesome cleanness about the place.

Baggy Trimble rolled to the big safe and opened it. Inside there were all manner of good things. There was a cold rabbit-pie, left over from lunch. There was half a chicken—still warm, for roast chicken had been served for dinner. There was a dish of assorted cakes and pastries; there was everything, in fact, that the heart of a gourmand could desire.

Baggy was strongly tempted to sit down and make a meal on the spot; but he realised that there would be risk of interruption. His best plan would be to help himself to what he wanted, and to convey it to the bed-room where he proposed to pass the night.

Taking a large tray, Baggy proceeded to load it with the rabbit-pie, and the portion of chicken, and the dish of cakes and pastries, and other edibles that took his fancy. He also located a couple of bottles of stone ginger-beer, and set them upon the tray also.

This done, he opened the kitchen door a few inches and peeped out to make sure that the coast was clear.

It was. The guests—with the exception of those who were playing cards in the winter-garden—were enjoying an evening stroll on the promenade.

Chuckling softly, Baggy Trimble picked up the tray and bore it out of the kitchen and through the lounge, till he came to the foot of the wide staircase. There he paused for a moment. Like Moses of old, he looked this way and that, and there was no man.

Up the stairs went Baggy, carefully poising the laden tray. He reached the landing of the first floor without being challenged; then, setting down the tray on a small table, he set out on a tour of investigation.

Passing from room to room, Baggy peeped inside. All the bed-rooms were deserted, but they showed signs of being in occupation. There were dressing-gowns hanging behind the doors, and pyjamas folded upon the pillows.

The end bed-room, however—No. 13—appeared not to be in use. The bed was made up, but there were no garments hanging behind the door.

Baggy knew that a lot of people were superstitious about the number thirteen, and he concluded that this room had been shunned by the guests, much as a haunted room might be shunned.

The fat junior had no such foolish fancies. He opened the door of No. 13, and propped it with a chair; then he went back for the tray.

A moment later, Baggy Trimble was safely ensconced in the end bed-room, with the door locked, and with a glorious feed at his immediate disposal. After the feed, he proposed to turn in.

CHAPTER 11.

A Night Alarm!

TOM MERRY sat up in bed with a start.

In his dreams, Tom had seemed to hear the clangorous peal of a bell. He heard it definitely and actually now, as he sat up in the darkness.

The sound echoed and re-echoed through the hotel. It was

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the front-door bell, and whoever was ringing it seemed to be trying to wrench the bell-pull out of its socket.

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "You fellows awake?"

Manners grunted a sleepy affirmative. And Monty Lowther stirred in his bed, and sat up.

"Who's kicking up that confounded shindy?" he demanded. "Have we locked anybody out, Tommy?"

"Goodness knows!" said Tom. "Anyway, it's a quarter to twelve, and guests who stay out till this hour ought to be jolly well ashamed of themselves! We locked up at eleven, thinking everybody was in."

The bell continued to clang with urgent insistence. By this time it must have awakened all the St. Jim's fellows, and the guests into the bargain.

"Somebody had better go down, I suppose!" growled Tom Merry.

But no one seemed anxious to make the excursion. It was very snug and comfortable in bed, and the juniors, after their strenuous day, did not feel disposed to turn out.

"Oh, let him ring on, whoever it is!" yawned Lowther. "He'll soon get tired of that game."

"Ass! It might be a new guest, just arrived."

"New guests don't arrive at midnight, as a rule," said Manners. "Strikes me it's somebody we've locked out."

"Bless him!" said Tom Merry. But his tone implied a malison, rather than a benison.

Still the bell clanged. The noise was getting on the juniors' nerves, and Tom Merry stepped out of bed at last, and slipped his feet into a pair of slippers, and donned a jacket over his pyjamas.

"It isn't the duty of a head-waiter to admit belated guests," grumbled Tom. "Gussy forgot to appoint a night-porter. But somebody must go down. This is getting too awful!"

Suddenly there was a rapping on the far side of the partition which separated the Terrible Three's bed-room from that occupied by Blake, Herries, and Digby.

"You fellows awake?" called Jack Blake.

"Of course!" answered Tom Merry. "This row would be enough to wake the Seven Sleepers!"

"Is it a fire, or burglars, or what?"

"Somebody we've locked out, I believe. Anyway, I'm just going down to see."

"Good man!"

Tom Merry hurried out of the bed-room.

It was a long way from the servants' quarters in the house-tops down to the hall floor, and Tom Merry, not yet being familiar with the geography of the place, could not find the electric light switches. So he groped his way downstairs in the darkness, and the clanging of the bell seemed to grow even louder as he went.

On reaching the first floor, Tom heard a bed-room door opened. Faintly through the gloom he could distinguish the night-capped head of one of the Misses Harridan. The old lady was in a state of great perturbation.

"Is it—is it burglars?" she faltered.

"I don't think so, ma'am," replied Tom Merry reassuringly. "A burglar wouldn't need to ring the front-door bell; he'd nip in through the drawing-room window. I'm afraid we've locked somebody out."

"This is a dreadful place!" said the elderly spinster. "One gets no peace by day or night. I shall demand compensation for having my slumbers disturbed in this way! And if these annoyances continue, my sister and I will leave the hotel!"

Tom Merry seemed quite unmoved by this dire threat. It occurred to him that the sooner the Misses Harridan found fresh quarters, the better it would be for the other guests at Ocean View. They were eternally complaining; they were never satisfied; they must have been the bane of Mr. Forrester's life, when he had charge of the hotel.

Tom Merry passed on down the stairs. When he eventually gained the ground floor, he found a switch and clicked it on, and the lounge was flooded with a blaze of light.

The bell-ringer, although he must have seen the light, did not desist from his exertions. The clamour was deafening.

Tom Merry hurried to the door and drew back the bolts, and released the catch. Then, without an instant's hesitation, he threw open the door.

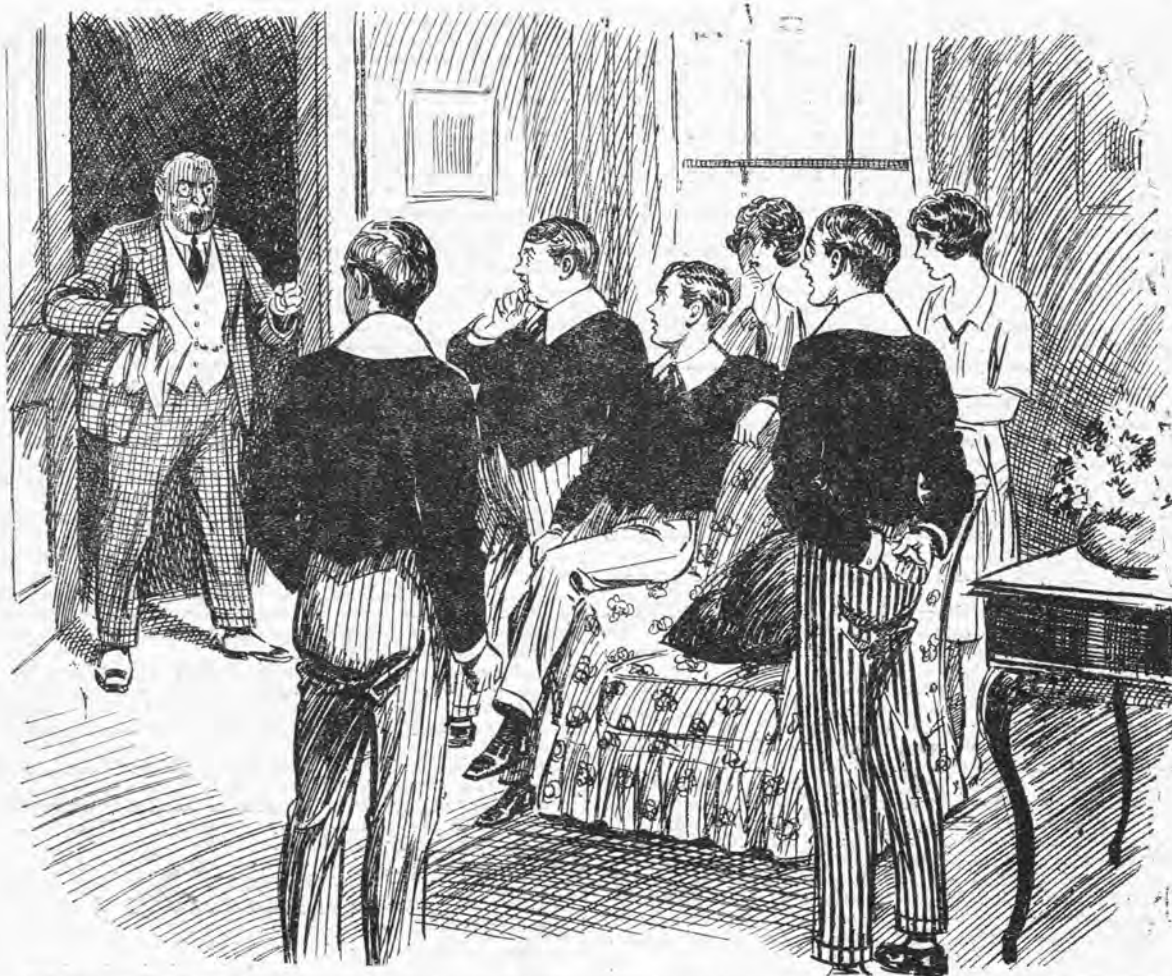
A purple-faced gentleman came charging through the doorway like an infuriated bull. Tom Merry was obliged to jump to one side to avoid being knocked down.

"Boy! Young rascal! What is the meaning of this, hey?"

It was Colonel Sparkes, and his voice was husky with rage.

"Locked out of my own hotel, by George!" hooted the colonel. "Was ever a man treated so scandalously? I've been ringin' this infernal bell for thirty minutes on end!"

This was rather an exaggeration on the colonel's part, but he was in no mood to be reasonable. He had been kept



The door of the drawing-room was thrown open without ceremony, and the purple face and bull neck of Colonel Sparkes were thrust into the room. "Waiter! Are you in here, you evasive rascal? Oh!" The colonel broke off suddenly, at the sight of the St. Jim's juniors and their girl chums. His large, fish-like eyes goggled at them from beneath bushy eyebrows. "Where's the waiter?" he snapped out. (See Chapter 6.)

waiting for ten minutes, and each moment of waiting had fanned his fury into a flame. He was almost beside himself as he stamped to and fro in the lounge and glared at Tom Merry.

The junior did not turn a hair. He waited quietly till the colonel's wrath should have spent itself.

Colonel Sparkes had been out for the evening, and he had not enjoyed himself. First of all he had visited the concert-party on the pier, and had been bored to distraction by whiskered jokes which had been invented in the days of Noah, and by songs which he had lisped in his childhood.

The colonel had left the concert-party in a great huff, and he had spent the rest of the evening at the Deep Sea Anglers' Club, of which he was a member. There he had played auction bridge for high stakes, and had lost heavily. The colonel was ill-fitted to be a gambler, for he had not sufficient sportsmanship to accept his losses with calm and grace.

And now, to crown everything, he had been locked out of his own hotel!

He had supposed—if he had thought about the matter at all—that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy would have appointed a night porter. But Arthur Augustus had not done so. Gussy's chums had had a hard day, and he would not have dreamed of asking any one of them to stay up all night into the bargain.

Tom Merry closed the door and shot the bolts into their place. Then he calmly confronted the colonel.

"Do you hear me, boy?" roared the incensed martinet. "I have been ringin' that pesterin' bell for half an hour!"

"That's not true, anyway," said Tom quietly. "Ten minutes would be nearer the mark."

"You—you—"

"We locked up at eleven o'clock," Tom went on, "because we saw by the hotel prospectus that that was the proper time. Any guests who expect to be out later are supposed

to notify the manager. Did you tell D'Arcy you were going to be late?"

"No, sir, I did not!" roared the colonel. "I do not consult a young puppy of a schoolboy as to my goings-out and comings-in!"

"Then you have only yourself to blame for being locked out," said Tom Merry curtly.

"Begad!" bellowed the colonel. "Am I to be insulted like this by an impudent young jackanapes? I will leave this hotel on Monday! I will shake its dust from my feet, sir!"

The remark was emphasised by a vigorous jerk of the colonel's foot.

It was on the tip of Tom Merry's tongue to say "Jolly good riddance!" Tom was himself in none too sweet a temper, having been roused and made to come downstairs in the middle of the night. But he restrained himself with an effort.

"Are you going up, sir?" he asked, crossing to the electric-light switch. "I'll leave the light while you go upstairs."

The colonel spluttered and fumed, and muttered some incoherent remark. Then he stamped through the lounge and up the stairs, snorting as he went.

Tom Merry waited a moment, then he switched off the light and groped his way up the staircase to his own quarters.

"Who was it, Tommy?" inquired Monty Lowther. And Jack Blake's door was opened, with the same inquiry.

"Need you ask?" growled Tom Merry. "It was the colonel. He slanged me till I thought he was going to have an apoplectic fit!"

"Good old Fiery Sparkes!" chuckled Lowther.

"It was his own fault he was locked out!" grunted Manners.

"I told him so," said Tom Merry.

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"You told him so to his face? No wonder he's wrathful!" Tom Merry was about to slip off his jacket and get into bed, when there came sounds of commotion from down below. There were bangings, and shoutings, and other sounds to vex the drowsy ear of night.

The juniors exchanged glances.

"Sounds as if the colonel's still on the warpath!" said Lowther, with a grin. "What fresh bee has he got in his bonnet, I wonder? Does he imagine there's a giddy burglar in his room?"

Whatever the colonel may or may not have imagined, he was certainly making plenty of noise. There was no imagination about that! He stamped, and he stormed, and he banged, and he hammered, until the place was in an uproar.

If it was the colonel's intention to awaken everybody in the hotel, he need not have bothered. They had been awakened already by the incessant clanging of the door-bell. But, as if to make quite certain of spoiling everybody's slumbers, Colonel Sparkes was now making a most terrific din.

"This is too thick!" exclaimed Tom Merry angrily. "Hasn't the selfish old buffer any consideration for the guests, or for ourselves? Doesn't he realise that it's past midnight, and that he has no right to kick up this shindy?"

"Let's go down and see what it's all about," said Manners, now wide awake.

For the second time Tom Merry turned out, and on this occasion his chums followed suit. They hastily slipped on a few garments, and quitted the bed-room. In the corridor they were joined by half a dozen sleepy-eyed and wrathful juniors.

"What's going on down below?" inquired Fatty Wynn. "Is this how they usually carry on at seaside hotels? What with a blessed bell buzzing in a fellow's ears for ten minutes on end, and now this awful commotion—"

"It's the colonel," explained Tom Merry. "I've just let him in, and now he's carrying on like a maniac! Either he's found a burglar in his bed-room—"

"Or else stepped on an inverted tinctack with his bare feet," suggested Lowther. "Hark at him!"

The colonel was behaving like a man demented. It seemed to the juniors, as they hurried downstairs, that he was hurling himself bodily against his bed-room door.

On their way down they were joined by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who slept on the floor below.

The swell of St. Jim's had been awakened by the bell, but he had felt too fagged to turn out. This subsequent din, however, was not to be endured. It had brought Arthur Augustus from his bed, and now, garbed in a gorgeous dressing-gown, he joined his chums.

"What a fearful clattah!" he exclaimed. "Who is responsible for it, deah boys?"

"The peppery one," grinned Monty Lowther.

"But what is w'ong?"

Colonel Sparkes soon satisfied Gussy's curiosity on that point. When the juniors reached the first floor, they found the irate martinet, purple and swollen, crashing his clenched fists upon the door of No. 15.

"Locked out of my own bed-room, begad!" roared the colonel. "This is Pelion piled upon Ossa—insult upon injury! First, I find myself locked out of my hotel, and then out of my own room!"

"Bai Jove!"

"It's monstrous!" shouted the colonel, glaring at the partially-clad juniors. "It's not to be tolerated, by George! I believe it is a trick—a practical joke—on the part of you young cubs!"

"Nothing of the sort!" said Tom Merry warmly. "We were too jolly fagged when we went to bed to want to stay up till midnight and play silly pranks!"

"There's somebody in my room!" panted the colonel, hurling himself against the door with a heavy shoulder.

charge. "When I first tried the door I distinctly heard sounds of snoring. Then, when I demanded admission, and threatened to smash the door in, I heard a bed creakin'. Somebody's in my bed, if ever you heard of such audacity! Help me to force this door, you grinnin' gargoyles"—for most of the juniors were smiling—"and I'll teach this confounded interloper a sharp lesson, by gad!"

The juniors hesitated. They had no brief for the colonel, who, from the moment they had taken over the hotel, had gone out of his way to make himself offensive and objectionable. At the same time, if there was an intruder in the hotel—a burglar, possibly—and he had calmly commandeered one of the guest's bed-rooms, he must be captured and dealt with. That was a plain duty.

"Shall we lend a hand, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yaas, deah boy. We must get to the bottom of this extwaordinawy business."

The door was already creaking ominously under the repeated charges of the colonel. And when a couple of sturdy juniors added their exertions, the door presently yielded. It caved in so suddenly that the colonel and his assistants were precipitated into the room, and they went sprawling on to the carpet. The others surged into the room behind them.

"Hellup!" yelled the colonel, who had fallen heavily, with a couple of the juniors on top of him.

"Switch the light on, one of you! Quickly—or we shall lose our man!"

Already the intruder was in the act of making his escape.

Jack Blake found the switch, and the sudden blaze of illumination showed the marauder to be fully dressed, and making his way through the french windows which opened on to the balcony.

The colonel, scrambling to his feet, and snatching up a malacca cane which was close at hand, uttered a roar that the celebrated Bull of Bashan might have envied. Then he rushed pell-mell to the window in hot pursuit of the fugitive.

As for the St. Jim's juniors, they stood spellbound, as if unable to accept the evidence of their own eyes.

For the fugitive was their own schoolfellow, whom they had imagined to be miles away.

It was Baggy Trimble.

CHAPTER 12.

After the Feast, the Reckoning!

"TRIMBLE!"

"Great pip!"

"Wonders will never cease!" ejaculated Monty Lowther. "What's that fat bouncer doing here, at Stormcliff? And how did he get into the hotel?"

"Ask me another!" said Tom Merry, in amazement.

Fatty Wynn pointed to the remnants of the tremendous orgy which Baggy Trimble had consumed. The empty pie-dish, the various other dishes, and the ginger-beer bottles, gave abundant evidence that Baggy had raided the hotel kitchen.

"Trimble seems to have done himself well," said Figgins.

"The—the awful fat toad, to drop in uninvited, and raid our supplies! He deserves to be flayed alive for this!"

Tom Merry smiled grimly.

"No need for us to do the flaying, I'm thinking," he said. "The colonel will take it out of Trimble!"

"If he catches him!" said Lowther.

"He'll catch him, all serene. Baggy hasn't got the nerve to drop from the balcony, so he'll be fairly cornered."

Tom Merry's prediction proved correct.

Rushing along the balcony, brandishing his malacca cane, Colonel Sparkes came upon the hapless Baggy Trimble, crouching in the shadows at the far end. Baggy had not sufficient courage to clamber over the balcony railings, and drop down on to terra firma.

"Got you, you rascal!" roared the colonel.

A grip of iron closed upon Baggy Trimble's collar, and he was hauled to his feet, and marched back to the bed-room.

In the glare of the electric light, the colonel took stock of his captive. He seemed very surprised to find that he had to deal with a plump schoolboy, and not with a fully-grown marauder. But he was none the less angry. The look that he bestowed upon Baggy Trimble made that luckless youth shake in his shoes.

"I will not waste words on you, begad!" roared the colonel. "I will not ask what you were doing in my bed-room. It is only too obvious." He jerked his hand in the direction of the tray of empty dishes. "You have seen fit to hold a disgustin' orgy in my room, and then sleep it off on my bed. You locked me out, and refused my repeated demands for admittance! You have behaved abominably, by George, and I should be quite justified in handin' you over to the police!"

LOOK OUT FOR THE "SHERBET MAN!"

Would you like a free gift of a box of delicious sherbet? Of course you would! Then look out for the Special Representative of the "Gem" at the seaside this summer! At all the principal seaside resorts our Representative will be specially looking out for boys and girls who are carrying a copy of the "Gem." To everyone seen displaying this paper, he will present free a box of delicious sherbet. So take your "Gem" with you when you go on the beach, and show it prominently as you can. Our sherbet man will be on the look out for you!

OUR EDITOR.

"Ow!" gasped Baggy Trimble. "It—it's all a misunderstanding, sir, I assure you! I'd no idea this was your bedroom. I—I didn't think the room was occupied."

"Enough of falsehoods, sir!" barked the colonel. "You have behaved like a common burglar, and I could have you given in charge for breakin' and enterin'. However, I prefer to deal with you myself. It will afford me more satisfaction than the other course. Get across that bed, sir!"

"Oh, really—"

"Get across!" hooted the incensed colonel, swishing his malacca cane through the air.

Baggy Trimble blinked appealingly at his schoolfellows, who stood in a silent group.

"Back up, you fellows!" he cried desperately. "Surely you're not going to stand by and see me walloped by this awful beast!"

"What!" thundered the colonel. "You dare to allude to me as a beast? This is more than flesh and blood can stand! For the last time, get across that bed!"

Baggy Trimble made no motion to comply, whereupon the irate colonel seized him by the collar, and slung him across the bed as if he had been a sack of coals.

Baggy's schoolfellows did not interfere. They felt that if ever a fellow richly merited corporal punishment, Baggy Trimble did. He had broken into the hotel like a thief in the night; he had helped himself liberally from the kitchen; and he had calmly commandeered one of the guest-rooms. By his conduct he had caused a terrific commotion in the middle of the night; and no doubt the guests would have something to say about it in the morning.

Whack, whack, whack!

The colonel got busy with the cane, and the dust rose in a

little cloud from Baggy Trimble's tight-fitting trousers. He wriggled and roared as the strokes fell.

Six times the cane descended upon Baggy's plump person, and six anguished yells fairly awakened the echoes.

The colonel was just warming to his work, as it were, and he would doubtless have laid on another six, had he been allowed a free hand. But Tom Merry & Co. considered six strokes adequate.

The juniors interposed between the colonel and his victim.

"That's enough, sir!" said Tom Merry sharply.

From beneath his bushy eyebrows, the colonel's eyes gleamed.

"Stand aside!" he roared. "I will not be dictated to by a pack of schoolboys! Get back, all of you—unless you want a dose of the same medicine yourselves!"

The juniors stood their ground. And when the colonel raised his malacca cane in a threatening manner, Tom Merry whisked it out of his hand with a quick movement, and tossed it into a corner.

"Come along, Trimble!" said Tom.

The fat junior was only too glad to obey. He scrambled off the bed, still yelping from the chastisement he had received, and he fairly bolted from the bed-room, his schoolfellows giving him a clear passage.

The colonel was almost beside himself with fury. For a moment, it looked as if he would take violent action against Baggy Trimble's rescuers. But he had sufficient prudence to avoid becoming involved in a scuffle with the juniors, who were quite capable of giving him a rough handling, despite the fact that he was a guest.

Tom Merry & Co. followed Trimble into the corridor, and the colonel slammed the door behind them with a

(Continue overleaf.)



Address all letters: The Editor, The "Gem" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.
Write me, you can be sure of an answer in return.

THIS week's mail brings me a fair number of letters dealing with swimming. One I have in mind comes from a cheery chum in Bournemouth. He's having the holiday of his life there—plenty of sunshine, plenty of swimming, and his copy of the GEM. He declares that his is a perfect holiday, and naturally I am very gratified to learn that the GEM has something to do with its perfection. Splendid! But it is with the swimming side of his holiday that I would deal with here, for my chum is evidently a swimmer of no mean order. He tells me that he likes to swim out from the shore about a couple of hundred yards, turn on his back and "float" away a few moments, as it were, thoroughly at peace with the world in general and himself in particular. Then he turns and makes for the shore. There seems to be nothing particularly dangerous in that at first sight; in fact, one would say "that fellow knows what's what." But it recalls to my mind an experience I went through many years ago—doubtless when I was the age my correspondent is now—and which I consider will be of general interest to you fellows who are keen on the water.

Like my correspondent, I was very fond of getting away from the madding crowd on the beach, and accordingly I used to swim out alone for about two or three hundred yards before I thought of turning back. On one occasion—I shall never forget it—I entered the water and struck out in the usual way, regardless of the time the tide turned. It was a foolish escapade from the start, as one kindly old boatman, who had watched me do the same thing every day, informed me. But I'm afraid at that time I did not pay the respect towards the counsel of my elders that I ought to have done. But I loved the solitude out there beneath a perfect blue sky on a perfectly calm sea. I felt like a superior being and as happy as a lark—until I turned back!

CRAMP!

It seemed to take hours, that return journey, and I was conscious all the time of what little headway I was making. And then the thought of cramp entered my mind and began to eat away at my confidence. The boatman's words came home to me then. I could see him in the distance, cruising about in an old crock of a motor-boat, and rather fancied that he looked towards me occasionally. But the terrors of

cramp kept my mind pretty well occupied. I can tell you. What would happen if cramp seized me? What indeed! Really it was a nasty feeling, and it gave me quite a turn. But I profited by the lesson. I reached the shore pretty exhausted, saw the old boatman shake his head as I passed him, as much as to say, "You young fool!" and knew that I was all he thought me, and worse. But he was a good boatman, that chap. I learned from a fellow on the beach afterwards that the old salt had been cruising about in his ancient tub of a boat ready to dash to my aid had the tide or other circumstances proved too strong for me. That made me think a bit. Really I had no right to play upon the old chap's fears. He was a stranger to me. What did it matter to him if anything happened to me? But as I said, he was a good chap. It struck me then that I was rather selfish—or shall we say thoughtless—in causing unnecessary anxiety to other people. Doubtless some of you have observed other fellows swimming a long way out to sea, have watched their heads bobbing away in the distance, and hoped that no harm would come to them. You see, that anxiety for the welfare of the next fellow is deeply rooted in most of us. It taught me a lesson, that swim. After that day I either went out with the boatman following me, for which I had to pay, of course, or else—when I was broke—I struck out about twenty yards from the shore and then swam up and down parallel to it. This latter wasn't quite so "thrilling," but I knew that if anything untoward did happen I was within fairly easy range of assistance. I pass both these suggestions on to you swimmers, for some of you may be tempted to do what my correspondent is so keen on doing.

NEXT WEDNESDAY'S PROGRAMME!

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A magnificent New Long Complete Story of Tom Merry & Co., describing their keen tussle with a team of Australian schoolboy cricketers. Right on the wicket, boys!

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"THE BATHING PARADE!"

A strong programme, this, chums, and one you'll enjoy to the full. Mind you order next week's GEM early. Chin, chin.

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terrific gusto. He was unable to lock it, the lock having been broken when the door was forced.

"Good-night, colonel!" called Monty Lowther cheerily. "Pleasant dreams and sweet repose!"

From the colonel's room came a rumble as of thunder, and the juniors chuckled.

"I—I say, you fellows!" faltered Baggy Trimble. "Where am I going to sleep?"

"There's a dog-kennel in the back yard," said Blake curtly.

"Oh, really, Blake—"

"We had better fix him up in one of the staff rooms, dear boys," said Arthur Augustus. "There is a vacant one next door to the bath-room."

Tom Merry nodded. He eyed Baggy Trimble very sternly as the procession passed upstairs.

"What have you got to say for yourself, you fat toad? What are you doing at Stormcliff, and how did you get to know we were here?"

Baggy Trimble told a pathetic story. And, for once in a way, he told the truth. He described how he had come down to Stormcliff for the day, and spent all his money, and passed many hungry hours on the beach, where he had heard Colonel Sparkes and another guest talking about the hotel being run by schoolboys. Eventually the pangs of hunger had become so acute that Baggy had decided to try his luck at the hotel, hoping to find refreshment and rest. He had found both, but he had no idea that he had taken possession of a guest's bed-room. Not seeing any clothes hanging up, he had taken it to be a spare room.

"When you heard we were here," said Tom Merry, "why didn't you come to us openly and honestly, and say you were stranded? We'd have helped you."

"We would have had a whip-wound for your return fare to St. Jim's," said Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, I know," said Baggy. "But I didn't want that. I wanted to stay here for the night—and for the week-end, if I could manage it."

Baggy Trimble was being unusually frank with his schoolfellows.

"You must go back to-morrow mornin', Twimble!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Rather!" chimed in Blake. "One night of Trimble is about as much as we can stand."

Baggy looked decidedly glum. He had nursed a faint hope that he might be asked to stay the week-end at Ocean View. That hope was now snuffed.

But Baggy brightened up considerably the next moment, when Manners pointed out that there were no Sunday trains from Stormcliff to Wayland or Rylcombe. True, a car could have been chartered, but the juniors were not disposed to pay Baggy's car fare to St. Jim's.

There was nothing for it but to consent to Baggy remaining at the hotel over the week-end. And the fat junior was jubilant at the prospect.

He was not so jubilant next morning, however. If he imagined that he was going to be treated as a distinguished guest, and waited on hand and foot by his schoolfellows, he imagined a vain thing.

Sunday was a very busy day indeed for the St. Jim's hotel-keepers. There were extra-special meals to prepare, and it was a case of "all hands to the pumps."

Baggy Trimble was set to work in the kitchen, performing such duties as peeling potatoes, and slicing onions, and washing cabbages. Even had there been no onions to slice, such tasks would have brought tears to Trimble's eyes.

The fat junior took his meals with the staff, and very hearty meals they were, too. But Baggy Trimble could hardly be expected to enter into the work of running the hotel with the same eagerness and enthusiasm as his schoolfellows. To them it was great fun; to Baggy it was sheer drudgery. He was almost regretting that there were no Sunday trains back to St. Jim's.

The day passed happily enough to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and his industrious myrmidons.

Colonel Sparkes was as irascible as ever, and his loud voice frequently penetrated from the dining-room into the kitchen. He grumbled at everything that was put before him; he rang the hand-bells, and abused the waiters, and thoroughly enjoyed himself.

The elderly spinsters, the Misses Harridan, were as shrewish and objectionable as usual. The remainder of the guests, however, seemed quite happy and satisfied, and they had nothing but praise for Fatty Wynn's cooking, and for the capable manner in which the hotel was being run by schoolboys without previous experience.

Certainly the St. Jim's juniors had made a great success of their experiment. They had kept the flag flying in the absence of the regular staff; and, ably assisted by Cousin Ethel and Doris Lovell, they had done everything possible for the comfort of the guests.

As for inveterate grumblers like Colonel Sparkes and the Misses Harridan, they did not know when they were well.

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off. Or perhaps they did know, and that explained why they seemed in no hurry to carry out their threats to find fresh quarters!

CHAPTER 13.

All Serene!

LORD EASTWOOD travelled down to Stormcliff by car early on Monday morning.

His lordship's mind was full of misgivings. Several times, during the week-end, he had reproached himself for having left Ocean View in charge of a party of schoolboys.

How could he reasonably expect his son, and his son's friends, to run an hotel successfully, young and inexperienced as they were? He ought not to have yielded so readily, he told himself, to that amazing request of Arthur Augustus.

There had been no telephone message from the juniors—no appeal to Lord Conway to go down to Stormcliff and help them out.

No news was supposed to be good news, but Lord Eastwood was far from easy in his mind, as his car leapt along the deserted country lanes, on that early summer morning.

What did his lordship expect to find when he got to Stormcliff? He scarcely dared to conjecture.

Chaos and confusion at the hotel; everything upside down; the guests walking out in disgust; to seek fresh quarters. These were but a few of the disquieting possibilities which came into Lord Eastwood's mind.

His lordship did not realise what a fine cook Fatty Wynn was, nor how adaptable the St. Jim's juniors could be in a strange situation, with strange duties to perform. He was terribly afraid that they had made a hash of things, and his face was glum as he sat at the steering-wheel.

On reaching Stormcliff, however, Lord Eastwood had an agreeable surprise—in fact, a whole series of agreeable surprises.

When his car drew up beside the front steps of Ocean View, a junior sprang swiftly down the steps and whipped open the door. It was George Figgins. No professional commissionaire could have acted more smartly.

"Good-morning, Figgins!" said Lord Eastwood, with a smile. Then, with a note of anxiety in his tone, he added: "How are things going?"

"Ripingly, my lord!" said Figgins.

"The hotel is being carried on satisfactorily?"

"Yes, my lord!"

"I am delighted to hear it," said Lord Eastwood heartily.

And he nodded to Figgins and mounted the steps, to be greeted at the front door by an immaculate and cheery-faced page-boy—his youngest son, Wally.

"Top of the morning, pater!" said Wally gaily. "We didn't expect you so early. You're just in time for brekker."

Lord Eastwood smiled at his son.

"Pon my soul, you make an excellent page-boy, Walter!" he said. "What is more, you appear to be thoroughly enjoying yourself. Where is Arthur?"

"You'll find him in the kitchen, pater. This way!"

Wally D'Arcy conducted his illustrious sire to the kitchen. A pleasant odour of fried bacon assailed his lordship's nostrils as he entered.

Fatty Wynn and his retainers were hard at work preparing the staff's breakfast. The guests were already breakfasting in the dining-room.

Arthur Augustus was also present. He was wearing an ultra-smart suit, and was monarch of all he surveyed.

"The pater!" announced Wally, ushering Lord Eastwood into the kitchen.

Arthur Augustus turned, with a beaming face, and greeted his sire very cordially.

"I understand that everything is going on splendidly, my boy," said Lord Eastwood.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You have experienced no difficulty in carrying on the work of the hotel?"

"None whatevah, pafah! To use a somewhat hackneyed expression, ewevythin' in the garden is lovely!"

Lord Eastwood's forebodings had quite vanished now, and he surveyed with great interest the animated scene in the kitchen. Fatty Wynn's skill and dexterity at the frying-pan was a revelation to him.

"Do the guests seem quite satisfied, Arthur?" he inquired.

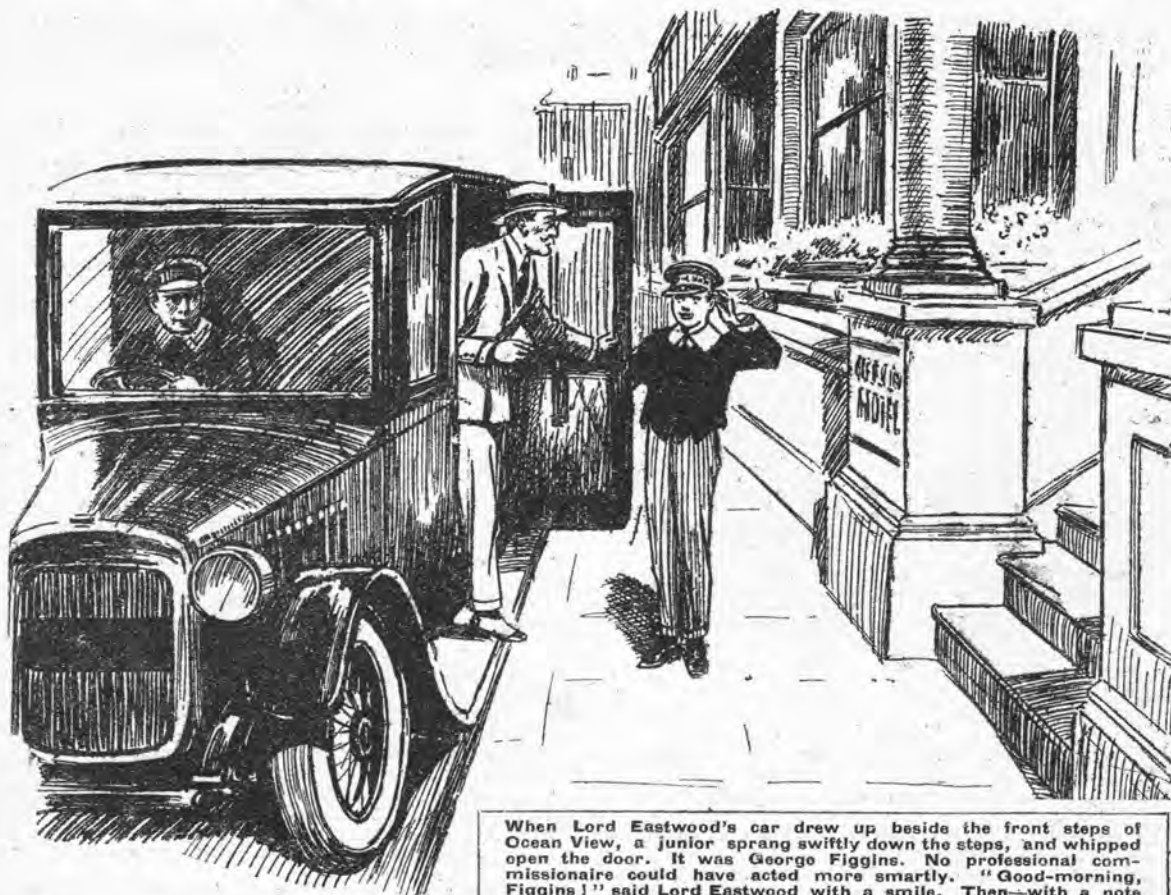
"Yaas, pafah—with the exception of thwee; an' those thwee would never be satisfied anywhere. I am beginnin' to undahstand a little of what Mr. Fowwester—the managah you dismissed—must have gone through."

"Indeed!"

"That fiery colonel," grunted Fatty Wynn, "would try the patience of Patience herself! Nothing is ever to his liking. If you serve him a cold lunch, he bellows for curry. If you give him a hot lunch, he bawls for cold chicken. A more cross-grained, sour-tempered, choleric old buffer I never met!"

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Lord Eastwood, surprised at Fatty Wynn's outburst. "The colonel seems quite a stormy petrel!"

Even as he spoke, the colonel's loud bark made itself



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audible from the dining-room. He was "going for" Jack Blake, one of the waiters.

Lord Eastwood listened for a moment, then he turned to Arthur Augustus.

"Is it your opinion, Arthur, that Mr. Forrester was provoked by the colonel, and others, into losing his temper? Do you consider that his dismissal was undeserved?"

"Absolutely!" said Arthur Augustus frankly. "If you would care to go and take breakfast with the guests, patah, you will have an opportunity of seein' how the colonel cawwies on. He would turn any hotel managah's hair gwey in a week!"

Lord Eastwood nodded thoughtfully.

"I will do as you suggest, Arthur," he said. "If any injustice has been done to Mr. Forrester, I shall be only too happy to repair it."

Lord Eastwood strolled into the dining-room, and took his place unobtrusively at a table in a quiet corner.

Over his breakfast, Lord Eastwood had an opportunity of studying Colonel Sparkes and the Misses Harridan.

The colonel was in fine form this morning. He was even more vociferous than usual in his complaints; and he repeatedly brought his clenched fist down upon the table with an impact which set the crockeryware dancing.

His complaints were neither just nor reasonable, as Lord Eastwood quickly saw. The breakfast was excellent, and the majority of the guests were thoroughly enjoying it. Lord Eastwood certainly enjoyed it. And the waiters were models of courtesy and punctiliousness. They suffered the colonel's hectic abuse in dignified silence.

Lord Eastwood listened to the colonel, and he listened to the Misses Harridan, who backed the colonel up; and he came to the conclusion that these people were doing the hotel no good, and that the sooner they were presented with their bills and asked to quit the better it would be for all concerned.

These were the people who had sent written complaints to Lord Eastwood about Mr. Forrester's conduct. His lordship reflected grimly that the boot should have been on the other foot, and that it was Mr. Forrester who had cause for complaint.

Before the meal was over, Lord Eastwood had formed two swift decisions. He would interview Colonel Sparkes and the Misses Harridan, and politely request them to find

another hotel where they would be more comfortable. He would also bring about the immediate reinstatement of Mr. Forrester; which would mean that the strike would automatically come to an end, and the regular staff would return.

After breakfast, Lord Eastwood conferred with the colonel and the two elderly ladies in the drawing-room.

The St. Jim's juniors never knew what passed at the interview. There were high words, for they could hear the colonel's booming voice, though they could not distinguish what he said.

Eventually, they saw the colonel come stamping out, in a royal rage, and bawl to the commissionaire—George Figgins—to order him a taxicab.

Figgins received similar instructions from the Misses Harridan; and shortly afterwards the three guests, who had been the cause of all the trouble, took their departure.

Colonel Sparkes went off in such dudgeon that he omitted to "tip" the commissionaire or the page-boy. But neither Figgins nor Wally D'Arcy minded that. They were only too glad to see the back of the truculent colonel.

By lunch-time there was an amazing transformation at the Ocean View Hotel.

Lord Eastwood had got into touch with Mr. Forrester on the telephone, and invited him to resume his duties as manager. He had also got into communication with the strikers, who readily flocked back to work the moment they knew that their popular manager had been reinstated.

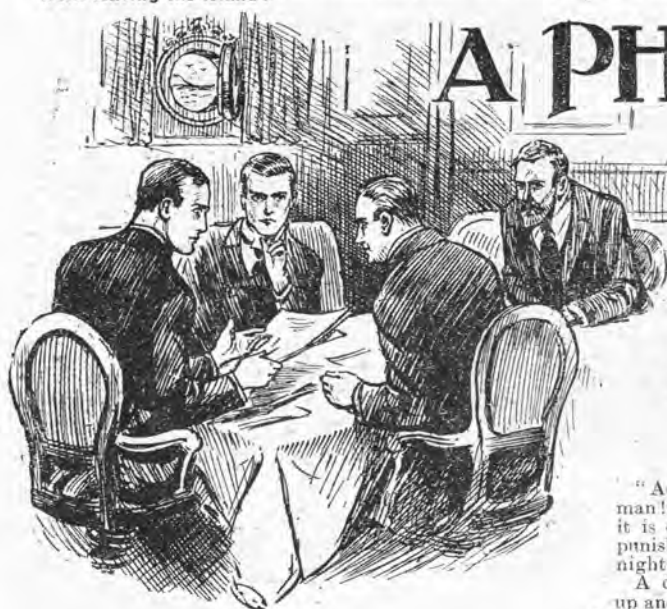
The St. Jim's hotel-keepers were thus relieved from their duties; and they spent the afternoon in bathing and boating, and other happy and healthy forms of pleasure.

Early next morning they were driven back to St. Jim's, after a week-end which one and all had enjoyed to the full, and which would linger long in the memories of Tom Merry & Co., Jack Blake & Co., and Figgins & Co.—not forgetting Cousin Ethel and Doris Levison—the St. Jim's hotel-keepers!

THE END.

(There will be another magnificent yarn of Tom Merry & Co. in next week's GEM entitled: "FIGHTING FOR THE ASHES!" Martin Clifford adds yet another great triumph to his already long list of successes. Miss it and you miss a grand treat!)

DANGEROUS KNOWLEDGE! At all costs the secret meeting between the exiled Kaiser and his Royalist plotters on a lonely island in the North Sea must be kept a secret, for if it leaked out French troops would be crossing the Rhine in double-quick time. At all costs, Val Hilton and his comrades, who have stumbled across the plot, must be prevented from leaving the island!



A PHANTOM THRONE

By Sidney Drew

An Amazing Story of Breathless Adventure and International Intrigue.

Trapped!

JOLLY cheerful and all that," said Dave. "I'd just love it, I don't think. Even if they managed to raise the lid they could only come down one at a time and they'd get a nasty dusting."

"Unless they had more sense than to try it, and just heaved in a few gas-bombs instead," said Val.

Ching Lung was once more on the iron ladder, holding on by the chain and listening. There was a ringing sound as metal struck against metal. Apparently a spade left behind by the men who levelled the sand had been found, and they were using it. With the bolt and chain in place there was little chance of forcing the steel door without using explosives.

"They've nosed us out," said Ching Lung. "I can hear them scraping."

"Souse me, they'll want to scrape harder than that, sir," said the bo'sun, lighting his pipe. "She's tough and tight!"

"Yes, she's a good dure," said Barry O'Rooney. "And wid a bit of a shillelagh in me fist, Oi'd wager to flatten out ivery mother's son that came down as aisy as bowling over skittles! Sure, there'd be a famine in sticking-plaster to patch up their heads when Oi'd finished. But sorra a bit of joy loike that will come our way, for the spalpeens won't let it!"

Dave was not so confident. Though he could only guess that the Kaiser's visit to the island had something to do with some plot to replace him on the throne, it was a secret of immense and tragic importance to those concerned, and they were willing to stop at nothing to keep it a secret.

"Well, I don't see why some of us shouldn't turn in," said the prince, yawning. "You for a start, Dave, for you look a bit washed out and not too rosy about the gills. I'll keep first watch. Try and get a sleep, Val, and sleep hard. I don't think there's any danger as yet, for this is a hard nut to crack, and they've got nothing to crack it with, for you can't open a tough-shelled oyster like this with a sword!"

"Oi'll get a blanket and slape on the duressthep," said Barry O'Rooney. "An' you're taking watch, sor," he added, lowering his voice, "kape an eye on the big Hun, an' you'll excuse the liberty of giving advice. He's a tough lot an he made up his mind to ut. Oi don't think that rope would hold him, and wance loose and on the rampage he'd take a soight of handling. Sthrong as an ox, the big spalpeen, and he nades watching, sor!"

"I'll do all that, Barry," said the prince. "Don't sleep too soundly."

Val told Wigland, who was still on guard in his wet clothes, to turn in. Before climbing into his hammock he spoke to the prisoner.

"I wish I could make you more comfortable, baron," he said; "but you see how it is. I fancy your friends are still up there, and you have shown us what you can do in a tussle. I am very sorry!"

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"Ach, and you may bresently be sorrier, Herr Midshipman!" said Von Stolzenburg. "I am not complaining, for it is only the fortune of war when there is no war. Your punishment will haf enough for this in good time. Good-night!"

A deep silence followed, and Ching Lung walked slowly up and down, casting a glance at Von Stolzenburg every time he passed the arch. Dave had fallen asleep at once, but Val was very restless. Instead of slumbering, Barry O'Rooney sat with his back against the ladder to finish his pipe.

Suddenly he raised his head and looked upwards.

"Do you hear anything, Barry?" Ching Lung asked.

"Oi belave someone walked over the dure, sor," said Barry. "The spalpeens are still up there, bedad. Who are they at all?"

"The ex-Kaiser was there, with Zeinmeyer and some staff officers."

"And the roight sorrt of place they picked, though they would not have picked ut an they knew who was there," said Barry O'Rooney. "But are ye sure it was Zeinmeyer, sor? Oi thought he loiked ould Kaiser Bill less than a kitten loikes cowl wather! Sure, wasn't he the man who fought tooth and nail against letting any of the ould German royal gang get any of their property back?"

"That's his eye-wash," said Ching Lung. "If it wasn't Zeinmeyer it was his ghost or his double. Hallo!"

Three knocks sounded on the steel door.

"Knock away," said Barry O'Rooney. "Faith, you'll get tired of knocking afore we open it, Oi'm thinking!"

The knocking was repeated.

"Nothing doing," said Ching Lung. "If we lifted it an inch they'd have an iron bar ready to shove in. They may want a parley, and wish to offer terms; but they're not to be trusted. We've seen too much to-night. If they knew in Paris what we've seen to-night, the French troops would be crossing the Rhine and the Dutch Government officials would be tearing their hair."

Again knocks echoed through the underground chamber, and after a pause they heard other sounds.

"Scraping round it," said Barry O'Rooney. "Ut's good concrete and plenty of ut, and they'll have blisters on their hands afore they chip through ut! Oi'll just step along and take a squint at the big Hun, sor, for he's a lot more dangerous than all the Huns up there!"

Val Frees His Prisoner!

TO all outward appearances, Baron Von Stolzenburg was fast asleep and his bonds were securely tied. The knocking had not awakened Dave and Val, but it brought the bo'sun on the scene.

"What's the game, now, souse me?" growled Maddock.

"Are they expecting us to ask them in to supper?"

"Perhaps they are only wondering if we are here, Benjamin," said Ching Lung. "Some of them—though with the exception of the ex-Kaiser and Zeinmeyer they look a youngish lot—must know about these submarine nests. It doesn't need much intelligence to guess that as we knew the way in we also knew the way out. They may think we slipped off in a boat while they were hurrying the ex-Kaiser away."

"The ex-Kaiser, eh?" said Maddock. "I was guessing it was pretty big game of some sort that brought us to this rubbish-heap, souse me! They seem to have got us corked up in this concrete bottle pretty tight. Har"

lines losing the 'plane, for if we had the 'plane we could have twisted them. No 'plane and no wireless. I reckon young Master Val has got both hands pretty full of it!"

"How do we go for rations, Ben?"

"Not too rosy, sir," replied Maddock. "That Hun guy has an appetite like a whole pack of wolves, souse me, and I suppose it's against the rules to put a prisoner on short rations. If it means a siege and cutting down the rations, it couldn't do much harm to let him go. There's nothing he could give away in the shape of information that could help them much. We needn't open the lid, for we could put him on the raft and shove him out either to swim ashore or to yell to his pals to fetch him."

Ching Lung shook his head.

"He's a nuisance and a big danger, but perhaps he's less dangerous as a prisoner than free," he said. "It just depends what value they put on him. There's no disguising the fact that they don't want us to get away and tell what we've seen. It would mean ruin for Zeimmeyer, for when the truth was told some of his infuriated dupes would probably lynch him. It would ruin the Kaiser's hopes, too, for though he may have a huge following, the plot would be exposed and ruined. I tell you, if these fellows get us we shall have a nasty time of it. I'm just hoping that Von Stolzberg is important enough to be a safe hostage."

"So as to kape the spalpeens from boring a hole and dropping in a bomb," said Barry O'Rooney. "Bedad, ut's a pretty thought and Oi'm grateful to your hoighness for suggesting ut. Sure, an Oi get out of this widout being blown to rags and tatters, Oi'll give up the say and get a loight job punching holes in muffins or something aisy!"

Barry O'Rooney gave a grin as he spoke, though there was not much to grin about.

"We'll go and get another forty winks, souse me," said the bo'sun. "There's no doubt that we've come unstuck—not that I'm professing to know anything about it, except that Tommy Prout or somebody else must know by now that they've come unstuck. I don't see who's to blame much, but there you are! It's not our lucky time, souse me, and that's that!"

All was still again. Barry O'Rooney curled himself up in his blankets and the prince resumed his pacing.

"Your Highness," said Von Stolzberg, sitting up.

"Yes, baron," said Ching Lung. "Don't make too much noise, please, for the youngsters must be jolly tired."

"Ach, it is my misfortune that I haf the big voice, but I will it moderate," said the German. "I want to ask you who you see oop there, for to me as to you it is most important, and to tell it will no harm do!"

"I saw Zeimmeyer," said Ching Lung.

"Zeimmeyer, yes," said Von Stolzberg eagerly. "Yes, that is important. A pig-dog I would not trust one inch out of my sight, though he is useful, and when we have no more use for that fat pig-dog he shall hang. No, no, I shall to no harm come for the sake of Rudolf Zeimmeyer. Was that all then, Zeimmeyer and a few others?"

WHAT HAS HAPPENED SO FAR!

FERRERS LORD, millionaire and world traveller, entertains the Prime Minister and his Foreign Secretary aboard his yacht, the *Lord of the Deep*. In the privacy of Ferrers Lord's cabin these Ministers of H.M. Government discuss informally with the millionaire and Rupert Thurston the activities of the Royalist party in Germany. Lord declares that the plot to restore the Kaiser to the throne is likely to be put into operation at any moment, and adds that should Germany be plunged into civil war, the whole of Europe would be involved in consequences too horrible to contemplate. So strong is the proof the millionaire submits to support his statement that the Prime Minister and his Foreign Secretary are convinced that swift action must be taken to avert this calamity. Ferrers Lord then suggests a way out of the trouble, and, although it is fraught with much risk to those who throw in their lot with him, the millionaire answers for the loyalty and patriotism of all aboard the *Lord of the Deep*, and offers to take that risk.

Under the command of Midshipman Val Hilton, Prince Ching Lung, David Ap Rees, Benjamin Maddock, Barry O'Rooney, and a number of ordinary seamen are ordered to proceed to an island named *Klarssfergen*. Here, in accordance with the orders of Ferrers Lord, they meet James Wigland, an interpreter and ex-spy, who leads them to a rectangular underground chamber—a one-time German submarine base—built below an old mill.

Almost immediately following this the mill is blown sky-high by Baron von Stolzberg, who, it transpires, owns the island. The baron is made a prisoner and taken into the underground chamber. Shortly afterwards Val and his companions are discovered by a party of Royalists who have foregathered on the island to meet the ex-Kaiser. With four German officers hard on their heels Val & Co. seek refuge in their underground stronghold. "If we fall into their hands we're done for," says Val. "We shall just disappear!"

(Now read on.)

Ching Lung hesitated and looked keenly at the German. The baron tried to appear unconcerned, but the prince could see that it was only a pose and that he was nervous and anxious. After all, there was no reason why he should not know.

"The ex-Kaiser was there, too, baron!"

The fingers of Von Stolzberg's uncovered hands interlocked and the colour faded out of his pink healthy cheeks.

"You do not lie, highness?" he asked hoarsely.

"Lying isn't a habit of mine, baron. Your exiled Kaiser was here and we saw him and recognised him."

"Then if you do not surrender this will be your death-warrant and mine too," said the prisoner. "I am in good favour with the All-Highest, but it will not save your life or my life. We haf in the war been called many bad names, but we are not murderers by choice. It is you now will be the murderer of us all if you do not surrender, for otherwise they will not let you escape alive with this secret. I promise you honourable terms with liberty when we our aim haf gained, only a few weeks to be imprisoned. If you refuse, this vault will keep the secret on our dead lips!"

"I'm not in command," said Ching Lung, "and can do nothing!"

"It is madness, it is insanity," said the German, shrugging his shoulders. "A mere boy like that midshipman in charge of this mad expedition. Has your freind, then, Ferrers Lord, lost his senses? Must we all die because this one man has gone crazy? But you haf power and influence and the boy will listen to you!"

"I don't think he will," said the prince quietly, "and I don't want to influence him. I am sorry, baron, but I can't do anything. I think I can promise you this, though, that if the danger becomes really acute we'll do our best to get you out of it!"

Again came the knocking, three heavy blows on the steel door, and Barry O'Rooney threw off the blanket.

"S-sh!" he whispered, with one hand to his ear. "Bedad, phwat are they up to now, the blatherskites? Phwat's that, sor?"

The prince mounted the ladder and listened.

"It sounds like a drill," he said. "I suppose that the aeroplane has come over to fetch them and they've found a big drill in her tool-locker."

"Then Oi hope for the love of Moike that they haven't a bag of poison gas handy, or they may shove the nozzle through the hole when they've made ut and present us wid a dose," said O'Rooney. "Yes, bedad, ut's a dhruill! Well, we've got a back dure as well as a front dure, that's wan marcy, so we needn't be poisoned loike rats in a hole!"

The scraping sound went on steadily and unceasingly. When Val awoke and joined them, rubbing his eyes and yawning, they were sitting in a couple of wooden chairs looking up at the chained and bolted door.

"What's happening?" asked Val. "What are you looking for?"

"Kape from undther, sor, or ye'll be getting a steel filing or a drop of oil in your oie," said Barry O'Rooney. "That's phwat we're watching for, and there she comes!"

A gleaming silvery point suddenly appeared against the rusty underside of the door. It revolved a few times and was then withdrawn, and a few grains of sand came trickling through the hole.

"Gentlemen," said a voice in English, "we ask you to surrender. It must be an unconditional surrender, for we can offer no terms. We give you fifteen minutes to decide. If you refuse, we have another way!"

"Poison gas," remarked Barry O'Rooney, cheerfully.

"You lunatic," said Val. "Do you think they carry poison gas about with them like you carry tobacco? Hallo!"

There was a human eye at the hole but it vanished and an ear took its place.

"I don't know what you intend to do," said Val, "but we have one of your people here who says he is Baron von Stolzberg!"

"All the more reason why you should surrender," said the voice. "Unless you wish to murder your prisoner. I have just been told to tell you that your lives will be secure and our treatment of you perfectly honourable. If you are mad enough to refuse, you must expect no mercy, for your own common sense will tell you that what you have seen to-night is enough to warrant death. I ask you, gentlemen, not to force us to extremes, for you hold a desperate secret, and we are desperate men!"

Barry O'Rooney saw the baron come rolling under the arch. He swerved as he neared the edge of the channel, and then wriggled forward on his toes and the palms of his hands. Barry O'Rooney stepped over him, and then came back with a hammer and several large nails. At a nod from Val he went up the ladder, and was fitting the nails into

the hole when a blow from the other side dashed them from his hands.

"Stop that foolery!" cried an angry voice. "Twelve minutes more, gentlemen, and then, if you fail to open this door and surrender, we shall get you out or kill you where you are. We are sorry for Baron von Stolzenberg, but if he must die it is for the great cause he has so much at heart. Come, surrender, before you make us more angry and more desperate!"

"Not for the German throne," said Val grimly. "Let 'em get on with it. We must plug that hole somehow. Can't you find a piece of iron somewhere, Mr. O'Rooney?"

The minutes passed away, and Barry O'Rooney searched in vain for a piece of iron that he could force into the hole. Von Stolzenberg, whose lips were twitching, spoke to Val.

"Herr Midshipman," he said, "things most unpleasing are going to happen. You heard said I might be willing to die for a great cause. That is true, but not this way. They will gas you as sure as you stand there. You are a gentleman, and gentlemen do not murder their prisoners, even if they themselves have to die, and so I ask you to release me. And die we all must if you do not the terms accept. And so, Herr Midshipman, as an honourable gentleman, I ask you to release me."

"Will you promise not to join in the attack made on us?"

"I promise to be neutral, Herr Midshipman."

"Pull the dinghy clear of the raft, Mr. Maddock," said Val quickly. "Now, Wigland, free the baron, and we will see what can be done. I hope you are a swimmer, baron, for you may have to swim for it."

Midshipman Val Hilton had taken command in earnest.

"Get on the raft, Herr Baron," he said, when the cords had been untied. "Have your shooter handy and keep a good look-out, please, prince. We wish you good-bye, Baron von Stolzenberg, and don't think badly of us because we had to treat you rather roughly, for it's only the luck of the game!"

Val stood erect, his cheeks flushed and his eyes very bright; and, after glancing at him quickly, the German raised his big hand in salute.

"Herr Midshipman," he said, "you are English, and it is much due to your people that my country is broken and ruined, and for that I hate the English. For you personally I have not hate, but I have much admiration. You are a brave and generous gentleman, and, except when you stand in my way, I wish you no harm. So little harm do I wish you that I beg of you to surrender."

Val pointed to the raft and reached for an oar. Very carefully the heavy German lowered himself and knelt on the raft.

"A rope here, Mr. O'Rooney!"

The rope was made fast, and, taking it in one hand, Val pushed along the raft with it until it was almost touching the sea-gate.

"The tide ought to swing you under the bank, baron," he said. "Jump the moment you're near, for we have no time to waste!"

From the hole in the steel door it was impossible to see anything that was happening, except exactly below the ladder. The lights were extinguished, and then the sea-gate began to sink. Ching Lung bent forward, the automatic pistol in his hand, and Barry O'Rooney, equally alert, was prepared to release the lever at the first sign of danger.

As the edge of the door sank beneath the water, Val drove the raft forward and paid out the rope. It swayed in the current, and then drifted out of sight, and a few seconds

later, when Val hauled it back into the channel, it had no occupant.

"Close away, Mr. O'Rooney!"

The sea-gate lifted and the lights shone out again, and Val threw the oar back into the dinghy.

"I wonder if I did the right thing?" he thought. "If these Huns really mean mischief and murder, I don't see what else I could have done. I say, Ching," he added, appealing to the prince, "have I made a mess over that gadget? Ought I to have let him go?"

"Unless they're bluffing, you had no option, son," said the prince. "You just had to!"

Again the blows sounded on the steel door, and it was Von Stolzenberg's voice they heard.

"There is but another minute, Herr Midshipman," he shouted down. "I beg you to surrender, and I promise you, on my honour as a gentleman, good treatment and only a short captivity."

"I'm sorry, baron, but I've no orders to surrender!" cried Val. "I'll do that, perhaps, but not until I'm forced."

Dave had slept soundly through it all and still slept. Barry O'Rooney plugged the hole with a piece of wood and filled his pipe.

The Baron Keeps His Word.

"IF I have been bluffed into this, I shall be as wild as a bull chased by horns, Ching," said Val, "for Von Stolzenberg will tell them about the sea outlet, and that we have a raft and a boat, and they will watch it like a cat at a mouse-hole."

"I don't think that will be fresh news, son," said the prince. "All the news that he can give is that the door is in working order. I think they've guessed that already, for they were pottering about with their flash-lamps, you remember. And I don't think there is much danger of the poison gas O'Rooney was so cheerful about just yet. As you say, it's not the sort of stuff that people carry about with them. But what's at the back of your head, son?"

"Nothing, except that I was told to land here, and there were no instructions to clear out," said Val. "That chance has gone, even if we wanted to. My hat! If we only had the wireless! Of course, I don't mean to have the whole bunch of us murdered down in this hole if I can help it; but it will have to be a jolly tight corner before I give in. Dave's a nuisance. I've serious thoughts of tying him up and handing him out to them."

"You'd never be forgiven for it, son," said Ching. "He'd never forgive you if you did."

"I don't suppose the beggar would, for he's full of pluck and grit," said Val. "And perhaps those Huns are blustering too much. If they can keep us down here long enough, that ought to suit their purpose just as much as gassing us, for if their plot succeeds, the visit of the ex-Kaiser and Zeimeyer to Klarspargen won't matter a rap to anybody. Besides, the chief must know by now that we're in some sort of a tangle, and he's sure to send along to see what's amiss."

"I hope so, son," answered Ching Lung. "It's a particularly nasty tangle just now, and I don't see the way out. A dinghy and a raft aren't much use, for we don't know where to make for. If we get to one of the other islands where there are inhabitants, they'd arrest us, for we have no passports; and if we pretended to be shipwrecked sailors it would take too much explaining away. Friend Valentine, I don't want to discourage you, but I fear we're well in the soup!"

"Up to the very tips of our ears in it," said Val dismally, "and beastly hot soup at that!"

Not a sound was heard from outside, and Val began to hope that the besiegers had talked about what they could not very easily accomplish. Perhaps the aeroplane had been sent to obtain explosives, or something even more deadly. Suddenly Barry O'Rooney gave a cry of warning, and jumped from the ladder as he heard a hissing sound.

"Kape clear!" he shouted. "There's something hissing and spluttering that sounds like a fuse!"

An explosion followed, and its deep roar wakened Dave and brought him rolling out of his hammock. The shock jerked the bolt out of the socket, but Barry O'Rooney mounted the ladder and pushed it back in its place again.

"Faith, it's a good thing they haven't got the stuff the baron used when he was so rude to the poor old mill!" he said. "They'll want a lot of that to bust this dure. Something they've dug out of their revolver cartridges, Oi reckon—just a wet squib."

"What's the shemuzzle?" asked Dave.

"Only a bunch of Huns trying to lift the lid off us, sor," said Barry. "They'd do just as well wid a sardine-opener."

"Where's the baron?"

"Thrown out, sor, and a good riddance!" said O'Rooney.



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"Get on the raft, Herr Baron," said Val. "And don't think badly of us, for it's only the luck of the game." The German raised his big hand in salute. "Herr Midshipman," he said, "you are Eenglish and I hate the Eenglish. For you personally I haf not hate, but I haf much admiration." (See page 26.)

"for he's a lot safer outside than in! If he'd broken loose wid a plank or the leg of a chair, and started a full-sized row, we'd have had to shoot him to make him kape the pace! Oh, thank you!"

The plug of wood was knocked from the hole, and O'Rooney jumped nimbly out of the way. There was a crack and a flash, and a bullet flattened itself in the concrete.

"Spite, souse me—just pure spite!" growled the bo'sun. "They're losing their tempers. Good job you put that plug in!"

The next moment a piece of iron was pushed into the hole, and all was quiet again, but not for long, for presently a hammer was heard tapping steadily.

"Boring a hole for a charge," said Ching Lung. "They want to get that door off mighty badly, so as to pitch something nasty at us. The nuisance is that we can't stop them!"

"Never a hope of it, souse me!" said the bo'sun. "They're well at the side, and working the bore under the hinges, by the sound. They won't get her off very easy then if the chain holds, unless they make a big gap."

Ching Lung handed his automatic pistol to Val.

"I've got a good mind to sneak out and see what's really happening, son," said the prince. "Have I your permission, commander?"

"You're a free-lance, Ching, and don't come under my orders at all," said Val. "I'm not responsible for you!"

"Then I'll chance it. I may not be able to do any good, but I'd like to see how many of the beggars there are. You keep the gun, for I don't want to shoot any Huns, if I can avoid it. If they get me, you won't be any worse off, and if they do get me it will be my own fault."

"But how are you going to get back? We can't keep the gadget open for you."

"I know you can't, and I'm just wondering how it can be worked. Give me the exact half-hour. I'll put my watch in my mouth, and if it's too dark to see the hands, I can feel them."

"Take mine," said Dave; "it's got a luminous dial. I say, can't I go along with you?"

"No, you can't, my lad," said Ching finally; "so that's that!"

The prince stripped to his under-drawers and singlet, and walked across the raft.

"Open up exactly five minutes past the hour, Val," he said; "and if I'm not there you'll know that I've been unlucky."

Val snapped off the lights, and the prince put Dave's silver watch in his mouth. The night seemed darker than when they had opened the sea-gate to release Baron von Stolzenburg. The descent of the massive door was checked, and very dimly they saw Ching Lung clamber up and kneel on it while he peered about him. He waved his arm, lowered himself, and vanished, and the gate rose again and slowly obscured the faint light till all was black as ink.

There was very little tide, and the water was not particularly cold, but Ching Lung kept as low as possible in the water. There was no watcher on the bank unless he was lying flat, or the prince must have seen him against the sky.

Ching Lung crept ashore nearly opposite the ruins of the mill. He could hear the faint tap-tap of the hammer and could see the big aeroplane. The lights that had been placed in position for the descent of the ex-Kaiser had been removed.

"That old bus would hold the lot of us," thought Ching Lung, "and if we were all here we might pack aboard and get clear away. We're not here, that's the trouble, and even then young Val might decline to go, as he seems to think it's his job to stay on the island till he receives further orders from the chief. Very nice in theory, but that's what young Casabianca did—the boy who stood on the burning deck. If there's nobody in charge of the bus, I'll use her."

Ching Lung changed his mind promptly. He was about to dash for the plane, hide under her, and then make another dash across the flat sand for the shelter of the dune, when he saw the glow of a cigarette, like a tiny red spark.

The east wind was colder than the water, and the smoker,

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who was probably the pilot, stepped out from beneath the plane, and began to swing his arms and stamp his feet.

To cross the flat patch without being seen was next to impossible, so the prince slunk back behind the mill and took to the water again. He crawled up the bank and wriggled through the sea-grass till he was afraid to go any closer. The tapping of the hammer ceased, and the man spoke in German.

"Come and take your turn, baron."

"I am sorry, general, but I have promised the Herr midshipman who released me to be neutral," replied the deep voice of Von Stolzenburg. "I have given my word to fold my arms and give nothing in the way of help."

"What a crazy fool you are! What are promises when we are dealing with this young pig-hound of an English spy? Come and take your turn. It is easy, though tiring to the wrist. Each time you tap the drill give it a half-turn."

"I regret, general, but the boy has my word," said the baron. "I am not a romantic fool, and, if needful, no doubt I could break my word; but there are enough of you to manage this without me. The boy, English or not, has treated me like a gentleman; if we must kill him there is no other way, but, ah, it is a pity! It is not any sentiment, and if it had been his uncle, Ferrers Lord, I would have broken any pledge, for he is our curse and our danger!"

"The All-Highest will hear of this, baron!"

"Call it what you like, general, but do not call me a traitor, or I shall ask one of our friends to lend me his sword!"

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," said another of the officers, "if you must quarrel, quarrel after the work is done. The baron has made a promise, and he feels it his duty to honour his word. A trifle, perhaps, but, with the work undone, do not be crazy enough to come to sword-thrusts over it."

The hammering was resumed by the light of a flash-lamp. There seemed to be five or six men there; but the light was too uncertain for the prince to be sure. He glanced at Dave's flash-lamp, which he carried in his hand.

"For a Hun, the baron doesn't seem to be such a bad sort," thought the prince; "but, all the same, he admits he'd break his word if he thought it necessary—which means, I suppose, if there was something to be gained by it."

"We must be nearly through," said the man who was working the hammer and drill. "And when we are through, general?"

Ching Lung pricked up his ears, but the answer was given in a guttural undertone, and he could not catch it. Then the officer with the spike in his helmet rose to his feet and shouted to the pilot, who came forward carrying a can of petrol in each hand, and then went back for more.

"So the brutes mean to roast us out of it," muttered Ching Lung. "Gentle creatures! No bombs or poison gas available, so petrol will do! And, probably, if we have to bolt for it they'll shoot us down."

The prince crept away like a shadow. The watch told him that he had still six or seven minutes to wait and only a dozen yards to swim.

Val was also looking at his watch. The hammer sounded its last tap, and came clattering down through the hole in the concrete.

"Bedad, Ben, share, there's some dirty work coming!" said Barry O'Rooney. "Phwat's this? Petrol, by Mike Casey's ghost!"

"Get a scull, Dave, stick a blanket on it, and try to keep the stuff out!" cried Val. "Don't go up and try to plug it, or you may get a bullet. Two minutes to go. Stand by the lever, Maddock!"

"Ay, ay, sir, souse me!" growled the bo'sun.

"Time!" cried Val.

As Val spoke, the folded blanket Dave was holding against the hole on the blade of an oar, burst into seething flame!

(To be roasted alive was about the worst fate imaginable; but, like true Britishers, Val and his companions were prepared to fight valiantly to the end! Don't miss the continuation of this powerful serial next week.)



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