

"THE FUGITIVE SCHOOLBOY!" This Week's Sensational Story of
Tom Merry & Co., at St. Jim's.



RUCTIONS AT ST. JIM'S—A FAG IN DISGRACE—

The Fugitive Schoolboy!

BY
MARTIN CLIFFORD

Take his dog away from him? Separate him from his pet? Let 'em try it! That's all young Wally D'Arcy's got to say—but he does a lot!

CHAPTER I.

Tom Merry's Resolve!

"HALLO! Here you are at last, Tom!"

"Looking for you, old chap!"

Monty Lowther and Harry Manners, of the Shell at St. Jim's, tried to speak cheerily and casually, but there was concern and curiosity in their voices as they greeted their chum.

Though it was a cold day, Tom Merry looked flushed and heated. His breathlessness showed that he had been running.

"Yes; here I am!" he answered quietly. "Did Linton miss me?"

"Of course! You're booked for lines or a licking!" said Monty Lowther. "But what made you cut dinner, Tom?"

"And where have you been out of gates?" demanded Manners.

Tom Merry coloured uncomfortably.

"Only for a little run out Rylcombe way," he answered.

"I—I say, any fresh news about Wally?"

"None! He's still in the detention-room awaiting sentence!" said Manners. "It's either a flogging or the sack for the poor kid! I don't believe he did it myself—there's something queer behind this business!"

"And you know something about it, Tom!" exclaimed Lowther grimly. "Was it because of this Wally affair that you cut dinner and went out of gates?"

The junior skipper coloured still more. But he did not reply, though he realised both his chums were eyeing him fixedly.

"Look here, Tommy!" said Manners, at length. "This won't do, you know! It's not like you to keep secrets from your uncles."

"What do you mean?"

"You know well enough what I mean! You've got something on your mind, old son—and it's something in connection with Wally's trouble, if I'm not mistaken."

"Why—why do you think that?"

"You were out of the dorm last night—just about the time Wally's supposed to have downed old Taggles!" said Manners.

"So you've found that out?"

"Monty was awake and spotted you come in, though he didn't say anything. He was too sleepy to think much about it at the time."

"And you think it might just as easily have been me as Wally who knocked Taggles down?" said Tom bitterly.

"Don't be an ass!" said Manners uneasily. "But we certainly feel that you know something about the affair—something you won't tell us!"

"Cough it up, Tom!" urged Lowther. "We don't usually keep secrets from each other. You've been worried to death all day—since the news came about Taggles. And now you've cut dinner and been out of gates. What does it mean?"

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Tom Merry hesitated.

He hated to keep any secrets from his chums and, after all, there was no harm in confiding in them—he knew they would respect his confidence. He nodded at last.

"You fellows are right!" he said slowly. "I do know something about this affair. I not only know that Wally did not do it, but I also know who did!"

"You—you do!"

His chums stared at him in amazement.

"You know young Wally didn't biff old Taggles, and yet you're going to let him suffer, Tom?" ejaculated Manners.

Tom Merry shook his head, and his lips set.

"I'm not going to let him suffer!" he said grimly. "But—well, I'm in an awkward position, you men!"

"Who was it that biffed old Taggy, anyhow?" asked Manners breathlessly.

"A village chap—Joe Tuttle."

"Phew! I know the fellow—he's a down-at-heels merchant who hangs round the Green Man!" said Lowther. "That's the chap!" said Tom. "Well, you know how this business started. Old Taggles complained that Pongo, Wally's terrier, had been pinching his fowls, while Wally denied it, and said the dog was only rooting about there after rats. The Head took Taggy's part and ordered Pongo to be sold in Wayland. But Pongo broke free and bolted back to St. Jim's."

"That's so!" said Manners. "But—"

"Then Pongo was found lying half-dead in the roadway," went on Tom grimly, "and Wally vowed Taggles had done it, and Railton heard him vow to pay Taggles out."

"Young idiot!" said Lowther. "If he hadn't said that—"

"But he did!" said Tom. "So when Taggles was knocked down last night suspicion naturally fell on Wally—especially as the kid was caught out of his dorm by Railton."

—FULL STORY OF THESE SENSATIONAL HAPPENINGS BELOW!



These faithful fags, risking dire consequences, readily give help to their fugitive chum!

"It looked like it!" said Manners. "You can't blame the Head, Tom."

"But Wally didn't do it!" said Tom grimly. "I was there and I know!"

"You were there?" exclaimed Manners.

"Yes. I happened to be awake and heard somebody talking outside the dorm. I got up, but they'd gone then. It must have been Railton and Wally, though. Anyway, just as I was going back to bed I happened to glance through the landing window. In the moonlight I saw somebody climbing over the wall into Taggles' garden. I guessed at once it was some village sneak-thief after Taggy's fowls, which meant that there was a chance of clearing Wally and Pongo, I dressed and went after the merchant."

"Oh!"

"Just when I reached the lodge I fancied I heard someone cry out!" resumed Tom. "It must have been Taggy, though I didn't know he'd been hurt then. I just went after the chap—spotted him just vanishing over the wall."

"And it was Joe Tuttle?"

"Yes."

"Then—then Wally was right! Pongo hadn't been touching the blessed chickens; it was Joe Tuttle?"

"Yes."

"And Joe Tuttle laid Taggy out?"

"Yes—though he only hit out to make Taggles let go.

Taggles heard him in the yard and went out. Anyway, Joe Tuttle did it."

"Then why on earth don't you go to the Head and tell him? You can't let Wally take the blame!" gasped Manners, staring.

"I haven't finished the yarn yet," said Tom grimly. "I followed Joe Tuttle over the wall and chased him across the fields. I meant to collar him if I could and prove Pongo innocent. Then Joe Tuttle reached the river, and started to cross it."

"Across the ice?"

"Yes—and like a fool I followed him, though I knew the ice couldn't have been safe. It wasn't. I went in, and but for Joe Tuttle I shouldn't be here now," said Tom quietly.

"Phew! He fished you out?" gasped Lowther.

"Yes. I struck my head on some ice and was going under. Joe rushed back and saved me at the risk of his own life." Tom shuddered. "It was awful—a fight for life for both of us. But that chap—wastrel and sneak-thief—fished me out."

"Well, my hat!"

"Now do you see my position?" muttered Tom. "To save young Wally from a flogging or the sack I've got to give away the fellow who saved my life. The Head might be merciful, but Taggles isn't likely to be. It would mean imprisonment for Joe for a certainty. I can't do it."

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"Phew!"

Tom's chums looked at him. They understood the position now. To do the decent thing—to save an innocent fag from punishment, Tom Merry would have to give away the fellow who had saved his life at the risk of his own. It was an unpleasant position for anyone to be in.

"It's rotten!" said Manners at last. "But—but you can't allow young Wally to be punished—perhaps sacked, Tom?"

"I know. I don't intend to."

"But what are you going to do?"

"I've just been to see Joe Tuttle. I did my best to get him to own up to the Head—as good as promised him the Head wouldn't prosecute. All I got for my trouble was—this!"

And Tom showed a cut lip.

"He did that?" exclaimed Manners.

"Yes. He's terrified of the police. He thought I meant to yank him along, and so he hit out and bolted for his life!"

"I thought you looked as if you'd be scrapping!" said Manners. "Then, if the chap won't come—"

"You'll have to tell the truth and give him away!" said Lowther.

"Never!" said Tom Merry. "If you'd been in my place last night—fighting for life in the darkness, knowing I was drowning, and—and that plucky beggar—I can't, Monty!"

"But you can't let Wally be flogged—perhaps expelled!"

"I know! I don't intend to!"

"Then what are you going to do, Tom?"

"There's only one thing to do," answered Tom quietly. "And that is for me to go to the Head and confess that I did it."

"Wha-at!"

"Just that! I don't believe it'll mean the sack. And a flogging's little enough to bear for the sake of the chap who saved my life. I can stand a flogging better than Wally, too. I'm going now to see the Head."

"Oh, my hat! But, Tom— Here, hold on, you idiot, you—"

But Tom Merry was gone. He left two astonished and alarmed chums behind him.

CHAPTER 2.

Before the "Beak"!

"D'ARCY minor!"

The Head's voice was deep and stern.

Before him stood Wally D'Arcy. The fag was a trifle white, but he faced the Head and Mr. Railton steadily and defiantly. Who had struck down the old porter the night before he did not know; he only knew that he was innocent. His conscience was clear, and he feared nothing. In any case, he was not the youngster to whimper and beg for mercy.

The whole charge seemed to him grotesque, absurd. Certainly he had vowed to get even with Taggles. In his grief and rage at finding his little terrier a limp, unconscious bundle by the school gates, he had scarcely known, or cared, what he said. His first thought had been of Taggles. Hadn't the old porter vowed to make him and Pongo "sit up"? But once Pongo was on the road to recovery, and Wally could take a calmer view of things, he realised how wild his accusation had been. Taggles was a crusty old stick, and he wasn't fond of dogs—or fags. But he was not the sort of fellow to strike a little terrier so brutally as to stun him.

In any case, revenge was not in Wally's line at all. He might try to get his own back by playing a prank on the porter. But he would never dream of harming the old man. He had got up in the night to see how Pongo, who was hidden away in a disused part of St. Jim's, was getting on. Unluckily, Mr. Railton had caught him out of the dormitory, fully dressed, and he could not explain without giving away the whereabouts of Pongo.

Wally was resolved that if Pongo went, he would go also. The Head was not likely to give Pongo a second chance of returning to St. Jim's. At the moment the Head seemed to have forgotten Pongo, and Wally dreaded the moment when he would demand to know where the terrier was.

Wally was ready to risk a flogging rather than be parted from his pet. So he faced the headmaster steadily now.

"D'Arcy minor," began Dr. Holmes sternly, "you have had all the morning to think over your position! I wish to know if you have anything to say?"

"Nothing, sir, excepting that I never touched Taggles; I did not even go out of the House."

"You still refuse to confess, then?" snapped the Head, an angry gleam in his eyes.

"I cannot confess to what I have not done, sir!" said Wally, almost angrily.

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"Then," said the Head grimly, "nothing remains but for me to deliver sentence!"

Wally D'Arcy's eyes blazed.

"Then—then you believe me guilty; you won't believe me, sir?" he stammered.

"I do believe you guilty, D'Arcy!" said the Head sharply. "In Mr. Railton's hearing you made threats against Taggles. At about the hour Taggles was assaulted you were discovered out of your dormitory. The motive is there, also the evidence. You have had ample opportunity to state why you were out of bed last night. You refused to tell me, and I can place only one construction on your silence; by refusing to speak you have condemned yourself."

The Head paused, and as he did so a tap sounded on the door.

"Come in!"

The door opened, and Tom Merry appeared. His face was a trifle flushed, and his eyes were gleaming strangely.

"What do you want, Merry?"

"To speak to you about this matter of Taggles, sir," said Tom calmly.

"What do you know of the matter, Merry?"

"I know all about it, sir!"

"What?"

"I know that D'Arcy minor did not do it, sir!" said Tom steadily.

"You—you know D'Arcy did not do it?" stuttered the Head angrily. "Then why have you not been to me before this, Merry?"

Tom Merry flushed.

"I—I ought to have come at once, sir!" he muttered.

"But—"

"You say D'Arcy minor did not strike Taggles!" snapped the Head. "How do you know that, Merry?"

"Because I was there, sir!"

"You—you were there?" almost thundered the Head.

"Yes, sir!"

"You were out of the House last night when the assault took place?" articulated the Head, quite overcome.

"Yes, sir! I—I've come now to clear D'Arcy minor—to—to confess!"

"What?"

The Head and Mr. Railton started almost convulsively. Had Kildare come to make that statement they could scarcely have been more astounded.

"Merry!" gasped Dr. Holmes. "Do—do I understand that you have come to confess to having struck Taggles last night?"

Tom Merry hesitated a moment. A lie did not come easily to his lips—far from it. He had hoped to avoid the direct falsehood. But he saw now that it was impossible if he were to carry the thing through.

"Ye-es, sir!" he stammered, his face flushing like a beet-root.

There was a silence. The two masters exchanged glances.

The Head spoke at last.

"Merry," he said quietly, "I do not believe you!"

"Neither do I!" said Mr. Railton.

"Oh!" gasped Tom.

It was going to be much more difficult than he had supposed.

Wally D'Arcy was looking on in blank bewilderment. It was clear enough to him also that Tom Merry was not speaking the truth—for once. Tom had a frank, open nature; he could not deceive anyone—or attempt to deceive them—without showing it in his face. The crimson in his face now was enough—more than enough for two gentlemen of such experience as the Head and his Housemaster. Tom's face had given him away.

"What does this mean, Merry?" went on the Head sternly. "It is obvious to me that, for some reason or other, you wish to take the blame for this matter on your own shoulders. You have attempted to deceive me—your headmaster."

"I—I swear D'Arcy minor is innocent, sir!" said Tom doggedly. "I know he didn't do it—I was there! My chums will prove that I was out of the dormitory last night. I am speaking the truth, sir!"

"I cannot accept that!" said the Head sternly. "What possible motive could you have to do Taggles an injury, Merry?"

Tom was silent. He could not answer that.

"There is neither motive nor evidence against you, my boy!" said Dr. Holmes, eyeing him steadily. "I refuse to accept such a statement without clear proof that you are the guilty party. If you can prove your words—"

"My chums know I was out of the dormitory between eleven and twelve last night, sir! If you will send for them—"

"Have you any other proof?"

Tom was silent again.

"I shall not send for your friends!" snapped the Head. "The matter is clear to me, Merry. You have come here solely to save this wretched boy from the penalty of his

misdeeds. Stay, though. If you claim that D'Arcy minor is innocent, possibly you know who is guilty? I cannot believe that you are!"

Tom was silent again—his face flushing. The Head waited a moment, and then, as if convinced, he made an impatient gesture.

"Enough!" he said abruptly. "The reason for your extraordinary conduct is clear, Merry! I am aware that you are friendly with D'Arcy minor, and can only suppose that you have attempted to shoulder the blame out of compassion for the wretched boy."

"But—but I'm speaking the truth, sir—he didn't do it!" panted Tom desperately. "I swear—"

"Nonsense!" The Head's voice became stern. "You have attempted to deceive me, your headmaster, Merry. That is a serious matter!"

"I—I know D'Arcy's innocent, sir! Believe me—"

"I refuse to do anything of the kind, Merry! I can appreciate and admire your self-sacrificing spirit in trying to save the wretched boy!" went on the Head, in a gentler tone. "For that reason I shall not punish you for this—this extraordinary attempt at deceiving me. You may go!"

"But please listen to me, sir—" "Go! Otherwise I shall reconsider that decision, Merry."

"But, sir—" pleaded Tom.

"Go. Leave this room at once, Merry!" thundered the Head.

And Tom Merry went. He saw that it was useless to stay—the Head had tumbled to his game, and no amount of pleading would make him change his opinion.

In utter dismay Tom Merry left the study. Out in the passage he found his chums, Lowther and Manners, waiting. They stared at him in scared and anxious expectation.

"Well?" demanded Lowther. "What happened, Tom? You didn't own up to it?"

"Yes!"

"You awful ass! Is it a flogging, or—"

"Neither!" said Tom dismally. "The Head tumbled—he's a deep old bird! He spotted at once that I was spoofing!"

"You couldn't tell a lie decently if you tried!" said Manners, his face clearing somewhat. "But—but Wally—"

"Wally's done for, I'm afraid!" said Tom, his lips setting. "But I'm not finished yet. The kid shan't suffer! I'll clear him somehow!"

"Here he is!" said Lowther breathlessly.

Wally came out of the Head's room. His face was white, but he was alone.

"It's not the sack, then!" muttered Manners.

"What's the result?" asked Tom Merry.

Wally D'Arcy grinned feebly.

"A flogging!" he said, with a grimace. "A flogging before the whole school at nine in the morning!"

"You—you mean that?" stammered Tom.

"Yes, old bean! Something for me to look forward to, what? But what about it, Tom Merry?" demanded Wally,

giving Tom a curious look. "Why did you chip in with that rot?"

"It wasn't rot!"

"Phew! You really did do it?" gasped the Third-Former.

Tom shook his head. There was no use in claiming the honour now!



With flushed face and gleaming eyes Tom Merry faced the Head. "I've come to clear D'Arcy minor, sir," he said; "to—to confess!"

"No, I didn't, kid!"

"Then why on earth—"

"Because I happen to know that you didn't do it, Wally!" said Tom quietly. "I did my best to save you, and I failed. But I'm not done yet; you shan't be flogged if I can help it! I'll save you somehow, kid!"

"You needn't trouble, old bean!" said Wally coolly. "I'm not going to be flogged if I can help it, either!"

"What do you mean, you young ass?" snapped Tom, startled.

Wally's eyes gleamed.

"I didn't touch old Taggles!" he said fiercely. "I'm not going to be flogged for what I didn't do. You'll see! Catch me taking it lying down! The blessed Beak—"

"Shush!"

Lowther gave the warning as Mr. Henry Selby, the master of the Third, rustled up with his jerky, irritable step.

"D'Arcy, what are you doing here?" he demanded. "I thought you were confined to the punishment-room."

"I was, sir!" said Wally. "But the Head's released me!"

"Then—then you have succeeded in proving your innocence—"

"Not at all, sir!" said Wally coolly. "I'm to be publicly flogged in Hall to-morrow morning!"

Mr. Selby caught his breath, and the juniors, as well as Wally stared at him wonderingly. They had expected him to look pleased, if anything, at that bit of news. His dislike of Wally was well-known. But he looked agitated and upset.

"I—I regret to hear that, D'Arcy!" he said haltingly. "But—but I wished to speak to you in regard to your dog. I understand that it was found last evening lying stunned in the roadway."

"That's so, sir!" said Wally, his face hardening. "Some brute struck at Pongo—with a stick, I suppose!"

"I—I think you are mistaken, my boy!" said Mr. Selby. "It is most likely the wretched animal was run down by a car. Certainly I cannot believe that Taggles or anyone else at this school would hurt the dog. But I wish to know where it is now, D'Arcy? I trust you are not defying the headmaster and keeping the dog here still."

Wally said nothing—it was the question he had feared. But Lowther came to his rescue.

"He's disappeared, sir!" he answered quickly. "Herries had him in Study No. 6, bringing the poor little beggar round. Then he vanished—we don't know where he is now."

"The wretched dog is still here—he must be!" snapped Mr. Selby, his face almost white. "I have heard his bark in the distance several times to-day! It was faint, but unmistakable. It—it sounded within the school somewhere. You—you are not hiding the dog in any empty class-room or box-room, D'Arcy, minor!" he added, looking sharply at Wally.

"Certainly not, sir!" said Wally, truthfully enough. "Where could I hide him in the School House, sir?"

"I—I cannot understand it!" said Mr. Selby, his voice quite lacking its usual rasping sharpness. "I have ordered the prefects to search all possible places—box-rooms and empty class-rooms. They have done so without result. Yet—yet I am certain I heard the barking—I recognised it at once. It—it is very strange!"

And Mr. Henry Selby walked away, his features quite agitated.

Wally D'Arcy gave a deep chuckle.

"Quite upset, ain't he?" he grinned. "Must think old Pongo's snuffed it, and is haunting him. He always was down on poor old Pongo. What a lark!"

"Lark!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "It won't be a lark if the Head hears you've still got Pongo here, Wally!"

"How d'you know I have?" said Wally defiantly.

"You must have!" said Lowther grimly. "I bet Selby heard him all right. Where is he, you young ass?"

"Like to know, wouldn't you?" jeered Wally.

"Then he is here in the School House?" said Tom, staring. "I thought you must have smuggled him out somewhere, Wally!"

"Perhaps I did!" said Wally.

"You young ass! Where is he?"

"Find out!"

"But, you young idiot—"

"Rats!"

And Wally walked away. Obviously he had no intention of satisfying their curiosity on the subject of Pongo's whereabouts. The Terrible Three went in to afternoon classes feeling puzzled and not a little worried. They were perplexed by the mystery of Pongo, for if Wally's pet was still at large in or near the School House, as it seemed he must be, where could he be hidden? Tom Merry and his chums had to confess themselves baffled, and their concern for Wally increased. There was trouble enough in store for the scapegrace of the Third, without his running himself into more—and that was what he seemed to be doing!

CHAPTER 3.

Gussy's Brain-Wave!

"WOTTEN!"

That was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's emphatic opinion, and it was shared by nearly everyone where it became known that Wally D'Arcy was booked for a flogging. Reckless young scapegrace that he undoubtedly was, Wally had no lack of friends, and few enemies.

And a public flogging was no joke. The humiliation of it alone was bad enough.

Wally himself seemed to be the least concerned over it, however. Either he was determined not to show his fear of the coming ordeal, or else he still had hope that the flogging might not take place.

Unlike his minor, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was more than deeply concerned. Not for one moment did he believe

Wally was guilty, and his distress and indignation were overwhelming.

"It's rotten enough!" assented Blake. "Hard lines on the kid if he didn't do it—and I, for one, don't believe he did, and blow the evidence!"

"Same here!" agreed Herries. "Blessed if I can quite understand the whole affair! It was queer Tom chipping in like that—"

"Jolly decent of him—few fellows would have done it for a fag!" said Blake warmly.

"Hem!" Herries did not seem convinced. "It was queer, all the same. I suppose it isn't possible—"

He paused.

"Don't be an ass!" said Blake witheringly. "If you mean that Tom Merry himself did it—"

"I know he couldn't!" growled Herries. "But I mean he might know something about it!"

"Rot! He did it out of sheer good nature—to save the poor kid from a flogging!" said Blake, though his own voice sounded a bit doubtful. "Still, it fell through, and young Wally's for it. Hard cheese on the kid!"

"Let's hope the Beak doesn't lay it on too hard!" remarked Digby. "Anyway, what about tea?"

"Good wheeze! Lay the cloth, Gussy! Shove that kettle on the hob, Herries, old man!" said Blake.

The affair of Wally D'Arcy was dismissed from the minds of Blake, Herries, and Digby. Tea was a much more interesting subject when a fellow was hungry. Blake, Herries, and Digby were very sorry for Wally. They would have done a great deal to save him from the flogging if they could. But nothing they could do would save the fag, and talking certainly would not help matters. So they concentrated on tea.

Not so Arthur Augustus. He did not even hear Blake's orders. His brow was dark, and his eyes full of worry and bitter resentment. He had done his best for his hapless minor. He had visited the Head and told him that he considered it an insult to the family to charge his minor with such an offence—and had been caned for his trouble.

It was useless to chip in again—he knew that. None the less Arthur Augustus was not going to allow the flogging to take place if he could help it.

"It is weally too wotten for words, you fellows!" he exclaimed, after deep thought. "Somethin' must be done, you know!"

"No doubt about that!" assented Blake. "Get busy, then!"

"I am twyin' to think of a plan, Blake!" said Gussy, shaking his head. "But I weally do not know what to do!"

"Lay the cloth to begin with!" suggested Blake. "Afterwards get the toasting-fork and make some toast!"

"Bai Jove! I am speakin' of Wally's twouble, Blake!"

"And I'm speaking about tea!" said Blake. "Gassing won't help the kid, Gussy. Let's have tea, which is much more useful—for us!"

"Wats! I do not wequiah any tea, Blake—"

"But we do, old top! Get a move on! Boil some eggs if you won't make the toast!"

"I wefuse to boil any eggs or make wotten toast!" said Arthur Augustus. "I am determined to save young Wally somehow! To flog him would be a wotten injustice, and I wefuse to allow it to happen!"

"You can't stop it, you dummy!"

"I wefuse to be called a dummay, Blake! I wepeat that I intend to stop the wotten floggin' somehow!"

"Good luck, then, old bean!" said Blake amiably. "I hope you succeed! Personally I think you'll only succeed in bagging a licking, old chap. Still, go on thinking while we scoff the eggs and toast!"

"You are a heartless wottah, Jack Blake! If you are prepared to stand by and see a wotten injustice done—"

"What can't be cured must be endured!" quoted Blake.

"I'd help save Wally soon enough if I could see a way of doing it, old chap! As I can't, I'm going to have tea. After tea your mighty brain, refreshed and vitalised, can go ahead thinking out wheezes. So—"

"I have already thought out a plan, Blake!"

"What?"

"A vewy good one!" said Arthur Augustus, his eyes gleaming.

"Cough it up, then!" said Blake, without enthusiasm. "Is it to kidnap the Head?"

"Pway do not be wedic, Blake!" The swell of the Fourth adjusted his monocle and eyed his chums reflectively. "You fellows know how this business started!"

"Quite!" said Blake.

"Taggles claimed that Pongo had been waidin' his hen-wun!" said Arthur Augustus. "That is all wot, of course. We have lots of hens and chickens and things at home, but Pongo nevah dweams of touchin' them. It is vewy cleah that it was someone outside the school—a village sneak-thief, you know—who has been takin' Taggles' poultwy!"

"More likely than not!" assented Digby. "In fact, that's my belief!"

"It wasn't Pongo at all—old Taggy has been wight off the wails all along," said Arthur Augustus. "If we can pprove that a village sneak-thief did it, then we shall cleah Wally!"

"I don't see that!" said Blake, staring. "What has pinching the giddy fowls got to do with biffing Taggy?"

"It is vewy cleah to me, deah boy! The wascal who has been stealin' Taggy's poultwy, is the wascal who stwuck down old Taggy!"

"Phew!"

"He has been doin' it in the night, of course!" resumed Arthur Augustus, shaking his noble head sagely. "He came last night, made a noise, and voused old Taggy. Feawin' captuah, he stwuck down Taggles and escaped!"

Gussy's chums looked at each other.

"My only hat!" said Blake. "There's something in that, Gussy! I do believe you've hit it!"

"Sounds reasonable enough!" assented Herries slowly. "The beaks are so busy harping on old Pongo that they can't see that possibility! I believe you're right, Gussy!"

"I feel suah I am wight, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus, his eyes gleaming now. "That young wapsallion, Wally, was caught out of bed wight enough. But he was only goin' to play a twick or somethin'—possibly on Taggy for all we know. But—"

"More likely he was going to see to Pongo!" said Herries. "Pongo had disappeared this morning, you know. Depend upon it Wally got up to smuggle the little beggar out somewhere, and was collared just as he got back! That's why he refuses to say what he was up to!"

"Bai Jove! That is vewy likely, deah boy!"

"More likely than not!" said Blake, nodding seriously.

"But how are we going to prove this to the beaks, Gussy?"

"That is my plan!" said Arthur Augustus. "I pwopose to dwess myself up as a feahful-lookin' fellow—"

"No need to dress up!" suggested Blake. "Just remain as you are, and you'll fill the bill!"

"Wats! This is no wottin' mattah, Blake! I shall dwess up as a wuff-lookin' person, and allow Taggy to see me hangin' wound his hen-wun!" explained Gussy. "See the ideah?"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Taggles will chase me, of course!" said Gussy confidently. "But I shall wush off then, and can easily show the old fellow a clean pair of heels. I wathah flattah myself that I can wun, so there is no wisk whatevah. The whole point is to pprove to Taggy that it is an outsiders who has been takin' his fowls. Taggy will then weport to the Head, and the Head will realise that he is wiskin' a gwave mis-cawwage of justice by floggin' Wally!"

"Hem!" murmured Blake. "He might!"

"Did you work all that out in your head, Gussy?" said Digby admiringly.

"Yaas, deah boy!" said Gussy modestly. "Wathah a neat plan, what?"

"It might work!" admitted Blake thoughtfully. "That is, unless you do it, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"If Gussy does it, it's bound to prove a washout, and do more harm than good!" said Blake firmly. "There's something in the wheeze, I must admit. If the Head has reason to think some outsider was pinching the fowls, and not Pongo, he's pretty certain to begin to wonder if the outsider didn't biff old Taggy, too! But Gussy, being such a footling ass—"

"Weally, Blake, you—"

"Gussy, being such a footling ass!" went on Blake, unheeding, "he's the last man to tackle such a wheeze. I suggest Lowther!"

"Lowther's the man!" agreed Herries.

"It's a weird wheeze altogether!" said Digby. "But if it's got to be done, then Lowther's the chap to pull it off!"

"Wats! I wufuse to allow Lowthah to pull it off!" snorted Arthur Augustus indignantly. "You fellows know how I can act—"

"Act the goat—yes; nobody knows that better than we do!"

"Wats! You know vewy well I mean what a wemarkably clevah impersonatah I am!" said Gussy heatedly. "I wufuse to wisk allowin' anyone else to wuin the plan. I will, howevah, allow Lowthah to help me nake up for the part!"

"Well, that makes the chances a bit more hopeful!" admitted Blake. "Now come and get tea, and we'll talk it over afterwards, Gussy!"

"There is no need to talk it ovah any more!" said Gussy, with a snort. "The mattah cannot wait, as it will be dusk soon, and I want Taggy to see me cleahly so that there shall be no mistake! I must wush off now and see Lowthah, deah boys!"

"But, look here, ass—"

"Wats!"

With that Arthur Augustus hurried out, and the door closed.

"Better go after the dummy!" said Herries in some alarm.

"After tea—yes!" said Blake, with a chuckle. "I don't fancy Lowther shifting himself before tea for Gussy! He means business right enough. But plenty of time! We'll cut along to Nobody's Study after tea and see how he's getting on with the giddy making-up!"

And, for the time being, Blake, Herries, and Digby left it at that.

CHAPTER 4.

Not a Success!

"WATHAH not!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy murmured the words to himself as he stood looking into Study No. 10 on the Shell passage.

The study was empty. As a matter of fact, the Terrible Three happened to be tea-ing that afternoon in Talbot's study. It was rather a check to Gussy's arrangements, but then it had suddenly occurred to him that it was not really necessary to enlist Lowther's services at all. On the contrary, the fewer there were in the "know" the safer his great wheeze would be.

Moreover, he knew Lowther would want to play the part of the "rough-looking person"—such escapades were meat and drink to the fun-loving Monty. Possibly he would refuse to lend a hand at all unless he played the part; or, at least, precious time would be lost in arguing the matter.

In any case, it was not at all necessary to enlist Lowther's services. Wasn't he an adept at make-up himself? The noble Gussy had a sublime and lofty faith in his own varied

(Continued on next page.)

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abilities—a faith that was not at all shared by his chums. Nobody else saw any reason why Gussy should consider himself an adept at the art of making up, or a past-master of the art of impersonation. But he did. His faith in himself was boundless and unlimited.

"Wathah not!" he repeated to himself, his mind quite made up now. "Aftah all I am wathah glad Lowthah does happen to be out. I would much pwefer to cawwy this thing through on my own. Yaas, wathah!"

Having decided upon that, Arthur Augustus hurried along to Nobody's Study at the end of the passage. Here the "props" belonging to the Junior Amateur Dramatic Society were "housed," most of the stuff being kept in a big box, the key of which Tom Merry usually guarded. But Gussy knew that the lock was broken—having been smashed only recently by Grundy of the Shell, who had been refused the loan of certain stage property. As a member of the society, Grundy considered himself entitled to it, and he had, in his usual reckless manner, taken the law thus into his own hands and helped himself to the things he wanted.

Now Arthur Augustus was doing likewise—though he felt more than one twinge of conscience as he did so. Still, what was Tom Merry's wrath compared with what was at stake—a flogging for his innocent minor?

The key of the empty study was in the lock, and, after carefully locking the door, Arthur Augustus got busy.

He soon picked out the clothes he required from the varied assortment of garments in the property-box. But he did not remove his own clothes—Arthur Augustus was much too astute to do that. It was more than possible he would be chased a little, and it was quite possible he might want to change back into his own attire in a hurry.

Self-confident as he was, Arthur Augustus saw the possibility.

Over his own elegant trousers he dragged a pair of rough, corded trousers, shabby and ragged at the edges. Over his natty, fancy waistcoat he pulled a ragged jersey, grimy, with black and yellow stripes—an article of attire that caused Arthur Augustus to tremble violently as he looked at it! Over the jersey he drew on a ragged jacket that had once been black, but now was a dingy green. A big red muffler completed that part of his deep disguise. Then Gussy removed his smart shoes, and replaced them with heavy, lumbering boots that had not seen blacking for years by the look of them.

A shabby, tweed cap, with a big, stiff peak, completed his clothing arrangements.

Then Gussy, after looking himself over a bit, started to make-up.

Grease-paint was daubed liberally on his aristocratic features, a pair of bushy eyebrows fixed on, and then a smallish, ragged moustache finished the job.

He surveyed himself in the mirror, and was more than satisfied with the remarkable result of his efforts. Certainly the moustache did not go very well with the eyebrows, which were black, while the moustache was brown. And even Gussy himself had to admit that he had overdone the grease-paint somewhat. But it would be dusk by the time he reached the lodge, and those little peculiarities would not be noticeable.

Altogether Gussy was satisfied. He was in deep disguise, and he flattered himself that even Wally would not have known him then. He had wanted to turn himself into a rough-looking person, and he had certainly succeeded.

He had scarcely finished, and was just admiring the result in the mirror, when the doorknob turned, and then he heard Blake's voice.

"Open the door, Gussy! Are you in there, old chap?"

There was anxiety in Blake's voice. It had suddenly occurred to Blake that Arthur Augustus might easily change his mind about asking Lowther's help, and he and Herries and Digby had rushed through tea and come to find out.

Arthur Augustus did not reply. He needed no help now, and he did not want any youngsters chipping in to spoil the whole thing. Blake was inclined, at times, to resent his followers taking the lead in anything.

Very quietly Arthur Augustus laid down the mirror and

stepped to the window. Raising the sash cautiously, he clambered over the sill and dropped down on to the flower-beds below.

It was a ten-foot drop at the least, and Arthur Augustus rolled over and over in the frosty earth. But he was unhurt, and the dirt only made him look a rougher person than he had been before!

Dusk was settling thick over the quadrangle. It was ideal for his purpose. Taggles would be able to see him, but there was very little risk of the old porter, or anyone else, recognising him in that light.

The quadrangle was deserted, and lights were just beginning to appear at the windows of the school. After a sharp glance about him, Arthur Augustus scudded away towards the lodge, keeping close in the shadows of the buildings.

He reached the garden wall of the lodge at last. It was the work of a moment or two to shin up the wall and drop down into the garden beyond. He waited there, listening.

To his ears came a hammering sound—the sound of breaking coal. It came from the wooden coalshed at the back of the lodge, and Arthur Augustus smiled his satisfaction.

It was going to be even easier than he had expected.

Taggles was in the woodshed, breaking coal.

The schemer crept to the hen-run, and tore at the fastenings of the wire-netting-covered door. It came open at last. From the fowls came a chorus of cackling and crowing, and they swarmed to the door, apparently under the impression that it was feeding-time.

Gussy allowed some to come out. Taggles would be wild, of course, but it would add to the reality of the scheme.

Then the swell of the Fourth stooped and picked up a hefty stone. So far Taggles did not seem to have heard the disturbance in the fowl-house; at all events, he was still hammering away at the coal. But the stone would soon draw Taggles' attention to the commotion.

Whiz!

Gussy sent the stone with the force of a cricket-ball whizzing for the stumps. It crashed again the back of the coalshed.

The hammering suddenly ceased. The next moment Taggles appeared round the coalshed.

"Drat them there young himps!" he growled, glaring about him. "A chuckin' of stones at a man's property now! Which I'll report this 'ere to the 'Ead—"

He broke off abruptly as his eyes fell on Arthur Augustus. That the wicked chicken-thief should make him wise to his presence by throwing stones at the coalshed might have occurred to Taggles as a strange proceeding. But Taggles didn't even think of that. He only saw his fowls pouring from the run, and the villainous-looking youth standing by the door.



"My heye!" gasped Taggles. "A bloomin' tramp—arter my fowls! 'Ere, stop you raskill! Stop, you bloomin' thief!"

The villainous-looking stranger turned to bolt. Arthur Augustus deemed it time to move. His task was accomplished, and it would be foolish to wait to discover what Taggles thought about it.

Unfortunately Gussy left it a trifle too late.

As he turned to go, Taggles gave a bellow, and something left his gnarled hand with a whiz!

It was the coal-hammer! Taggles had acted rather hastily and recklessly. Had that hammer struck Gussy's noble head, the porter would probably have had to meet a



Leaving a line of fellows strawn to right and left behind him, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy bolted into the School House.



a charge of manslaughter. But, luckily for both Gussy and Taggles, only the haft of the hammer hit Gussy. It took him in the small of the back and a terrific howl came from Arthur Augustus.

"Yawooooop!" Arthur Augustus went down flat on his face in the muddy garden.

Taggles, not a little alarmed at what he had done, rushed up to him.

But Arthur Augustus, hurt though he was, was not too hurt to realise what capture meant.

He scrambled up, covered from head to foot in mud, and, dodging Taggles' grasp, leaped for the nearest wall.

It happened to be the inner wall, however, that separated the garden from the yard. Gussy had intended to make his orderly retreat by way of the outside wall into the lane. From the lane he intended to bolt for the fields, and, in suitable shelter, divest himself of his dark disguise.

But "the best laid schemes o' mice and men gang aft agley," as the poem has it, and Gussy's scheme went agley now.

With Taggles between him and escape by the outer wall, Arthur Augustus took the next best way out. From the yard he could reach the quad, and then bolt through the gates.

But Fate was against him once again. He swarmed over the wall and dropped down. Unfortunately he dropped backwards, and so did not see the rain-water butt below him.

For one brief instant his feet rested on the lid of the butt. The next, the lid tilted up, and then—
Splash!

CHAPTER 5. Only Gussy!

SPLASH!

"Yawooooop!"

Gussy's wild yell was enough to awaken the celebrated Seven Sleepers.

The water in the butt was cold—icy cold; in fact, Gussy's feet smashed through ice before reaching cold water. Luckily, he had fallen half over the edge of the big butt, with only his legs submerged to the thighs; but the sudden, unexpected shock was unpleasant, for all that.

A roar from beyond the wall roused him to superhuman efforts, and he floundered out of the butt and dropped in a dripping, dismal heap on the ground. Then he staggered up and made another desperate attempt to escape.

By then Taggles had dashed round into the yard in hot pursuit, his whiskers fairly bristling with rage. Once again Arthur Augustus dodged him.

"Stop!" he bawled furiously. "Stop, you varmint! After my fowls, hey? And me thinkin' as it were that there dorg! Stop!"

But Arthur Augustus did not heed the voice of the charmer—he flew, his drenched clothes flapping round him dismally, his boots squeelching.

Tearing open the yard gate, he bolted through into the quad.

Only a dozen yards from the gates and safety now!

And then Arthur Augustus struck another snag.

In the gateway, chatting in a group, were half a dozen Fifth-Formers—Cutts, Gilmore, St. Leger, and three other fellows. They had just come in, and were standing in the dusk discussing that afternoon's footer match.

Taggles' and Gussy's yells had drawn their attention, and they spotted the ruffianly figure at once.

"Stop thief!" roared Taggles. "Stop 'im, young gents! Stop 'im, Master Cutts!"

"Oh, bai Jove!" groaned Gussy.

Cutts grinned, and stepped aside—obviously to capture the fugitive. Gilmore, Price, and St. Leger joined up alongside—with like intention.

D'Arcy dodged them, Lowther; he did not want to be captured at all, much less by Cutts & Co.

"Some filthy tramp!" grinned Cutts. "Now he's gone, let him rip!"

"May have been pinchin', though!" said St. Leger.

"Dash it all, we ought to chip in and catch the blighter!"

"Been pinchin' Taggy's gin most likely!" chuckled Cutts.

"Still, I'm for a giddy man-hunt!"

"What-ho!"

And Cutts & Co. joined in the chase, with a whoop and a will—to the luckless Gussy's utter dismay. They pelted after him, easily leaving the gasping panting porter behind.

Arthur Augustus plunged on, hampered considerably by his drenched clothes. He was cold, but he scarcely felt it in the excitement of the moment. He had realised that escape by the gates was hopeless now, with Cutts & Co. on the trail. The Fifth-Formers could easily outdistance him in the open, good runner though he undoubtedly was.

His only chance was to find a hiding-place where he could divest himself of his clothes. After all, his task was accomplished. Taggles was convinced that he was the rascal who had been stealing his fowls—and not the luckless Pongo, the dog with a bad name!

All he had to do now was to escape and lie low.

Unfortunately, that was not so easily done. From various parts of the quadrangle other fellows took up the chase. In the dusk, deepening rapidly now Arthur Augustus looked a most villainous rascal. The quad had been empty almost before, but the shouts soon brought more pursuers rushing out from New House and School House.

"There he goes—over by the elms!"

Arthur Augustus had dodged round by the elms, making his way towards the woodshed behind the chapel. But a sudden rush of fellows out of the New House cut off that way of escape, and he made a blind rush into the open.

Then Cutts spotted him again—the Fifth-Formers having lost him amid the dusky trees.

The hunt was in full swing again with a vengeance!

Arthur Augustus streaked back across the quad again, making for the gates, heedless of the fact that plenty of fellows were rushing about now. But the gateway was clear, and it was his only chance.

He was well ahead of the chase now—only a couple of strides from the gates. Just the tuckshop to pass now, and then—

Crash!

"Yarrooooooh!"

A wild yell rent the night air—a yell in the well-known tones of Baggy Trimble of the Fourth. It was yet another snag for Gussy, a hefty snag. Rolling out of the tuckshop, Trimble had fairly walked into the fugitive—or the fugitive had fairly run into him! At all events, they collided with a terrific jolt, and both staggered backwards and sat down hard.

"Yow!" panted Gussy. "Ow, ow, ow! You fat wottah!"

He leaped up again like a jack-in-the-box, conscious only of the thudding feet ever drawing nearer. He realised that he was fighting now not only for himself, but for Wally, and he put all he knew into that desperate spurt.

This time he ignored the gates—already fellows had dashed there to cut him off. He made a desperate beeline for the School House doorway!

It was quite an unexpected move—indeed he was half-way there before anybody seemed to spot the sudden move in the deepening darkness.

Arthur Augustus flew.

Where Taggles was he did not know nor care, but very soon a swarm of fellows were whooping and yelling at his heels.

"There he goes again!"

"Look out!"

"My hat! I spotted him—an awful ruffian! Buck up!"

With the whole mob yelling and roaring in pursuit, Arthur Augustus made a mad break for the School House steps.

At least a dozen fellows halted as if to stop him, but so ferocious was the aspect of the approaching figure that their hearts failed them at the critical moment, and they jumped aside.

It was just then that Blake, Herries, and Digby appeared on the steps, attracted by the uproar in the quadrangle. Blake & Co. had long ago guessed that Arthur Augustus had gone through the window of Nobody's Study, and they had left the door some time ago. Now, as they heard that

commotion from the quadrangle, sudden apprehension came to Blake. He guessed it had something to do with Arthur Augustus, and, with his chums, he hurried out to make sure.

They met Arthur Augustus much sooner than they had expected. As Blake reached the top of the steps, Arthur Augustus reached the bottom, and came charging up.

"Look out!" yelled Herries.

"Oh, my hat! Gussy—"

Crash!

To right and left went Herries, Blake, and Digby. Leaving them strewn on the steps, Arthur Augustus bolted into the House and made tracks for Study No. 6.

On the stairs he met Tompkins and Mulvaney of the Fourth. Those two juniors saw the fugitive rushing upstairs towards them, but that was all they saw. Both found themselves seated on the stairs, wondering how they had landed there, while Arthur Augustus went on like a devastating whirlwind, his wet trousers still flapping round his legs. Before Clarence York Tompkins and Mick Mulvaney had ceased wondering, a swarm of pursuers came charging upstairs. They passed over the two like an incoming tide.

But Arthur Augustus was still well ahead, and he was alone when he rushed into the Fourth Form passage, panting, and with scarcely a scrap of breath left in his lungs. Only three fellows were in the passage at the time. They were the Terrible Three, and they were just on the point of entering Study No. 6.

They entered it much quicker than they had expected to—or, at least, Tom Merry and Lowther did. They happened to be just in the open doorway when Gussy rushed up.

Arthur Augustus did not stand upon ceremony. He charged Tom Merry and Monty Lowther, sending them sprawling, with wild yells, into the study. Manners had been sent staggering aside, and before he quite realised what had struck him the door was banged to and the key clicked home.

At that moment the foremost of the pursuers came rushing round the corner of the passage. Luckily for Arthur Augustus it was Jack Blake. Behind him were Herries and Digby, and behind them Cutts and a swarm of others.

In a flash Blake had realised who the fugitive was, and he had leaped up, desperately anxious to join the pursuers; but not for the purpose of catching the ruffian-looking tramp—far from it. His object was to lead the pursuers off on a false scent if he could.

He saw his chance now, guessing Gussy had taken refuge in Study No. 6.

"There he goes!" he bawled, as he rounded the corner.

"This way, you chaps!"

He pounded along the passage, the swarm at his heels. Manners was just recovering himself, but he was fairly flattened against the wall as the crowd went charging past. Manners yelled out to them, guessing they were after the ugly stranger who had barged into No. 6. But his yell came too late.

The swarm passed on, following Blake's false lead.

It vanished round the corner leading on to the Shell passage.

A few seconds later Blake came hurrying back. Manners was still gasping against the passage wall.

"Where is he?" hissed Blake, glancing cautiously up and down. "Is that awful idiot inside there, Manners?"

"Ow! Groooh!" gurgled Manners. "You—you silly owl! He hasn't gone on! He's in here, of course! An awful rotter—"

Without replying, Blake grabbed the door-knob and rattled it.

"Gussy, you born idiot, open the door—quick!"

The door was opened just then. Tom Merry appeared in view, his hair and clothes ruffled, his face red and heated.

"Here he is!" he yelled. "We've got him! An awful—Here, what the—"

Slam!

Blake had pushed Tom back into the room, grabbed Manners and hurled him in afterwards, and then followed himself, banging the door and locking it.

He stared at what he saw. On the floor, flat on his back, was the drenched, bedraggled form of the fugitive. Seated on his chest, looking almost as dishevelled and breathless, was Monty Lowther.

"We've collared the ruffian!" panted Tom. "Blake, what the thump have you locked—"

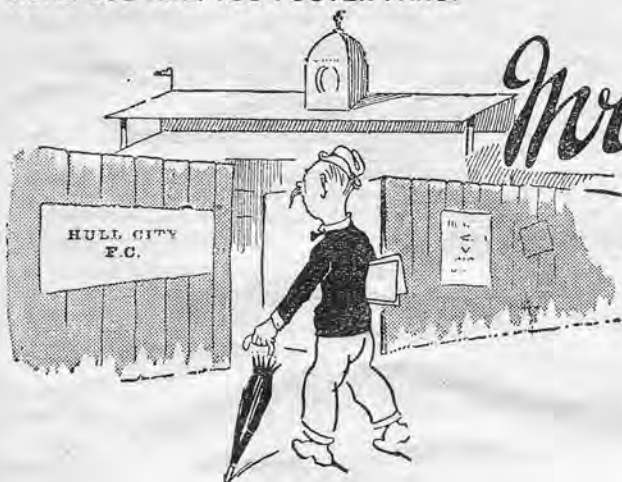
"Can't you see?" hissed Blake, hardly knowing whether to yell with laughter or with anger. "Can't you see whom it is? It's Gussy—that born idiot, Gussy!"

"Gwooooooh!" gurgled Arthur Augustus from the floor.

"Gwooooh! Ow-wow! Oh ewikey!"

There was no mistaking that well-known voice and accent! Until then the hapless Arthur Augustus had had no chance to speak. Tom Merry and Lowther, believing they had to deal with a madman or a tramp who had got into the school, had fallen upon him as one man.

HERE YOU ARE, YOU FOOTER FANS!



Mr. Parker POPS IN

TO SEE
HULL CITY.

This week, our special football representative, Mr. "Nosey" Parker, visits HULL CITY, notebook in hand and with his two ears wagging like a happy dog's tail. And the following INSIDE INFORMATION is what he has gathered from those stalwart sportsmen at Hull!

A Hive of Industry!

ALL my readers are at the top of their Form for geography, they will know instantly to what place I am referring when I mention the Third Port. But for the benefit of the boy who is at the bottom of the geography class I should perhaps add that Hull is called the Third Port. I have heard Hull called a lot of other names in my time, and I have said an occasional word or two myself which I thought described it pretty well. But we will let that pass.

They have a football team at Hull, and it is the life-long ambition of everybody connected with it to see the club rise to the dizzy heights of the First Division. You would have imagined that they were out to do it this season, too, if you had called at the ground with me one morning recently.

Talk about a hive of industry! Those Hull fellows doing their ball practice would have made a colony of the busiest bees look fast asleep. I hope that it wasn't the presence of the manager on the pitch, showing them how things should be done, that made them so busy. Indeed, I found later that it is real, not sham, enthusiasm which inspires the boys of Hull City.

Having crept into the ground unnoticed, I stood for a little while in hiding, but able to watch the lesson in progress. Suddenly I came out from my hiding-place, threw up both my arms, and yelled "Offside!"

"Bill"!

YOU would have laughed if you had seen "Big Bill" McCracken's face when he heard that call! It was a study which would have made the fortune of any artist who could have painted it. I expect you have heard of Bill McCracken even if you are not old enough to have seen him play football with Newcastle United. Now, in his footballing days "Bill" had one record: he got shouted at by spectators at grounds which Newcastle visited more than any other player has ever done. The trouble with "Bill" always was that he would play the offside trick—simply couldn't help it. Indeed, we can say with real truth that it was the way McCracken worked the offside dodge which caused the rule to be altered. So you can imagine the look on his face when, during the morning's practice, I suddenly burst in with my cry of "Offside!" in the real McCracken manner.

"Bill" is one of the most likeable Irishmen I have ever met and about the last one with whom I should try to pick a

quarrel. He can look so fierce! He certainly didn't drop on a bed of roses when he left Newcastle United to take over the managership of Hull City, because they are another of the clubs with a bank balance generally bordering on the wrong side.

In fact, as I talked to Bill about the team and its prospects, he had one or two things to say about what he would do if he had a lot of money to spend. He said that he told the bank manager quite recently that if he would stop mentioning the overdraft, then Bill wouldn't ring up the bank manager when the club happened to have a balance on the right side! That's Bill all over: he will have his joke now that he doesn't play, just as he would have it when he did play. And about his jokes there was generally just a touch of grimace.

The Substitute "Goalie"!

THE lads at Hull like their manager, however, and will do anything and everything he tells them. There are some fine young players on the staff, too. But the first man I ran up against was one of the old-timers of the team, Matthew Bell. He is the Adonis of the side, with flowing, auburn hair, and with a heart which fits well with his name—as sound as a bell.

Here is a story about Bell which I must tell you—it is so typical of the man. Some four years ago Hull played a Cup-tie on the Saturday against Wolverhampton Wanderers. In the course of it the goalkeeper of the side was hurt. The game had to be replayed on the following Wednesday, and there was no other goalkeeper available. The club could not sign one on in time, as a player has to be registered for fourteen days before he can play in a Cup-tie for any team. The manager didn't quite know what to do.

"I'll go in goal if you think you can find another full-back," said Matthew Bell. The manager took him at his word. Bell kept goal in the replayed Cup-tie, and do you know what the result was—Hull won by a goal to nothing, Bell saving no end of shots to help the side through.

Three Good Lads!

THE regular goalkeeper, of course, is George Maddison, a fellow who was once at Tottenham. They call him "Smiler" sometimes, and that pet name fits him. The only times when he is serious are when nasty shots come his way and when somebody challenges him to a game of "snooker." I learnt, however, that the Hull players have ceased to challenge George at the

many-ball game and now acknowledge him as the champion of the staff.

In another corner of the field I saw three of the players having a more or less heated argument. The question of what should be done to the turf had been raised, and the three gardening experts of the side—Goldsmith, Childs, and Gibson—were trying to decide among themselves as to the best methods for bringing the nice green grass to that bit of pitch. I think it is a good thing Hull don't play football in summer, or these three would spend their training time in argument as to which could produce the best roses, sweet peas, and that sort of thing. One of the places where they

meet to argue is Matthew Bell's sweet shop which he owns in the town. Indeed, I believe Matthew has more than one such shop. What a pastime—to be manager of two or three tuckshops!

The interests of these Hull lads are many and varied. Stanley Alexander is a young centre-forward in whom the manager has a lot of faith. He knows everything there is to know about dogs of all sorts, and I should not be surprised to learn one of these days that he has greyhounds running on the tracks.

A Rejected Offer!

ALTHOUGH most of the Hull players at present on the staff have been brought out by the club, and many of them are local products—not produced by the gardeners of the team, of course—there is a touch of the cosmopolitan element supplied here and there.

Howieson, for instance, is a Scottish International, and a fine scheming forward, too. He offered to drive me to the station in his motor-car, but somehow or other Duncan, his wing partner, gave me the impression that I should be well advised not to accept the invitation. I took the tip, and consequently can't say whether Howieson pretenses dribbling with his car round other vehicles in the streets of Hull to enable him to dribble round football field opponents all the better.

Then there is Williams, whom nobody ever gives his Christian name. I am not surprised at that, because it is so difficult to spell, and I could not have given it to you if I had not made a note of it at the time—and had it spelt out for me! It is Emelyn. He gives the Welsh touch to the side, and another Scot to keep Howieson company in Kenneth Macdonald.

Jimmy Walsh is the handyman—the fellow who can play anywhere—full-back, half-back, or in the forward line. Having seen most of the players, I then went back to Manager McCracken to ask him what he thought of the club's prospects of winning promotion. The look he gave me suggested that if I didn't get outside I should be "offside," so I hurried away by the nearest side exit. But, reflecting on what I had heard, I came to the conclusion that a number of people connected with the Hull City club are inclined to agree with McCracken that the offside trick can still be worked to advantage. Anyway, the backs of Hull still try it, and every time it comes off Maddison smiles his big smile.

"NOSEY."

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The Fugitive Schoolboy!

(Continued from page 10.)

Gussy, already winded, with no breath left for speech, much less to fight, was as a child in their hands. He was whirled over and set down hard on the floor in a matter of seconds.

But now both Lowther and Tom realised the truth as they blinked down at their captive. He looked a most woeful sight. Gone was his cap, his moustache, and quite a lot of the grease-paint. Now they heard that familiar voice they had no difficulty in recognising its owner as the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"But what does it mean?" gurgled Tom Merry. "What's the burbling bander-snatch doing in this rig-out?"

"I'll explain!" said Blake wearily. "We might have known how it would end!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Dry up, and get those things off sharp!" said Blake urgently. "You chaps can be helping to get them off while I explain!"

Blake explained, while the Terrible Three, looking bewildered, helped the trembling and exhausted Arthur Augustus to remove his outer suit of clothes.

"What's happened goodness knows!" groaned Jack Blake. "But that was the game—to make them think it was a local thief who'd been at Taggles' fowls! Of course, Gussy was bound to make a muck of things—he couldn't do anything else if he'd tried! It wasn't a bad wheeze, though. If only Lowther had tackled it instead of this born idiot it might have come off!"

Tom Merry drew a deep breath, and exchanged glances with Lowther and Manners, who were grinning now. But Tom was not grinning. He realised how near to the truth Gussy had got in his scheme. It was a village youth who had been at Taggles' fowls, and who had struck down Taggles. Yet he dare not tell Arthur Augustus that, much as he longed to do so. In his desperate desire to save Wally, Gussy might not consider Joe Tuttle. He could not be blamed for putting his minor first, in any case. Tom gave his chums a warning glance.

"It—it was a good wheeze!" said Tom, eyeing Arthur Augustus grimly. "And it might easily have come off!"

Arthur Augustus managed to get a little more breath back.

"You—you feahful idiot, Blake!" he gasped. "It has come off! I have succeeded in my plan, though I did have a feahful wun for it."

"What?"

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped Arthur Augustus, exhausted but triumphant. "I have had a most feahful time—a howwid time! That wotten old duffer, Taggy, thwew a coal-hammer at me. Then I fell into a water-butt, and then Cutts and a whole crowd of intahfeahin' wottahs wushed aftah me. I also wushed into Twimble and came a cwoppah, and altogetherah I have had a w'etched time of it."

"Yet you did it—you've made Taggy think it was a thief after his blessed fowls?" gasped Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! I heard him shout quite plainly that he had thought it must have been Pongo befoah! He wenlises now the possibility of it bein' a thief fwom outside aftah all. Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, my hat!"

Blake seemed quite overcome at the thought that Arthur Augustus had "pulled it off" after all! He crossed to the door and unlocked it, for the swell of the Fourth had removed his weird and wonderful disguise by this time, while slippers adorned his elegant feet.

"Well, my only hat!" he gasped. "Good for you, Gussy! Better unlock the door now—safe enough! Might arouse suspicion if anyone came along and found it locked. What about your wet togs, Gussy?"

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry. "I'll cut along and get you a pair of bags to change into, Gussy. You hang on here—"

"He'll want a rub down, too, though!" said Blake grimly. "He can cut up to the dorm and change his bags and get a rub down—nobody's likely to go up there now!"

"Yaas, wathah! I shall weally catch a chill if I don't!" So Arthur Augustus hurried off to the dormitory, with little fear of being caught now. Nor was he. Twenty minutes later he entered Study No. 6 looking his usual serene self again. He found the Terrible Three still there, and he smiled at them.

"All wight now, deah boys!" he remarked cheerfully. "I heah they've given up the chase! You fellows must admit
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that it was a gweat ideah, and that I cawwied it off wathah well!"

"That's so!" agreed Blake grimly. "But the proof of the pudding is in the eating, old chap! We don't know yet whether the Head's been influenced at all by Taggy's news. If he isn't, then it's all been useless as far as I can see!"

"Absolutely!" agreed Tom Merry. "Still, there's a good chance that the Head will never risk doing an injustice when he has reason to think it might have been an outside raider. It may come off, Gussy!"

"It will come off!" said Gussy confidently. "If Taggy does not weport this to the Head I shall make it my business to see the Head gets to know, and I shall point out what it suggests. Yaas, wathah!"

But the confident Arthur Augustus was booked for a surprise—a cruel surprise. For just then the door flew open and Baggy Trimble appeared, his fat face ablaze with excitement.

"I say, you fellows, have you heard the news?" he gasped. "What news?" said Blake, with sudden interest.

"He, he, he!" giggled Trimble. "Such a lark! That merchant wasn't a beastly tramp at all!"

"Bai Jove! Twimble—"

"Nor a giddy villager either!" grinned Trimble. "I thought it was jolly rummy his getting away like that! Railton's in a fine bate about it. It must have been one of our chaps!"

"Gweat Scott!" Arthur Augustus seemed to collapse like a pricked balloon. "Weally, Twimble, what—what do you mean?"

"He, he, he! You'd never believe it!" giggled the fat junior. "I guessed the truth when the merchant biffed me over in the quad."

"You fat fibber—"

"Fact! Anyway," grinned Trimble, "it was all through me the chap's been bowled out!"

"Bowled out!" yelled Blake.

"Well, as good as bowled out, though nobody knows who it was yet!" grinned Trimble. "I'd give a term's pocket-money to know—the beast nearly busted me! Anyway, when he barged into me I made a grab at him, and what d'you think I grabbed?"

"A jam-tart?"

"No, you ass! The chap's moustache!" chuckled Baggy, with a wink. "It was a false one, of course! The chap was disguised! I kept it in my fist and handed it to Railton! Then the cap was found—Cutts found it!"

"The—the cap!" echoed Tom Merry, with a sudden start. He fancied he could guess what was coming next. He was right.

"Yes, the giddy cap!" grinned Trimble. "It fairly gave the game away. You see, it was a cap out of the Dramatic Society's property-box. It was marked inside with the giddy society's initials. All the things were marked by Tom Merry, weren't they, 'cause some of the things were being taken away by chaps for japes."

"That's so!" almost groaned Tom Merry. "I marked all the things myself. And—and this cap was marked, you say?"

"Yes, old chap—Railton's got it now. It was some silly ass playing a jape on Taggy, I expect. Railton's looking in a fine stew about it! Bit of a scream—what? He, he, he!"

And Trimble rushed off to spread the news far and wide—that the ruffianly-looking chap who had caused all the commotion was not a strange tramp, after all, but a St. Jim's fellow playing a jape!

There was a silence after he had gone. Arthur Augustus looked almost on the point of weeping. In the moment of success had come defeat! All his trouble, his pains and tribulations, had been for nothing. The authorities, and Taggles, now knew that the rough-looking person was a St. Jim's fellow—a japer only. The great wheeze had fizzled out at the very moment of its seeming success.

Arthur Augustus gave a dismal, hollow groan.

"Well, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Hard lines, Gussy!"

"Rotten luck, Gussy!" said Blake

"Too bad!" murmured Digby.

And it was too bad—all were agreed upon that. But it was small comfort to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. When the chums went down to the junior Common-room they found it buzzing with the news. Speculation was rife as several of the keener fellows, like Cardew, and Levison, and Glyn, eyed Tom Merry & Co. curiously. But they asked no questions, though it was clear they suspected something. Possibly Mr. Railton also suspected something, but his inquiries came to nothing. Nobody seemed to know who the daring japer had been. When St. Jim's retired to rest that night the affair was still a mystery to the authorities, and the fellows in general. And Wally D'Arcy was still booked for the flogging on the morrow!

CHAPTER 6.

No Flogging!

TOM MERRY was, perhaps, the most worried fellow in all St. Jim's on the following morning. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, too, was wearing a troubled frown, though Wally himself, from all accounts, did not seem to have lost any sleep in worrying over the ordeal before him. Floggings were few and far between at St. Jim's, and public floggings were exceptional to a degree. They were dreaded by most of the onlookers, just as they were dreaded, in far greater measure, by the unfortunate victim.

Possibly Wally was not so unconcerned as he seemed, for he had heaps of grit, and he was not likely to show fear before the ordeal or during it. Or, possibly, he had other reasons for not showing his feelings.

But Tom Merry was worried. He was determined that the flogging should not take place. Yet how to stop it he did not know. Before breakfast he took his courage into both hands and visited Mr. Railton to make a last-hour appeal on the wretched fag's behalf. Knowing the fag was innocent, Tom pleaded hard—desperately hard. He asked to be taken before the Head to plead still further. It was useless, however. Mr. Railton realised the futility of trying to persuade the Head to cancel the sentence without good and sufficient cause. The Housemaster was clearly sorry for the wretched Wally. He was sympathetic to Tom Merry and to Arthur Augustus, who also ventured to plead on his minor's behalf. But he told them he could do nothing. The sentence must stand unless the Head decided otherwise.

The time appointed was nine o'clock, before morning school. And the Head did not change his mind. By three minutes to nine every fellow was in his place in Big Hall, waiting in breathless silence. Tom Merry was there, trembling with the emotion that filled him. He had to prevent the flogging—he must! He would never forgive himself if he stood by while the innocent fag was punished and humiliated before the whole school.

There was a sudden hush as the Head appeared on the dais alongside Mr. Railton. Taggles, the school porter, was already there. The old fellow looked the most unhappy person in the great Hall. Though it was not generally known, Taggles—not a bad old fellow, for all his grumpiness—had pleaded with the Head also, begging him not to flog the fag who was condemned for striking him down. But the Head was adamant, and Taggles had the unpleasant task of hoisting the victim for the flogging.

"Silence!"

Dead silence now. In a few brief and impressive words Dr. Holmes explained why the general assembly had been called—which everyone knew already. He told how Taggles had been struck down, and of the evidence that had convicted Wally D'Arcy. Then he called the fag's name, and ordered Taggles to hoist the victim.

It was then that Tom Merry jumped from his place.

"Stop!"

His voice trembled a little, yet it carried all over the great Hall.

The Head stood motionless and glared down at him.

"Who—Merry, how dare you? Resume your place at once, sir!" he thundered.

"Stop, sir!" gasped Tom. "D'Arcy minor must not be flogged, Dr. Holmes! He is innocent, sir!"

"What—what—Merry, are you out of your senses? Leave this dais this instant, sir! Go!"

"Please listen to me, sir!" panted Tom Merry. "You are making a mistake—a terrible mistake! D'Arcy did not do it—he did not touch the school porter! It was—"

"Be silent!" thundered the scandalised Head. "Leave this dais at once, boy!"

"But, sir—"

"Mr. Railton—Kildare, remove this boy! Take him from the Hall!" stuttered the headmaster.

"Dr. Holmes—sir—"

"Enough!" gasped the Head, raising his hand. "I have already heard you, Merry. You have already pleaded with me on this wretched boy's behalf—you have even dared to attempt to deceive me into believing that you yourself committed the act. The matter is ended; only this boy's punishment remains—a richly-merited punishment. Go!"

"But I have something else to say, sir—please—"

"Go!"

Tom Merry had no chance to say more. Amid a breathless stillness Mr. Railton grasped him by the shoulder and twisted him round. Kildare came hurrying up the aisle. Between them Housemaster and school captain hustled the dazed and trembling junior away. They vanished from the Hall amid a sudden buzz. Never had such a sensation been caused in the great Hall.

But it was not fated to be the only sensation that morning. As the three vanished, the Head, trembling with wrath, turned again to Taggles.

"Taggles, do your duty!"

"Yessir!"

Wally licked his suddenly-dry lips.

The moment had come. He knew what was expected of him. The Head had picked up his birch from the table. He was expected to climb on Taggles' broad back and take his punishment. But the scapegrace had other ideas on the subject. Not for one moment had he had any intention of submitting to a flogging he had not earned. By having him collared after breakfast and fastened up until the moment came, the Head had scotched his plans. But there was still time—still a chance.

(Continued on next page.)

OUR NEW SERIAL THAT FOLLOWS

"The Worst Form at Codrington!"

"RADIUM"

(the earth that burns).

Staged in the same perilous land as that in which the Spanish Conquistadors of old made romantic and never-to-be-forgotten history, a little band of fortune-seekers set out in quest of Radium—undaunted by the stories of past failures, and terrible hardships. With that spirit to succeed—or follow in the paths of those other brave-hearted adventurers who lie in unmarked graves beneath the storm-swept trees and jungles of the Andes, they set their faces in the direction of



"THE VALLEY OF FORTUNE!"

THRILLS? Yes, they find their thrills, piled one upon the other, in what seems to be chain without end. But an end there is—an end where the life-giving RADIUM hides lurily in the rocks at the very back of the Andes.

Here's a story, THE FIRST CHAPTERS OF WHICH WILL APPEAR NEXT WEEK, that will grip every adventure-loving boy—grip him in a tense, magnetic grasp, hold him from chapter to chapter, adventure to adventure. It is a story that will last in the memory of every reader, the story of bravery and undaunted courage!



COMMENCING IN
NEXT WEEK'S GEM!

Wally took it.

As the lumbering porter twisted round with his back to him, Wally simply turned tail and bolted for it.

But he did not bolt down the steps of the dais—he knew better than that. Before he could have taken a dozen steps down the aisle a dozen prefects would have collared him and held him. Instead, Wally turned right about, and bolted for the Head's private door at the back of the dais.

Before anyone quite realised his intention, Wally had wrenched the door open and rushed out into the small ante-room beyond.

It was empty, and scudding through it, the daring fag wrenched open another door and reached the passage beyond. There was not a soul in sight along the passage, and Wally took to his heels like a flash of greased lightning.

After that Wally D'Arcy vanished utterly—or so it seemed.

When half a dozen prefects rushed out into the same passage a few seconds later he had gone—nor did they find him!

Big Hall was in a buzz. For once, even the Head's choking voice did not succeed in bringing silence. Several minutes passed—the Head had left the Hall now. In vain Mr. Ratcliff, the senior Housemaster, called for silence, and made all sorts of threats to obtain it. Such a sensation needed discussion, and the school discussed it—audibly now the Head's august person was absent. But Mr. Railton came in at last and held up a hand for silence. It did more than all Mr. Ratcliff's ravings had done.

"Dismiss, boys!"

The flogging was off—for the time being, at all events. And the school went to their various Form-rooms in a state of seething excitement. But the news filled one fellow with mingled joy and fear. That fellow was Tom Merry. For the time being Wally had escaped the flogging. But he had run away, and Tom wondered if that would not mean a worse fate for him when caught. In the Shell Form-room Tom Merry sat and worried, feeling certain that at break he would hear that the runaway was captured.

Practically every fellow in St. Jim's felt the same. But they were wrong. Break came, and so did dinner, and Wally D'Arcy was still missing!

CHAPTER 7. In Hiding!

"ALL serene?"

"What-ho!"

"Get any grub, Curly?"

"Yes, rather!" murmured Curly Gibson of the

Third. "I collared a chunk of pudding at dinner and wrapped it in paper. And I've got some tarts from the tuckshop. You got anything, Frankie?"

Frank Levison chuckled, though his face was a trifle graver than his fellow-fags'.

"I've got a tin of pressed beef and some tea, also a tin of condensed milk. Sure Wally's got plenty of water?"

"Heaps, old nut! We took some for Pongo last night; must be plenty left. Safe to get along there now?"

"Hold on!" murmured Frank Levison grimly. "That cad Piggott's got his peepers on us! 'Shush!'"

Just then Reuben Piggott came over to where the four fags were talking in whispers. His crafty features showed suspicion and curiosity. Wally D'Arcy had disappeared completely, as far as the authorities were concerned. He had run away, and no trace of him had been discovered, though prefects had scoured Rylcombe and the surrounding district.

But Piggott had a good idea that Wally's chums knew where he was, and he was very curious and very suspicious. "They've not collared Wally yet!" he remarked, grinning.

"No," returned Jameson calmly. "Wouldn't you just be pleased if they did?"

Piggott scowled.

"I don't see that I should!" he sniffed. "I think he's got no end of nerve! I bet you chaps know where he is!"

"You're no end of a betting man!" said Reggie Manners.

"Yah! It's pretty clear to me!" said Piggott, with an unpleasant grin. "You chaps don't seem to be troubling where he is, anyway! You can't pull the wool over my eyes!"

"But we can pull your giddy jacket over your napper!" said Curly Gibson cheerfully.

And, suiting the action to the word, he grabbed Reuben Piggott, sat him down hard on the floor, and dragged his jacket up over his head with a quick wrench.

"Sit on him!" he grinned, giving Reggie Manners and Levison a meaning glance.

Reggie Manners and Levison minor promptly obeyed; they jumped on the struggling Piggott and proceeded to rag him thoroughly. Piggott was a sneak and an unpleasant

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little beast who needed ragging often, in the fags' view. But there was a purpose in the ragging now; they wanted their chums to get away safely, without the risk of Reuben Piggott following.

Jameson, Curly Gibson, and Hobbs slipped carelessly from the Third Form-room, leaving the ragging in the capable hands of Reggie Manners and Levison minor and several other fags who were only too glad to join in the ragging of Reuben Piggott.

"That's settled the sneaking little sweep!" said Jameson, with a chuckle. "Now for Wally! Keep a sharp look-out, though; the prefects may have their peepers on us, you know!"

It was quite likely, and the fags took care they were not followed as they made their way cautiously to the disused wing of the School House. They stopped at last before a cupboard just beyond the Shell quarters. From the



Scarcely daring to breathe, Wally D'Arcy & Co. stood in the secret then through the op

cupboard various packages were taken—food that had been hidden there in readiness. Then the fags hurried on into the deserted wing, and, with many glances behind them, mounted the rickety, uncarpeted stairs leading up to the attics.

But the attics were not their destination. On a landing half-way up the stairs they halted. Here, in a small blind passage—little more than an alcove—was the secret sliding panel leading to the secret room below St. Jim's. Often enough had the reckless fags used it; and now they had it open in a moment, and were clambering through into the musty darkness of a gloomy passage beyond.

"Quietly, now, you men!" warned Jameson. "This giddy passage goes past several rooms, you know. 'If we're heard—"

"Nobody will guess anything!" grinned Hobbs. "It's some time since the Head had the giddy panels screwed up. I say, what about having a squint at old Selby?"

As he spoke Hobbs shone the light from the pocket-torch

he carried on to the passage wall at one side. The bright light gleamed on panelling black with age, and covered from floor to ceiling in dust, cobwebs, and grime. In the spot Hobbs lighted was a curious arrangement of springs and strange wooden wheels. Both springs and wheels showed signs of having been recently oiled.

Before the other fags could stop him Hobbs had grasped the panel and cautiously slid it aside a couple of inches. It was as well he did move it cautiously; for next moment a sound made them start—a well-known, rasping cough, striking with startling clearness on their ears.

"He's in there!" breathed Jameson. "Let's have a squint, Hobbs!"

Hobbs grinned, and removed his eye from the slit in the panelled wall, while his chum took his place. Jameson found himself looking into Mr. Selby's room. Directly before him, so near that he could have reached out and



passage and listened to the amazing conversation that reached him in the panel!

touched it, was Mr. Selby's bald head. He was seated at his desk, with his back to the panelled wall.

With mischief in his eyes, Jameson watched a moment. And just then Mr. Selby happened to reach up over his desk for a pile of exercises at the back of the desk.

As he did so Jameson gently and swiftly moved the panel aside another inch or so, shoved his arm through, and grasped the back of Mr. Selby's chair. A quick lunge sent it sliding aside on castors—just as Mr. Selby grabbed the exercises and sank back.

Instantly Jameson withdrew his hand and slid the panel gently shut. At the same moment Mr. Selby sat down on the spot where the chair should have been, and to the ears of the gleeful fags came the sound of a heavy bump and a muffled howl.

"That's enough to begin with!" murmured Jameson. "We'll give dear old Selby a bit more attention presently. Let's go and see to Wally; he'll be getting jolly hungry, I bet!"

And, chuckling explosively at thought of that heavy bump beyond the panelling, the reckless young scapegraces went along the passage and down some stone steps; then along another passage until they reached an arched doorway. As they did so there sounded a growl, followed instantly by a delighted barking, as Pongo—Wally's terrier—recognised Jameson's low whistle.

"Quiet, Pongo, you little ass!" came Wally's voice.

The next moment the fags were in the secret room—a long, low apartment, with stone walls and floor, and with a long, massive oak table right down the centre of the room. In the fireplace an oil-stove was burning, and it was quite warm and cosy, while candles lit up the strange apartment.

Wally D'Arcy was there, with Pongo. He gave his chums a faint grin as they crowded in.

"All serene?" he asked. "I say, I'm hungry! Got any grub?"

"Heaps, old man! Here you are!"

"Any suspicion that I'm hiding in the school?" demanded Wally anxiously.

"None, old scout!" chuckled Jameson. "But you'd better keep old Pongo a bit quieter, or someone will be tumbling to the game. Old Selby swears he's heard him barking, and he's had the prefects searching the place. Nobody else seems to have heard it, though."

"Selby's room's nearest," said Wally. "But what were you grinning about when you came in? Blessed if I can find much to grin about to-day!"

Jameson told him of Mr. Selby's downfall, and Wally chuckled.

"We'll give him a few more shocks before we've finished," he said. "But we'll have to be jolly careful. Nearly everybody knows about that panel, though they think it's still screwed up. Selby may tumble if we overdo it. Anyway, cut along now, and I'll expect you for tea. Must be close on time for afternoon classes. Buzz off!"

"Right-ho! Keep your pecker up, Wally!"

The fags left Wally to his lonely meal with Pongo, and hurried back the way they had come. This time they left the panel opening on Mr. Selby's room severely alone, and very soon they had reached the Third Form-room again.

Piggott gave them a suspicious scowl as they entered. He was just buttoning his collar, and his hair and clothes still showed signs of the little ragging.

"You—you rotters!" he hissed. "I know why you did that, you beasts! I—I'll pay you out, you see if I don't!"

"Shouldn't be such a sneaking, spying little worm!" said Curly Gibson cheerfully.

"Cave! Here's Selby!"

The master of the Third came rustling in. His sour features were rather flushed, and he limped a trifle. It was clear that he was in a very bad temper indeed, and the Form saw the danger signals at once. That heavy fall had been a shock to Mr. Henry Selby. Not only had he come down heavily, but he had bumped his head on the panelling, also. His temper had suffered in consequence.

Being on the look-out for anything to feed his temper, Mr. Selby noticed Piggott immediately.

"Get to your places, boys—at once!" he barked. "Piggott, how dare you come to the Form-room in that disgraceful condition? You have been fighting, sir!"

"I haven't!" snapped Piggott.

"What—what—How dare you speak to me in that insolent manner, boy!" hooted Mr. Selby.

He made a grab at his cane lying on the desk. He seemed to be itching to use it, in fact.

"Stand out here, Piggott! Hold out your hand!" he rapped.

Apparently, Mr. Selby had forgotten the little chat he had had with Piggott the previous day. But Piggott had not forgotten, and he proceeded to remind Mr. Selby.

"I shan't!" he said coolly.

"What—what!"

"You're not going to cane me!" said the cad of the Third, his eyes glittering with spite.

There was a buzz. The fags stared transfixed at the daring Reuben. The young rascal was usually humble and cringing to a master. Now, it was amazing.

"Must be absolutely potty!" breathed Jameson.

That was the general belief.

Still Mr. Selby did not remember.

"I—I am not going to cane you!" he babbled. "Bless my soul! You—you insolent young rascal! Such impudence—such insubordination! I—I will soon show you whether I am going to cane you or not. Hold out your hand, sir!"

It was a bellow. Piggott put his hands behind him, and faced the irate and astounded master impudently.

"Better not," he said coolly. "One bad turn deserves

another, sir. I'm—I'm not a dog to be struck for nothing, Mr. Selby."

"Oh!"

Mr. Selby suddenly lowered his cane—he had remembered.

It was the word "dog" that had done it.

He stood and gazed at the impudent face of Reuben Piggott, the colour coming and going in his face.

"I—I will not cane you now, Piggott!" he gasped faintly. "I—I will punish you another time. I do—do not feel equal to caning you at the moment. Go—go to your place!"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

Reuben Piggott swaggered to his place and sat down, conscious that the little scene had caused a sensation in the Form. He grinned at the startled faces around him. It was not often Reuben Piggott had the whip hand, and he was determined to enjoy the possession now he had it—or believed he had.

"Get your books out, boys!" gasped Mr. Selby. "English History! Hankey, you were talking. Come here, sir!"

"Please, sir—"

"Come here, at once!" bellowed Mr. Selby. "Hold out your hand, Hankey!"

Hankey came out, but he hesitated about holding out his hand. He was wondering if it would be safe to copy Reuben Piggott and refuse. But he soon realised that it wasn't. Mr. Selby did not wait. He grabbed the fag's hand and wrenched it into position.

Swish!

"Yowooop!"

Swish!

The cane came down viciously again, and again Hankey howled.

"Now go to your place!" panted Mr. Selby. "Any further talking will be severely punished! Silence!"

There was no further talking after that. Obviously Reuben Piggott was, for some mysterious reason, a privileged person. The English History lesson proceeded on its career. Canings and linings were frequent and free in the Third Form-room that afternoon. Mr. Henry Selby was in an unusual "waxy" mood, and the Form suffered—with one single exception. Reuben Piggott was left severely alone; he was neither lined nor caned. And when Wally's chums visited the fugitive in the secret room for tea when afternoon classes were ended, they had a curious tale to tell him—a tale that made Wally stare and wonder.

CHAPTER 3.

Mr. Selby's Secret!

"H OLD on!"

Once again Hobbs of the Third called a halt in the ancient passage beyond the panelled wall of Mr. Selby's study.

Tea was over in Big Hall at St. Jim's. To avoid arousing suspicion, Wally's chums had made a show of taking tea in Hall. But they were now on the way to the secret room to have another tea with the fugitive and Pongo. Under jackets and in pockets they carried various delicacies purchased from the tuckshop.

"Let's get on!" murmured Curly Gibson. "We can have a squint at dear old Selby after tea."

"Why not now?" whispered Hobbs, with a soft chuckle. "Listen!"

In silence the fags listened in that gloomy, dusty passage.

From beyond the panelling came a rattle of crockery and spoons. Then came silence, and the closing of a door.

"We passed Selby in the hallway, talking to Railton," murmured Hobbs. "That was the giddy maid taking in Selby's tea, I bet. Bit of a lark to take his tea to Wally—what?"

"Oh, crumbs!"

It was an entrancing prospect to the young rascals. Very gently, without waiting for Hobbs to act, Jameson slid aside the panel an inch or so. Sure enough the study was empty, and on the desk was a tray with crockery, jam, cream, a boiled egg and toast, a slice of cake, and a pot of tea.

"What a lark!" murmured Jameson. "Good for you, Hobby!"

As he spoke Jameson coolly opened the panel wide, and slipped through into Mr. Selby's study. Then with ears cocked, ready to spring back at the slightest sound of footsteps in the corridor outside, Jameson stepped to the tray.

To add an artistic touch to the proceedings he emptied half the glass dish of jam on to the seat of Mr. Selby's chair. This done he replaced the dish, and handed the loaded tray to his chums in the passage. Then he joined them, closing the panel again.

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"That's for poor old Wally, mind," he murmured, with a chuckle. "It'll do the poor kid good to have the pleasure of scoffing Selby's tea. Lead on, friends!"

Gurgling with mirth the fags went down to the secret room, Jameson carrying the tray containing Mr. Selby's tea. They found Pongo half asleep, curled up before the oil-stove, while Wally was seated reading the "Magnet" by the light of two candles.

"Cheerio, Wally!" exclaimed Jameson. "How goes it? Hero's your tea, old chap!"

"What the thump—" Wally stared at the loaded tray. "Where the dickens have you boned that, you fellows?"

"It's Selby's tea!" said Jameson airily. "Pile in, old chap! We were afraid the egg would get cold if we left it waiting for old Selby."

"Oh, my hat!" gurgled Wally.

He understood how his chums had collared it easily enough, and piled in. The very fact that it was the detested Mr. Selby's tea gave it added flavour to the hungry fags. A kettle was boiling on the oil-stove, and soon fresh tea was made, and the other fags set to with a will on the tarts and other provisions they had brought.

Then Curly Gibson suddenly remembered the affair of Piggott, and told Wally.

"Jolly queer!" was Wally's comment, his brows wrinkled. "Looks to me as if that little beast Piggott had some hold over Selby."

"No end queer!" said Frank Levison thoughtfully. "I—I suppose Selby knows nothing about your affair, Wally—I mean, he's had nothing to do with anything!"

"Blessed if I can see how he can have!" said Wally. "Anyway, I've enough troubles of my own to face, old beans! I'm all right here for a bit, but—"

"It can't last for ever, Wally!" said Levison minor quietly.

"I know. But we'll have some fun down here while it does last!" said Wally, trying to speak airily. "I'm hoping the truth will come out yet. Old Gussy was an awful ass to play that game yesterday. But he's got hold of the truth, I think. It was some outside rotter who pinched the fowls, and it was the same chap who biffed old Taggles. He's sure to come again, and perhaps he'll get collared next time. That will help me out a bit."

"Well, there's something in that!" assented Jameson, though he seemed doubtful. "Anyway, we're standing by you to the giddy end, Wally. You're not going to be flogged for what you didn't do, old scout. And if you go, we all go. Stand or fall together!"

"Yes, rather!"

"But who bowled over Pongo?" asked Levison minor, whose brows were thoughtful again. "That's the queer part about it. I don't believe Taggles did it, and I don't believe you think so, either, Wally!"

"I don't think I do now!" grunted Wally. "It's a giddy mystery, chaps! Anyway, what about sneaking this tray and things back now? Selby will think somebody boned the grub, but if the tray and crockery are missing, too, it'll make the brute suspicious!"

"My hat, yes!"

"In any case, we're out to play a lark on Selby now we've got the chance!" said Reggie Manners. "What price ragging his study?"

"He'll be there now, fathead!" said Wally. "Still, we'll go along and see how the land lies if you chaps have finished working your chins!"

The fags had finished, and they accompanied Wally as he led the way up the passage off which lay Mr. Selby's study. That they were risking a lot in playing tricks on Mr. Selby they were well aware. It was a long time since they had done the same thing when they had held their secret society meetings there, and since then the panels had been screwed up by order of the Head; but at any moment Mr. Selby might remember the sliding panel and "tumble"!

But the temptation to get a bit of their own back on the tyrannical master, however, was too strong for them.

They reached the panel at last, Wally carrying the tray. But they soon saw there was no chance of putting the tray back. Mr. Selby was there. He was seated in an easy-chair reading a newspaper. Every now and again he glanced up at the door, as if impatiently waiting for someone. They soon knew why.

A tap came to the study door, and a maid entered.

"You sent for me, sir?" she said.

"Yes, I did send for you!" snapped Mr. Selby, glaring at her. "I think I asked for my tea to be sent to me here at five; it is now fifteen minutes past five!"

The maid gave a faint sniff. Like the rest of the domestic staff she did not like Mr. Selby.

"I brought your tea at five, sir!" she said. "I put the tray on the desk there!"

"Nonsense!"

"But I did, sir!" said the girl, glancing round the room somewhat blankly.

"Absurd! It would be here now if you had done so!" snorted Mr. Selby. "Kindly bring my tea without further delay!"

The maid sniffed again. Obviously she imagined the master was "bilked" her for a second tea.

"But I brought it once, sir!"

"Then it has been taken away again!" snapped the master angrily. "Kindly obey me, and bring me my tea!"

The maid tossed her head and departed, closing the door after her with quite unnecessary violence.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Wally, hugging himself. "This is too rich! I bet Mrs. Mimms won't send the old hunk another tea! Hallo, here's someone else! Phew! It's that little sweep, Piggott!"

It was, Piggott of the Third entered Mr. Selby's study without knocking. Mr. Selby glared at him.

"Piggott, how dare you enter my room without knocking?" he articulated.

"Sorry, sir!" said Piggott coolly. "I'm in a hurry to get to Wayland. May I have a late pass, sir?"

Wally almost choked. For a fag to ask for a late pass was cheek enough; but for a fag to ask for one in that cool manner almost took his breath away.

It certainly did Mr. Selby's. He stared at Piggott as if transfixed.

"You—you want a late pass?" he stuttered.

"That's right, sir! I'm going to the pictures in Wayland—want to catch the five-forty-five at Rylcombe!" said Piggott.

"You—you will do nothing of the kind, Piggott!" gasped Mr. Selby. "I shall certainly not give you a late pass! Such—such impudence!"

"Oh, all right, sir!" said Piggott calmly. He turned to the door. "Mr. Railton may give me one if I ask him. Matter of fact, I want to have a chat with Mr. Railton. I've a theory that it wasn't Taggles who struck down Pongo, D'Arcy's dog, or a car that knocked him down. In my view he was struck down with an umbrella! I shall tell Mr. Railton just why I think so!"

Behind the panel the hidden fags held their breath. Wally gently opened the panel another inch with fingers that trembled.

Mr. Selby was silent for a full minute. Then he stood up.

"You—you young villain!" he panted. "What—what do you mean?"

"Just what I said, sir!" answered the young rascal calmly. "I'm sure it was an umbrella that knocked out Pongo—an umbrella like that one in the corner there!" As he spoke Piggott crossed the room and picked up Mr. Selby's umbrella, which stood there in the corner. "Yes; one like this, sir! Why, this one has a dark smear on it now—just like dried blood, sir. And there are white hairs sticking to it. Isn't that queer?"

"Piggott—" choked Mr. Selby hoarsely.

"It might have been the very umbrella that struck down Pongo, sir!" said Piggott.

"Put that umbrella down, Piggott!" hissed Mr. Selby.

"Certainly, sir! May I have my late pass now, sir?"

"You—you depraved young rascal!" gasped Mr. Selby.

"You—you saw—the other night—"

"I saw everything, sir!" said Reuben Piggott cheerfully. "I was standing by the gates, you know. I spotted you coming along the road in the dusk. Pongo was hanging about the lane outside the gates waiting for D'Arcy to come in. You tried to collar him, knowing the Head had sacked the giddy dog. Pongo went for you, and you climbed up on to the fence!"

"Be—be quiet, Piggott!" panted Mr. Selby. "You—you say—"

"Pongo tried to get at you!" resumed Piggott, quite enjoying the master's distress. "You lashed out at him with your umbrella to drive him off. Then you caught him that whacking knock—fairly bowled him over! I thought you'd killed him when I saw him drop and lie still! Then you hooked it—and said nothing about it!"

"Piggott—"

"Can I have my late pass, sir?" said Piggott. "I shall miss my train—"

Mr. Selby stood motionless, his face working with mingled fear and rage. Then he seated himself on his chair, and started to make out the late pass. He finished, and handed it to Piggott with a shaking hand.

"Thank you, sir! If I happen to be late, you'll make it right with Mr. Railton, won't you?"

"One moment, Piggott!" gasped Mr. Selby, with an effort. "What—what you have stated is true to some extent. It was an accident, however—I had no intention whatever of hurting the wretched animal. But I do not wish the matter to become public property. Kindly refrain from—from mentioning the matter to anyone."

"I shan't say a word to anyone—so long as you do me a favour now and again! Well, I'd better be off now!"

And Reuben Piggott departed, grinning.

Behind the panel Wally and his chums looked blankly at each other. Never had they dreamed of this. The mystery as to who had struck Pongo was a mystery to them no longer. It was not a car, and it was not Taggles! It was Mr. Selby! Knowing Pongo had been expelled by the Head, the interfering master had tried to catch him—with what results they knew now.

"Well, my only hat!" murmured Wally. "It was Selby—the awful brute!"

They realised well enough why Mr. Selby was terrified of the facts becoming known. Possibly what he had done had been done in self-defence; nobody could blame him for that. But they could blame him—and would—for keeping silent in the matter. He had remained silent, and allowed Taggles to be blamed for it by many. It had led to all the trouble over Wally.

Moreover, though the fags were unaware of this, Mr. Selby had expounded at large in the Masters' Common-room, giving his opinion freely that a car must have knocked the dog down. Wally could imagine what Mr. Railton and the other masters would say if the truth came out now. Mr. Selby had lied, had deceived, had allowed the innocent to be suspected.

Bitterly must the guilty master be regretting now that he had not spoken at first—when he would scarcely have been blamed for what he had done!

It was too late now, however. Piggott of the Third knew the facts, and the young rascal was obviously bent on making the most of his knowledge.

Wally gently closed the panel, the tray forgotten now.

If he had had any qualms about playing pranks on Mr. Selby they had vanished now. It was Mr. Selby who had stunned his pet, who had caused all this trouble! Wally's eyes glittered.

"Come on—back to the room!" he breathed, his voice trembling. "Oh, the rotten brute! He was the brute who stunned poor old Pongo!"

"But—but he didn't mean to hurt the little beggar, I suppose!" said Frank Levison, quite frightened by Wally's trembling voice. "Still—"

"Come on!" said Wally, his eyes gleaming. "I'll make him pay for it! No wonder the rotten was asking so much after Pongo; no wonder he seemed so funky over hearing those barks!"

"That's it!" breathed Jameson. "He thinks Pongo's dead, and he's an awful funk—no end superstitious! Hear—"

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AND let me tell you this, chums, it's well up to the high standard the GEM has set.

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MARTIN CLIFFORD excels himself with a story that you will long remember.

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Lastly, next week's number contains the first gripping instalment of a splendid new serial. Full details of what thrills are in store for you will be found on page 13.

EDITOR.

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ing those barks, and knowing nobody else seems to have heard them, he's got the wind up—thinks Pongo's haunting him!"

And Jameson chuckled grimly.

But Wally didn't chuckle.

"We'll haunt him, anyway!" he snapped. "I've got a wheeze—something to frighten his wits out! We'll bring Pongo here and turn him loose in his study!"

"Wha-at?"

"See the idea?" said Wally. "With Selby there we can't rag the study, can we! But Pongo will jolly soon drive him out and give him the fright of his life into the bargain! In the dark he'll think it's Pongo's giddy ghost—"

"But the electric light, ass!"

"One of you must attend to that!" said Wally, with a grim chuckle. "You can see to that, Frankie—you're pretty slippery! The switch is by the door, isn't it? Just cut round, open the door softly, slip your giddy hand in, and switch it off. We'll be ready here. When the light pops off I'll open the giddy panel and shove Pongo through, shutting the panel pronto! See?"

"But—well, of all the—"

"Leave it to me!" said Wally. "Safe as houses! Selby will bolt in a fright. Then we collar Pongo, rush him back to the room, and then, locking Selby's door, we get busy in the study. And we'll rag it as it's never been ragged before!"

"But the risk—"

"Blow the risk!"

"But—"

"Rats! Come on, you funks!"

That was quite enough for Wally's followers. Wally was the most reckless of them all, and he was in one of his reckless moods now. They were not going to be thought funks, anyway. So, as usual, Wally had his way, though his chums—Frank Levison especially—thought it the maddest wheeze Wally D'Arcy had ever invented, which was saying a lot!

CHAPTER 9.

Not as per Programme!

"**B**LACKMAIL! The—the young scoundrel!"

Thus Mr. Selby, speaking to himself in the privacy of his own room.

At least, Mr. Selby imagined he was in privacy; he little dreamed that several youthful eyes were fixed upon him at the moment, or that his muttered words were overheard by sharp ears.

"The—the young villain!" mumbled Mr. Selby.

The master of the Third had quite forgotten his tea by this. The maid had not returned, but he had forgotten the maid. All his thoughts were fixed upon his recent interview with the rascally Reuben Piggott.

They were bitter thoughts. If only he had openly reported what had happened in the lane, if only he had told the Head of the attack upon him by Pongo, that wretched, troublesome terrier! The Head might have raised his august eyebrows in surprise on hearing of that final unfortunate blow from his umbrella, but he could scarcely have blamed him.

It was too late for regrets now, however. At all costs the truth must not come out! Mr. Selby trembled to think what the Head would say, what Mr. Railton and the other masters would think, if the miserable truth did come to light. He remembered with a shiver how eloquent he had been in Masters' Common-room as to the certainty that a car had run down the wretched dog. What a fool he had been!

But Piggott knew, and at all costs the young scoundrel must not be allowed to spread abroad what he knew.

The master suddenly jumped in his chair. Was it fancy? He could have sworn he heard a faint whine—the whine of a dog! He blinked round him, quite scared. Kildare had searched for Pongo at his orders and had declared himself certain that there was no dog in the House. But Mr. Selby had heard the faint, strange barking! How eerie it had sounded! Was it possible—

Once again Mr. Selby jumped. He fancied he heard a slight sound behind him, but before he could even glance towards the door the light went out.

"What—what—" Mr. Selby leaped to his feet, peering towards the closed door. The fire had burnt very low, and only a very faint glimmer came from it. "What—how—" He started towards the door, intending to switch the light on again, though he imagined it must have fused.

Before he could move a step, however, another sound came from behind. It was a sudden scratching on the linoleum, and then a low growl.

"G-r-r-r-r-r!"

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"Goo-good heavens!" Mr. Selby whirled round.

Mr. Selby stared transfixed, with dilated eyes.

Before him was a dog—a small, very familiar terrier. It was Pongo, and Pongo's eyes were fixed on him. Pongo had been rather puzzled as to why his master had pushed him into the dark room and left him there. Then he sighted Mr. Selby's form, and even in the dim firelight he recognised his enemy.

"G-r-r-r-r-r!"

"Goo-good heavens!"

Mr. Selby fairly shook. In that moment, not thinking of the secret panel, the master of the Third must have imagined he was staring at a ghost and not flesh and blood. He shook from head to foot, his brain in a whirl at the sudden, astounding happenings. The firelight flickered on Pongo's eyes.

Then Pongo made a move towards him, growling still more ferociously.

It was more than enough for Mr. Henry Selby!

He gave one wild shriek, and then he leaped for the door, dragged it open, and flew for his very life.

And after him went Pongo!

That was not what Pongo should have done; Wally had not even thought of such a possibility. It was not according to programme; but then Pongo very often did not act according to programme. Possibly, at sight of his enemy and Wally's enemy, Pongo suddenly imagined his cue was to chase Mr. Selby—that Wally had placed him there for that purpose. At all events, he went after Selby!

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Wally. "What—Here, come back, Pongo!"

But Pongo was too far away to hear that desperate command.

"Oh, great pip!" ejaculated Wally. "Go on, after the little beggar some of you! If he gets collared—Oh crumbs!"

"Back—somebody coming!"

The fags jumped back into the secret passage, all thoughts of ragging the study gone now. But it was only Frank Levison, and he was looking very scared.

They opened the panel again, and he scrambled through. "You—you ass, Wally!" he gasped. "You've done it now with your mad wheeze! Pongo's being chased by a crowd of chaps! He's torn Selby's trousers again, and Selby's nearly off his chump! He dashed into Masters' Common-room with Pongo hanging on to him behind!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"I tried to collar him, but it was no good!" gasped Frank. "I'd just reached the end of the passage after turning out the light when they came flying past. I believe Selby's in a faint or something!"

"Oh, great pip!"

Bitterly did Wally regret his mad idea now!

"You chaps had better shove off now!" he groaned. "Cut off and do all your can—try to find the little beggar! I'll cut back to the room, though perhaps I'd better wait here by the panel in case Pongo doubles back here looking for me!"

"Much better! Perhaps he will!"

It was a very slight chance, but Wally hoped for the best. He remained by the slightly-opened panel while the rest of the fags scuttled away to do their best to get hold of Pongo.

They left the secret passage, closed the panel, and made their ways separately to the occupied quarter of the School House. They dared not risk going out through Mr. Selby's study doorway. Then they started the search for the missing Pongo.

They soon had news of him! The whole House was in a buzz! By the time they got round to Mr. Selby's study they found a crowd congregated there.

"Hallo! What's up?" asked Jameson airily.

"Goodness knows!" said Watson of the Third. "But old Selby's had a fright or something! Says D'Arcy minor's blessed dog went for him—or his giddy ghost! Rot, I call it!"

"It's true enough!" grinned Mellish of the Fourth. "I saw the little beast hanging on to Selby's trousers! Selby was yelling blue murder!"

And Mellish chuckled delightedly at the remembrance.

"Oh, my hat!" said Jameson, pretending to be astounded. "Has that blessed dog turned up again? Where is he now?"

"That's what the beaks want to know!" grinned Mellish. "All the giddy prefects are hunting upstairs for him!"

"He, he, he!" Baggy Trimble joined in the discussion. "It's a fact—I saw Pongo, too! He bolted out of Masters' Common-room! Kildare and Darrell chased him up the stairs! Fact!"

It was all Jameson & Co. wanted to know. They drifted away, and went upstairs. On the landing they found North and Baker, just coming out of the box-room, looking dusty and the reverse of cheerful.

"The little beast's got away, by the look of things!" Baker was saying. "I've had enough. I'm chucking it. Let Selby catch the little brute if he wants him caught!"

"Don't believe the dog's been in the House at all!" snorted North. "Selby's got the confounded animal on the brain! This is the third time he's had us searching the House for him. Hallo! You youngsters seen that wretched little beast—"

"Selby?" asked Curly Gibson innocently.

"No, you young idiot! I mean that dog of D'Arcy minor's!"

"I saw him when he got bowled out the other night," said Jameson. "You mean Pongo, I suppose?"

"I saw him then, too," said Reggie Manners, nodding. "Why—has the little beggar come back again?"

North and Baker did not deign to answer that. They strode away downstairs, snorting. Apparently they felt it below their lofty dignity to waste their valuable time searching the House for a fag's pet terrier—which was just as well for Pongo.

"He can't have been caught yet, then!" breathed Jameson thankfully. "He's a knowing, slippery little beggar! I say, supposing he's cut along to those Fourth chaps—Gussy's lot? Herries is a great pal of Pongo's. He may have hidden himself there as they kept him that night when he was hurt."

"Phew! Quite likely!"

They hurried along to Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage.

"No need to mention Pongo if he's not there," warned Jameson. "Just pretend we've come along to ask Gussy if anything's been heard of Wally."

"Good wheeze!" chuckled Curly Gibson.

The four fags reached the door of Study No. 6. Jameson rapped and tried the door-knob. The door was locked.

"Who's that?" came Blake's voice from within.

"Only me—Jameson and my pals!" called Jameson, feeling suddenly hopeful.

There was a moment's pause, and then the door was partly opened.

"Come in, kids!" snapped Blake. "Sharp!"

They scuttled into the study, and Blake closed and locked the door again. As the Third-Formers entered they heard a sudden yelp of pleasure—a yelp that was instantly smothered.

It was Pongo right enough! Herries sat in the easy-chair with the little terrier in his lap. Herries had one hand clapped over the dog's wriggling mouth.

"Quiet, Pongo!" he hissed.

"Well, my hat!" breathed Jameson. "I—I say, what's old Pongo doing here?"

Blake gave them a searching look.

"I was just coming to look for you kids!" he said grimly.

"That's what we want to know—what Pongo's doing here? Where's Wally?"

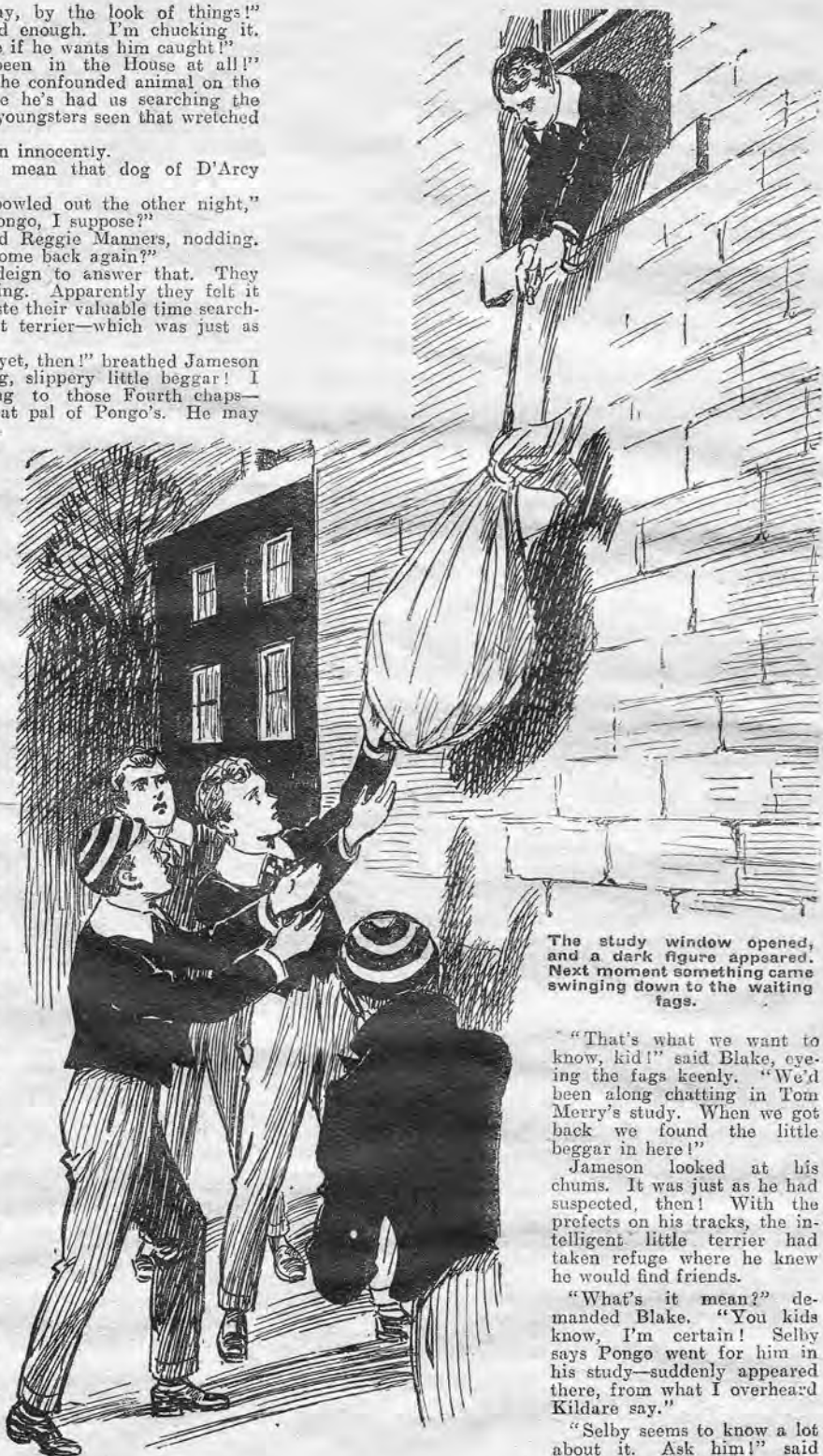
"Yaas, wathah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, breathless with anxiety. "If you youngsters know where Wally is—"

"I expect he's safe enough somewhere!" said Jameson non-committally. "No need for you to worry about old Wally, Gussy. He's able to look after himself—much better than some of you old fogies!"

"I told you you'd no need to worry, Gussy!" grinned Digby. "These kids know where he is, I bet. The young scamp can take care of himself all right!"

"That is all vewy well," began Gussy, in some agitation, "but—"

"How did Pongo come to be here?" demanded Curly Gibson. "The prefects are hunting for him everywhere."



The study window opened, and a dark figure appeared. Next moment something came swinging down to the waiting fags.

"That's what we want to know, kid!" said Blake, eyeing the fags keenly. "We'd been along chatting in Tom Merry's study. When we got back we found the little beggar in here!"

Jameson looked at his chums. It was just as he had suspected, then! With the prefects on his tracks, the intelligent little terrier had taken refuge where he knew he would find friends.

"What's it mean?" demanded Blake. "You kids know, I'm certain! Selby says Pongo went for him in his study—suddenly appeared there, from what I overheard Kildare say."

"Selby seems to know a lot about it. Ask him!" said Jameson coolly.

"But where is Wally?" said Arthur Augustus. "I am confident you youngsters know!"

"If Pongo's here, then Wally can't be very far away, can he?" said Curly Gibson. "Don't you chaps worry about Wally—and don't ask questions! I say, can you chaps keep Pongo here for a bit?"

"We were going to do that!" said Blake. "But he's bound to be found here sooner or later, kids. What's to be done? If you kids know where Wally is you'd better take Pongo to him—smuggle him out somehow!"

"Tell us where Wally is, and we'll try to do it," suggested Herries, stroking Pongo's head gently.

"Rats!" sniffed Jameson. "Who said we knew where he is? Look here, can you chaps keep Pongo here until—" He paused, and his eyes gleamed. "I say, you know," he went on hastily, "you chaps don't want to see Pongo captured and sent away to the dog dealer in Wayland, do you?"

"No, we don't," admitted Blake. He looked at Pongo, and the little terrier returned his look appealingly, almost as if he understood the question. Though the dog's injured head was nearly healed, he still looked a bit groggy, and far from his usual frisky self. "No; we'll save the poor little beggar if we can."

"Then don't ask any questions," said Jameson briefly. "Just back us up now; I've got a wheeze!"

"What's that?"

"Lower Pongo through the window, and we'll be waiting for him in the quad below," said Jameson. "Shove him in a basket, or a bag, and lower him down."

"But— Oh, all right!" said Herries. "There's a bit of rope in the cupboard, and we'll soon find something to put him in."

"Cut off!" said Blake briefly.

The fags waited no longer; they realised that Jameson had a scheme, and they followed him out of the study and down the stairs. Soon they were scuttling out into the darkness of the quadrangle.

Jameson led the way round to the flower-beds below the window of Study No. 6.

"What's the game, Jameson?" demanded Curly Gibson. "If we get Pongo outside we shall be worse off—"

"No, we shan't!" grinned Jameson. "What about the back staircase in the servants' quarters? All the giddy servants will be in the kitchens, or off for the night now. We can cut up the back staircase and reach the disused wing without being spotted, I bet. Hallo! There's Blake!"

A dark figure appeared at the window above, the light of which had just gone out. Jameson whistled softly.

"All serene?" It was Blake's voice.

"Yes—let him come!"

The next moment something came swinging down to the crouching fags. It proved to be the study tablecloth, tied at the twisted top with rope. Inside was a wriggling, whining bundle.

In a moment the rope was untied, and Pongo—not a little scared—was released. Jameson grabbed him.

"Quiet, Pongo old boy—quiet!"

The terrier whined softly. Curly Gibson jerked the rope once, and the tablecloth was whisked upwards again, and the window closed. A moment later the light appeared again in the window of Study No. 6.

It was just then that Reggie Manners gave a warning hiss. "Someone coming! Look out!"

It was only too true. A dark figure came rushing towards them in the gloom. It proved to be a fag.

"Piggott!" gasped Frank Levison, in alarm. "I spotted the little sneak at the bottom of the stairs and saw him stare after us. I might have known the crafty little cad would follow! Look out! Cut off with Pongo, Jameson; we'll see to Piggy!"

CHAPTER 10.

The Worm Turns!

IT was Reuben Piggott right enough. The sneak of the Third had returned from the station not long before. He had missed the train for Wayland, after all, and, being obliged to abandon his expedition to the cinema, he was in a very bad temper indeed. He had soon realised that something was amiss in the School House, and it hadn't taken him long to learn the news about Pongo's sudden reappearance in the school.

Then, when just about to go upstairs, he had noticed Wally's chums' stealthy and hurried exit out of doors, and guessed that they were on some unlawful expedition—something, doubtless enough, in connection with the missing Pongo!

Being a very curious youth, and only too eager to find out what was on, Piggott had hurried after them into the dark quad. He had arrived just in time to spot the bundle descending from the window above. Even in the darkness, Piggott guessed it was Pongo. But he was taking no chances of losing his prey. Careless of the fags, he rushed up, determined to catch them in the act.

He regretted his rashness the next moment.

Jameson was already cutting off with Pongo, and as Piggott made to follow, the rest of the fags leaped upon him as one man and brought him crashing down.

"Now, you little sneak!" gasped Curly Gibson. "Hold the little beast down, chaps!"

"What-ho!"

"Lemme gerrup!" panted Piggott savagely. "I'll make

you sit up for this, you cads! I know the game. You've got Pongo! I'll tell Selby—I'll tell Railton!"

"Then we may as well pay you for sneaking right away!" said Curly Gibson grins. "And a bit extra for being a blackmailing little sweep!"

"Wha-at! What do you mean?"

"We know all about it, old bean," said Curly cheerfully. "Go to Mr. Railton, by all means. We can tell a few tales, too! He'll be no end interested to hear you've been blackmailing old Selby! That catches you on the raw—what?"

"You—you rotters! You—you've been listening—spying!" gasped Reuben Piggott, aghast that his secret was known.

"Not at all, old chap. We leave spying to scrubby little beasts like you!" said Curly. "Well, going to old Railton about it? I expect you'll get sacked, at least. Blackmailing a master's a bit thick, even for you, Piggy!"

"Hang you!" hissed Piggott. "Look—look here, lemme go, and I'll say nothing about that beastly dog!"

"You'll say nothing, whether we let you go or not!" said Curly grimly. "You know what it means if you do—the boot, or a flogging at the very least! Understand? Not a word of this, or Railton shall hear about your little blackmailing game. He'll be no end interested to know how you got that late pass this evening, for instance!"

Piggott seethed with rage.

"I—I'll say nothing!" he panted. "Now let me go!"

"After you've had a little lesson, old bean," said Reggie Manners. "Rub his chivvy in the soil, Curly!"

"Good wheeze! Make him a scrubbier little beast than he is!"

"Look here, if you dare. Grocoogh! Mum-m-m-m-mum!"

Piggott's apprehensive protests ended in a weird gurgling and mumbling as his face was jammed down hard into the flower-bed. It was jammed down and rubbed in the frosty soil again and again, and then handfuls of earth were thrust down between his collar and his neck, and plastered over his face. Then, satisfied with their rather ruthless lesson to the sneak, Curly and his chums melted away into the darkness, and left him to recover at his leisure. Now they knew Piggott's shady secret they had little fear of his exposing theirs.

And they were right. When Reuben Piggott, seething with rage, staggered indoors a few moments later, it was with the clear realisation that he dared not sneak about the fags he hated. He was only too well aware that he would receive short shrift from the authorities if it became known that he had actually dared to blackmail a master—and his demands from Mr. Selby were nothing less!

But though Piggott knew he dared not approach Railton, he was still determined to get his own back. If Mr. Railton could not be his weapon of revenge, Mr. Selby could and would!

He made straight for the study of the master of the Third, and marched in without troubling to knock. Mr. Selby was there. He was reclining on the couch, trying to recover from the shock he had received that evening. Now he was calmer he realised that he had made a fearful fool of himself—that it was no phantom he had seen, but Pongo in the flesh. Mr. Railton had been more than sarcastic about the way he had lost his head, and the master of the Third was inwardly shaking with rage at his humiliation.

Yet the mystery still remained. Who had switched off the light, and how had Pongo come to appear in the study so mysteriously? Mr. Selby was beginning to have a suspicion that Wally's chums could tell him. It was an easy matter for someone to open the door softly and switch off the light, also to let the dog into the study. Mr. Selby's face grew blacker and blacker as the suspicion strengthened. The dog was somewhere about the House; and if the dog was, then his master was likely to be still in the House also.

It was in this bitter frame of mind that Reuben Piggott found him. And just then Piggott's unwholesome features acted on Mr. Selby like a red rag to a bull.

He rose from the couch and glowered at the sneak of the Third.

"Go!" he rasped. "Leave my study this instant, Piggott! I—I am not in the mood to put up with your insolence now, you young scoundrel!"

Piggott would have been wiser to have gone. There was a limit to Mr. Selby's endurance, and he had reached it. But Piggott did not realise that.

"I'll go when I want to!" he answered impudently. "Look at me—look what a state I'm in!"

"Abominable!" rapped out Mr. Selby. "I am used to seeing you filthy, Piggott. But the state you are in now—How dare you come to me—"

"Those rotters did this—Jameson, Gibson, Levison minor, Hobbs, and Manners minor!" hissed Piggott, heedless of the way he spoke to the master. "They collared me and rubbed my face in the flower-beds in the quad. You've got to take it out of them for me—thrash them for it!"

Piggott's errand to the master was clear now. Having the whip hand over Mr. Selby, he intended to force that gentleman to be his instrument of vengeance! It was a

pretty scheme, but Mr. Selby was not in the mood to obey the crack of the whip this evening.

He glared at the fag.

"I—I've got to!" he stuttered. "I—I've got to, did you say, Piggott? You are daring to give orders to me, your Form master?"

"Yes, I jolly well am!" said Piggott savagely, though he did not like the gleam in Mr. Selby's eyes at all. "I—I'm going to have the beasts thrashed for it! I don't care what excuse you make to them, but you've got to thrash them—can't you? Look at the trick they played you to-night! It was them, of course. You can pretend it's because of that—that you've found them out. But you've got to lay it on hard—thrash them all!"

Piggott paused, breathless and panting in his rage. That the master would dare to refuse to obey him he did not dream. He expected he would be only too glad to thrash the fags he disliked. But Mr. Selby's patience had been sorely strained that evening.

"You—you young scoundrel!" he panted. "I—I shall do nothing of the kind. This—this is too much! You shall suffer dearly for this astounding insolence! Go! Leave my study this very instant."

"Shan't!" snapped Piggott, a nasty look on his face. "Mind, I don't want to have to go to Railton! Better toe the line, or— Here, leggo! I shall tell him about— Yarrooooooh! Yooooop! Stoppit!"

But once again Mr. Selby refused to obey the crack of the whip. He had grasped his cane, and grasped Piggott by the collar, and was laying the cane about his shoulders with a ferocious vim.

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

"Yooooop!" roared Piggott. "Yarrooooooh! Yooooop! Stoppit! I'll tell everything, you— Yooooop! Lemme go! Yarrooop!"

Never had Mr. Selby wielded a cane so vigorously, and he was an adept with a cane. He brought it down as though he were beating a carpet, and he kept on as if he were never going to stop. From wild yells Piggott's voice rose to piercing shrieks of pain and rage. From savage threats he proceeded by degrees to blubbering pleadings for mercy.

But Mr. Selby was not in a merciful mood. He seemed to have lost his head, as he had done once before that evening. Instead of thrashing Jameson & Co., Mr. Selby was thrashing Piggott, and he made a thorough job of it.

A tap came at the door, and the mild, kindly features of Mr. Lathom looked in. The Fourth Form master must have imagined that murder at least was taking place in Mr. Selby's study. He looked quite alarmed.

"Dear me! Mr. Selby, pray—"

Mr. Lathom paused. It was not his business to interfere between another master and a member of that master's Form. None the less, he felt that Mr. Selby was overdoing it. But Mr. Railton came hurrying along just then, and so saved Mr. Lathom from an unpleasant duty, for the little master of the Fourth had deemed it his duty to prevent Piggott being killed altogether.

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

Mr. Selby was still going strong when Mr. Railton rustled up. Piggott had got to the weeping stage long ago. Never had Reuben Piggott received such a thrashing—never had he so thoroughly deserved one. Piggott had overdone it with Mr. Selby; now Mr. Selby had overdone it with Piggott!

"Good gracious!" gasped Mr. Railton. "What—what is happening here, Mr. Lathom? Ah, Mr. Selby, sir!"

The Housemaster's stern voice brought Mr. Selby back to sanity with a jerk. He lowered his cane and released his victim. Then he dropped into a chair, panting. Piggott dropped to the floor, howling.

"What—what does this scene mean, Mr. Selby?" said Mr. Railton, in no little indignation. "That boy—that poor boy—you are forgetting yourself, sir!"

Mr. Selby did not reply; he was incapable of replying at the moment. But it was dawning in upon him that there was now no hope of keeping his secret. He knew the spiteful nature of the fag he had thrashed only too well. And, somehow, the master felt a deep feeling of relief. Mean-spirited as he was, ill-natured and a bully, the master of the Third still had some measure of self-respect. Bitterly did he regret in that moment that he had ever allowed himself to be under the thumb of Reuben Piggott. But it was done now. Whatever happened Piggott would tell. Better far for him to explain the unpleasant circumstances himself. He ought to have gone to the Head, and explained all, the moment Piggott had attempted to make use of his knowledge. How he wished now that he had!

He spoke at last, pointing a quivering forefinger at the sobbing Piggott.

"That—that boy," he gasped—"that hardened young rascal—has dared to attempt to blackmail me, sir! He—he—"

Mr. Selby's voice failed him in his deep wrath and indignation.

"One moment!" snapped the Housemaster.

Mr. Lathom was inside the room, and a crowd was gathering round the doorway. Mr. Railton waved them away and closed the door.

"Now, Mr. Selby," he said quietly. "If you will kindly explain—"

There was icy coldness in the Housemaster's voice, but Mr. Selby did not notice it.

"I—I will explain all, Mr. Railton!" he panted. "And I bitterly regret that I did not do so earlier! If Mr. Lathom would kindly retire from my room—"

"Certainly, Mr. Selby!" said Mr. Lathom, with quiet dignity.

Mr. Lathom left the room, closing the door quietly after him.

"The matter can be explained very quickly, Mr. Railton," said Mr. Selby, his face like a beetroot now. "Dr. Holmes must know of the matter, of course, and I would prefer that you explained it to him. It—it is in connection with that wretched animal—that dog belonging to a boy in my Form—D'Arcy minor!"

"Really, Mr. Selby!" Mr. Railton froze at that. He had heard quite enough from Mr. Selby regarding the luckless Pongo for one evening. But Mr. Selby waved his hand.

"To be brief, sir," said Mr. Selby, his confession coming out in a sudden burst. "it was I who struck down the dog in the lane the other evening."

"Wha-what?"

Mr. Railton was thunderstruck.

"Am-am I to understand that you—it was you who injured that wretched animal, Mr. Selby?"

"Yes, sir! It—it was a regrettable accident, however; I had no intention of hurting the dog!" stammered Mr. Selby, noting the look on Mr. Railton's face. "I—I will explain fully, Mr. Railton."

And he did. The Housemaster listened, with a frozen face. It was what he might have expected from a nervous dog-hater like Mr. Henry Selby. But the fact that the master had kept silent about it—had allowed another to remain under suspicion in the matter—filled him with scorn—a scorn he could not keep from his face. He did not speak until Mr. Selby had finished. But his expression changed swiftly as he understood Reuben Piggott's part in the affair.

"Disgraceful!" he exploded at last, with a grim look at Piggott's terrified features. "Never have I heard of such impudence—such rascally conduct, Mr. Selby! I have nothing to say in regard to—to your unfortunate accident with that dog. It was unfortunate, indeed—most unfortunate! And it is regrettable that you have—er—allowed the truth to remain hidden. But that is your own affair. Piggott's rascally conduct would suggest, however, that you explain matters fully to Dr. Holmes yourself, Mr. Selby."

"I—I will, Mr. Railton!" faltered Mr. Selby, his face pink.

"Piggott must come with me at once—"

Mr. Railton was resuming when a startling interruption occurred. From behind the panelling came a sudden yelp, the sound of scuffling, and then a howl in a familiar voice.

"Yawwoooooop!"

CHAPTER 11.

On the Trail!

"THAT settles it!"

Blake was the speaker. In Study No. 6 Blake & Co. were discussing the strange reappearance of Pongo. It was only a few minutes after they had lowered that troublesome little terrier down into the quad. But in those minutes, Blake, at least, had been doing some hard thinking.

"That settles it!" he repeated grimly. "If Pongo's hanging round the school still, then you can bet your bottom shilling that Wally is."

"Bai Jove! I weally do hope so, deah boy!" mumbled Arthur Augustus. "I was gettin' tewwibly worried about him. The Head has wished to the patah, and he states that he knows nothin' of the young wascal! If he is in hidin' heah—"

"No doubt about that," said Blake, his eyes gleaming. "For one thing, those cheeky fags wouldn't be so chirpy if he wasn't. And there's Pongo still making himself felt! How did Pongo come to be in Selby's study? Another thing—Pongo vanished jolly mysteriously that night. He didn't go far, wherever he went! And don't forget that Selby swears he's heard him barking more than once!"

"Nobody else has heard him, though," said Herries.

"That's the point that's making me think," smiled Blake. "There's a good reason why only Selby's heard him. Only

Selby's been near enough to his giddy hiding-place to hear him!"

Herries and Digby sat up at that.

"What the thump do you mean, Blake?"

"What I say," said Blake coolly. "Pongo's been hidden somewhere in the School House—though the prefects have searched everywhere for him. Now Wally's vanished—and he's been hunted for to. And we're pretty certain now that the kid's not far away."

"But—"

"Another significant point," said Blake, smiling at his chums' mystified faces. "Did you notice anything queer about Pongo? His hair was covered in dust and cobwebs. And those fags' clothes were the same—dusty and cobwebby. The conclusion is obvious, my dear Watson—they've been somewhere where there's heaps of dust and plenty of cobwebs."

"Pepper's barn!" breathed Herries.

"The loft over the woodshed!" suggested Digby.

"We've agreed that they're hiding somewhere in the School House—not outside!" said Blake.

"But—but those kids have taken Pongo outside—that made me sure Wally must be hiding outside the school!" said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Gussy, nodding.

"Fatheads!" said Blake calmly. "Cast your minds back a bit! Do you remember that secret society those fags formed once? They had a high old time—collaring chaps who'd offended them, and putting them through the mill in a secret room they'd found."

"Oh!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

Blake chuckled.

"I see you've tumbled at last," he remarked. "The giddy secret society was bowled out at last and stopped, and the panels were screwed up and the place put out of bounds. But that wouldn't stop those cheeky young rips from unscrewing 'em, I know."

"Phew! You've hit it, Blake!"

"I bet I have!" said Blake confidently. "Wally and Pongo are hiding in that giddy secret room. That would explain the dust and cobwebs, and a lot of other things. It explains why only Selby has heard the barking. His study is near the room—the only one with a sliding panel. I heard a yarn this evening that Selby's tea had disappeared mysteriously out of his giddy room. Then that funny affair with Pongo this evening, too. Depend upon it Pongo was shoved through that panel to scare old Selby, but the little beggar followed the old hunks!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Jameson knew what he was doing when he suggested our lowering Pongo through the window," went on Blake, with a chuckle. "It would be easy for the young scamps to rush Pongo round to the back door and smuggle him up the back staircase to that sliding panel there!"

"Bai Jove! Yaas, wathah!"

Blake slid down from the table.

"There'll be no giddy prep done to-night by us by the look of things!" he said. "Still, it's early enough yet. I vote we go and put my giddy theory to the test. You fellows on?"

"What-ho!" said Herries and Digby together; while Arthur Augustus nodded, his face very grave.

He did not share Blake's humorous view of the situation. He was wondering how it was all going to end—for Wally. The scapegrace of the Third had escaped a flogging so far, but it was only to earn something worse—the sack!

Blake armed himself with a pocket-torch, and the four left the study. With due caution they made for the disused wing of the School House. Though strictly out of bounds, the place was familiar enough to Blake & Co. They very soon reached the sliding panel in the little alcove on the stairs. Almost at once they noted the recent footprints in the dust, also the fingermarks round the sliding panel. But the screws were gone, and that discovery put an end to all doubts.

"Come on!" murmured Blake, with a chuckle. "We'll give Wally a little surprise!"

"We can't give the kid away, though," said Herries uneasily.

"No fear!" said Blake. "I'm hoping we'll be able to help him! But we want to make quite, quite sure first, old beans!"

They proceeded cautiously along the dusty passage, the light flickering and dancing on the walls—the stone wall on one side, and the black, age-old panelling on the other. Reaching the sliding panel leading into Mr. Selby's study they went more cautiously still. From beyond the panelling came a murmuring of voices. They little dreamed what was taking place in Mr. Selby's room at that moment.

"Never mind, Selby!" breathed Blake. "Come on! Phew! It's draughty here, and no mistake!"

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They resumed exploring, and very soon were made aware of the truth of their suspicions when from somewhere ahead came a low growling, followed by a bark, abruptly stifled.

"Pongo!" murmured Blake, with another chuckle.

He whistled quietly, to warn Wally that his visitors were friends.

A moment later the great oak door of the secret room was open, and they tramped in. Wally, his face a trifle pale, faced them defiantly. In his arms he held Pongo, who was struggling and whining. He had soon recognised Herries and his other friends.

"So you've bowled me out!" said Wally, grinning faintly as he caught the severe eye of Arthur Augustus. "Cheerio, Gus! Aren't you glad to see your giddy minor again?"

"Weally, Wally, you feahful young wascal—"

"Now don't start jawing!" said Wally. "Consider the sermon delivered, old bean! I suppose you spotted Jameson and the others leaving here; they've only been gone a few minutes!"

"My dear man, we haven't seen those kids since they left Study No. 6 with Pongo!" said Blake. "I figured it out like a giddy Sexton Blake where you were hanging out, Wally. But how long are you going to keep up this game,



Tom Merry held the lantern high, and in its light he and his chums saw a slight, ragged figure struggling in the grasp of Taggles, the porter!

kid?" he added, more seriously. "It can't go on for ever!"

"I know; but I'm jolly well not going to be flogged for something I never did!" snapped Wally, his eyes gleaming. "I'll stay here for ever first! The truth will come out yet. I'm certain it will!"

"It's a queer business altogether!" said Blake slowly. "But—well, I'm afraid you're a bit too optimistic, Wally. I don't see—"

"We've found out one thing already!" said Wally grimly. "We've found out who it was who was buffed poor old Pongo!"

"You—you have, Wally?"

"Yes. It was dear old Selby!"

"Wha-at?" Blake yelled.

"Fact!" said Wally, his eyes glimmering. "It was Selby!"

And he told the astonished juniors what he and his chums had learned so strangely.

"Well, my only hat!" breathed Blake. "What a howling cad old Selby must be!"

"And a feahful funk!" said Arthur Augustus. "He must

have known people believed old Taggy had done it. The fearful wottah! As for that unspeakable little wascal Piggott—

"He'll hang himself yet!" said Blake. "That sort of thing always leads a chap to overdo it, and then he'll come a cropper! But— Well, my hat! Fancy it being Selby all the time! That's one mystery cleared up, anyway!"

"We'll see everybody knows about it, too!" said Herries doggedly, his face red with indignation. "Fancy any chap hitting a dog as he must have done! The brute! But now he's bowled out—"

"We can't do anything without giving Wally away, though!" said Blake. "Best to say nothing about it yet, chaps! Got plenty of grub and everything you want, Wally?"

"Yes! I'm all right here!"

"Better chuck it!" advised Blake soberly. "We won't give you away, of course! But—but it can't go on for long, and the longer it goes on the worse it will be for you, Wally!"

"Rats!" said Wally. "I'm seeing it through! I'm not taking a flogging, anyway. I'd stand it quickly enough if I'd earned it. But I haven't. Whoever biffed Taggles, it wasn't me."

"We know that, but— Hallo! What's that row?"

To their ears came a faint yelling in a youthful voice. It was Piggott going through it at Mr. Selby's hands, though, naturally, Blake & Co. and Wally did not guess that.

They listened to the sounds of woe that floated faintly to their ears.

"I'm jolly well going to find out what it means!" said Wally suddenly. "Come on! Go back, Pongo, old boy! Back, old chap!"

And Wally grabbed a torch and started out of the room, the others crowding after him. None of them noticed that Pongo had not obeyed, and was trotting after them. They were too excited to notice anything, in fact. The sounds of woe suddenly ceased when they were near the panel. As they cautiously approached the spot they heard a deep voice from the room beyond.

"Railton!" breathed Blake. "Quiet, for goodness' sake! He's not like that duffer Selby!"

They waited, listening. What the Housemaster was saying they could not hear, until Wally gently grasped the sliding panel and moved it open a fraction of an inch. Instantly Mr. Railton's voice became clear.

"Piggott's rascally conduct is another matter entirely!" he was saying sternly. "The headmaster must hear of it at once! I would suggest, however, that you explain matters fully to Dr. Holmes yourself, Mr. Selby!"

"I—I will, Mr. Railton!" came Mr. Selby's faltering voice, in reply.

"Piggott must come with me at once—" Mr. Railton was resuming.

And it was just then the little accident happened—a most unfortunate accident. Unaware that Arthur Augustus had his face just behind him—the swell of the Fourth being

eager to see into the room—Wally happened to jerk his head back just then, afraid that the keen-eyed Housemaster might spot him. And the back of Wally's head came into violent collision with the luckless Gussy's nasal organ.

Arthur Augustus jumped back, clutching his nose in anguish. Unfortunately he trod on Pongo's paw—that troublesome animal being almost under his feet.

The result was what might have been expected. Pongo yelped, and, being a dog that objected strongly to being trodden on, especially by Arthur Augustus, promptly gave Gussy's noble calf a playful nip.

Then followed Gussy's involuntary howl!

"Yawwoooooop!"

That did it!

The two masters jumped. But while Mr. Selby never imagined the truth, Mr. Railton grasped it at once. In a flash he remembered the sliding panel.

One stride the Housemaster took to the panelling, and he sighted the slightly-open gap at once. Wally had no time to close it before Mr. Railton's fingers closed on the edge and it was wrenched aside.

A flood of light swept into the dark, gloomy passage beyond.

It revealed several startled figures just scrambling away, bumping against each other as they bolted to left and right.

But it was too late. Mr. Railton's sharp eyes took in them all. His voice rang out sharply:

"Stop! D'Arcy minor—Blake—Herries—Digby—D'Arcy major! Stop at once! Do not think of escaping! Stop!"

Then, more grimly still:

"Step into the room, all of you! D'Arcy minor, refuse and you will have cause to regret it! You cannot escape!"

Wally D'Arcy stopped—the rest had already come to a halt. The fag was intending to bolt, but there was something in the Housemaster's voice that made even the reckless scamp of the Third change his mind. Blake led the

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"I say, I hope it isn't Jameson and those other chaps getting it from Selby!" said Wally, in sudden alarm. "Supposing Selby's tumbled?"

"Or that little sweep Piggott's given them away, after all!" said Herries. "If he daren't tell Railton, he may have told Selby!"

"Bai Jove! It sounds as if someone's gettin' it hot, anyway!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "I do twust it is that little weptile Piggott! Pwobably he has overdone it, as you suggested, Blake!"

"Let's hope so!" said Blake.

way through, and Wally brought up the rear, with Pongo in his arms now. They faced the grim-looking Housemaster in a dismal group.

Mr. Selby's mouth was wide open. He was gaping like a stranded fish. Piggott sat on the floor still, and he also was gaping, his aches and pains forgotten in that amazing disclosure.

"I might have guessed this!" remarked Mr. Railton quietly at length. "It amazes me now that I did not think of such a hiding-place. Then, Mr. Selby, the sounds of barking you heard were not due to your imagination, after all!"

Mr. Selby fairly shook with sudden rage as he remembered what had happened that afternoon. His vanished tea, the jam on his chair—most of it on his trousers now, the chair that had suddenly moved when he had sat down. He remembered it all. So this was how the confounded dog had entered his study!

Like Mr. Railton, he wondered how he could have forgotten that panel and what lay beyond. Still, he knew now, and his time would come—if the Head did not dismiss him over this wretched affair!

That was a point that was worrying Mr. Selby very much indeed!

"I—I was certain that the sounds were not due to my imagination, Mr. Railton!" he stuttered. "This—this explains all the disgraceful, wicked things that have happened to me this day. It explains why that dog was never traced, and where that young rascal has been hiding. I trust he will now receive his deserts, and that that wretched animal will be sent away, never to be a pest and nuisance to the school again!"

"That will remain for the headmaster to decide, Mr. Selby!" said Mr. Railton coldly. "Rest assured the boy will be punished severely—very severely indeed! Never have I known such astounding audacity! D'Arcy minor, you will accompany me to the headmaster at once. The rest of you may go for the present. Doubtless Dr. Holmes will require you later!" he added grimly.

With that the Housemaster laid a heavy grasp on Wally's shoulder. If Wally had contemplated escape again, he realised he had left it too late now. He was a prisoner, and it was not likely Mr. Railton would allow him an opportunity of escaping again. And, with a heavy heart, the hapless fag, with Pongo still clutched in his arms, was led away to the Head's study.

But the game was not played out yet. Though Wally little dreamed it, something was happening just then that was to alter affairs for the scapegrace of St. Jim's!

CHAPTER 12. Joe Tuttle Again!

"**R**OTTEN!"

Tom Merry gave it as his view that it was rotten, and his chums, Monty Lowther and Manners, agreed with him.

The three chums of the Shell were strolling in the quadrangle in the darkness. Tom Merry often spent a little time before prep in getting a little fresh air and exercise. But this time he had persuaded his chums to come out to discuss the affair of Wally D'Arcy more than to get air and exercise.

A thaw had set in earlier on in the day, but now it was freezing again—a fact that gave pleasure to the fellows at St. Jim's in general, if not to Tom Merry. As a matter of fact, nothing seemed to give Tom pleasure that day. He had done his best to save Wally—to right a wrong, and he had failed, failed dismally. Nor did he see any way out of his unpleasant predicament.

Certainly Wally had escaped the flogging so far. But he had done a mad thing in running away, and thus earned for himself, more likely than not, something far worse than a flogging.

Yet Tom realised that something had to be done. His mind was torn with anxiety and doubt. What should he do—what could he do? The Head refused to hear him, and Mr. Railton had told him more than once that it was useless appealing to the Head. And now Wally had bolted—though a glimmering of suspicion as to where the fag was had already begun to form in Tom's mind.

"It's rotten!" he went on dismally. "I feel a rotten cad—a howling cad! I ought to have spoken at first—I ought not to have considered Joe Tuttle, though, goodness knows, I've good reason to feel deeply grateful to the poor chap. He's never had a chance in life—an under dog all his life, kicked by everybody. He's an orphan, and never had a home, I believe, and everybody's hand's against him. It's no wonder the poor wretch pinches something to eat when he gets the chance. He told me he'd no idea he'd hurt

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Taggles; he simply struck out in the darkness, just to make Taggles let go of his ankle as he was scrambling over the wall. If only the silly fool had come with me to the Head, I'm certain I could have begged him off. Taggles might have kicked, though—"

Tom broke off suddenly.

From the darkness in the direction of Taggles' lodge came sounds of a sudden commotion; the Terrible Three heard Taggles' voice yelling, and sounds of a scuffle.

"What the merry dickens—" began Lowther.

"Come on!" hissed Tom Merry.

As if he knew instinctively what the uproar meant, Tom Merry pelted off towards the lodge. His wondering and startled pals went after him.

They soon reached the yard of the lodge. Tom tore open the door, and dashed through to the garden beyond. A storm-lantern was on the ground there, and beyond the radiance of the light showed two dark figures struggling together.

"A light—fetch that bloomin' light 'ere!" came Taggles' bawling voice.

Tom grabbed up the lantern and rushed to the spot, holding it high. The light revealed the burly figure of the porter. Struggling in his grasp was a slight figure of a youth in ragged clothes, and with a thin, frightened face.

"Joe Tuttle!" breathed Tom Merry.

He recognised the pinched features in a flash.

"What's the matter, Taggles?" he asked, though he knew well enough.

"Matter, hey?" hooted Taggles. "I got 'im! Arter my fowls, he was! And if I ain't mistook, it ain't the first time he's been arter 'em, neither!"

"Well, my only hat!" murmured Lowther.

"Arter my fowls!" repeated Taggles wrathfully. "Good job I 'eard the young raskil! Joe Tuttle's 'is name, and a useless young scamp he always was, I reckon. My heye! 'E must 'ave been arter my fowls the other night. My heye! It weren't that there dorg, arter all, and it weren't young Master D'Arcy what knocked me down, neither! I sees it now! It were this varmint as struck me! I reckonise him plain as plain, now, though it were only moon-light!"

And Taggles paused for breath, his whiskers fairly bristling.

"Lemme go!" whined the thin youth, still struggling madly. "I won't touch your bloomin' fowls no more—I swear I won't!"

"You won't for a tidy bit. Ho, no!" sneered Taggles. "We'll see what Mister Crump, the bobby, 'as to say to this 'ere! My heye, though! I oughter take 'im along to Dr. 'Olmes, oughtn't I, Master Merry? I got to clear young Master D'Arcy arter this!"

He hauled the protesting youth out of the garden.

"Caught 'im in the hact!" he went on triumphantly. "Come along, my lad! We'll see what the 'eadmaster 'as to say to this 'ere! You'd better come, too, young gents, as witnesses."

"We'll come, Taggy!" said Tom grimly.

There was a constant buzz of questioning voices as Taggles led his captive towards the Head's study. But the old porter didn't enlighten the curious, nor did the Terrible Three. Taggles knocked on the Head's door, and a deep voice bade them enter.

Dr. Holmes was not alone. With him were Mr. Railton, Mr. Selby, and Wally D'Arcy, who was still holding Pongo. Dr. Holmes almost jumped out of his chair as the procession entered, Joe Tuttle blinking fearfully in the bright light from the electric lamp on the Head's desk.

"Bless my soul!" articulated the Head, his eyebrows nearly disappearing in his amazement. "What—Good gracious, Taggles, what is the meaning of this intrusion?"

Taggles wiped his brow with a red-spotted handkerchief, and pointed to the cringing Tuttle.

"Which I've brought this 'ere young villain afore you on a most important matter, sir!" he puffed. "And these 'ere young gents will bear me out as what I says is true. Arter my fowls—that's what Joe Tuttle was doing! Caught 'im in the hact, sir!"

"What—what—" began the Head, staring transfixed. "Who is this individual, Taggles?"

"Which he's the young thief what's been taking my fowls, sir!" vociferated the old porter. "I thought all along as it were young Master D'Arcy's dorg as 'ad bin takin' 'em. Well, it weren't, arter all! It were this young raskil—Joe Tuttle! Caught 'im in the hact, I did, jest a few minutes ago. Of course, I knowed at once as it were 'im as 'ad been takin' 'om before. Jest as it were 'im as struck me when I caught 'im at the job the other night! It weren't young Master D'Arcy at all, sir!"

"Bless my soul!"

"Ah!" said Mr. Railton quietly. "I think we are getting at the real truth of the matter now!"

(Continued on page 27.)

THE
CONCLUDING
CHAPTERS
OF
DAVID
GOODWIN'S
SCHOOL
SERIAL,

which clear up the
mystery of the
"Woolly Lambe."



THEIR FORM
MASTER IN DIRE
PERIL!

THE WORST FORM AT CODRINGTON!

Captured!

"WE'RE coming, too!" said Taffy Wynne's chums. "No, two are enough."

The grove was a short one, and at the other end a dark figure could be seen approaching. It was Mr. Lambe, for his tall form was unmistakable, though his face could not be seen.

He was walking along in the most unsuspecting manner, with his arms swinging beside him. The Remove master never carried a walking-stick. The boys watched anxiously, wondering where the supposed hidden convict would appear.

The Woolly Lambe came right past them, however, and strode on down the path. Still nothing happened. He was now near the other end of the grove.

"Has the ruffian given it up?" muttered Kempe, with a breath of relief.

Suddenly a dark form slipped silently out of a bush that Mr. Lambe had just passed—Kempe recognised it as the convict—and in his hand he held a knotted bludgeon, which could just be seen in the gloom. He took three noiseless steps after the Woolly Lambe, who never even turned his head.

The boys, with sudden anxiety, jumped out upon the path.

"He doesn't see the man!" exclaimed Kempe, as the deadly bludgeon was raised to strike. Kempe's lips opened to give a shout of warning. But before the cry left his lips, the Woolly Lambe turned like a flash of lightning, and seized the arm that held the bludgeon. With a quick dart, he caught the other wrist, and there was a yell of pain as the convict's arms were pulled across each other with a jerk that nearly dislocated them.

"Good-evening, Mr. Edward Jacques! We meet again," said the Woolly Lambe blandly.

Taffy and Kempe came running up as hard as they could sprint, the fire-irons in their hands. The convict was struggling madly, but the Woolly Lambe quickly overpowered him, and, drawing both the man's arms together between his own elbow and side, neatly snapped a pair of handcuffs on his wrists.

"Hallo!" said Mr. Lambe to the boys. "What brings you here?"

"Er—we—er—we were afraid something might happen, sir," said Taffy nervously, "so—"

"Ah, you came to protect me!" said the Woolly

Lambe, chuckling. "Thank you, Wynne. And you, too, Kempe." He looked curiously at the latter.

The convict, who had been panting breathlessly, stared at Kempe, too.

"Gosh!" he yelled explosively. "That's the young hound as sold me!" He added a long string of invective, and nearly foamed at the mouth with rage. "That's 'ow I'm done! That young beast there and two o' his pals got me this suit o' clothes, an'—"

"That'll do, my man!" said Lambe, taking him by the arm. "We don't want any family histories just now. Pick up that bludgeon, Kempe, will you? We'll see this gentleman into the school, where the police will shortly call for him."

The sensation was immense, for the news spread like wildfire.

"What is it?" exclaimed Walsh, catching Taffy by the arm. "Who is he?"

"The escaped convict from Longmoor," said Taffy. "We've been out to capture him, that's all, dear boy."

Ferguson and Kent-Williams, a little farther along, came to the door of Study No. 12. They nearly fell down with horror when they saw the convict in Lambe's hands, and Kempe walking behind with Taffy. Neither of them could utter a word.

The prisoner could, and did, however. His fury revived at the sight of the two, and he made a frantic attempt to get at them, handcuffed as he was.

"Them's the two!" he shouted. "Burn me if I wouldn't rather do them in than you, now! They got me this rig-out an' told me where I'd find you, an' it's all a trap! I'll—"

"You'll make less noise," said the Woolly Lambe, with a grip that caused him to make more for the moment.

Kent-Williams and Ferguson, with horrified faces, fled.

"Go and ask the Head quietly to oblige me by coming to this room, Wynne," said Mr. Lambe. "And, Wynne!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Do what you can to keep the Form more or less quiet. It will be bad for the school if we have any riot just now. You see, don't you? We don't want any rumours flying about. They saw me bring this man in."

"Shall I tell them about you, sir? What you asked me not to talk about before, I mean? They'll understand then."

"Yes; that will be best. You're a good, straight fellow, Wynne. I'm going to thank you presently. In the meantime, give the Head my message."

Conclusion!

TAFFY sped away on his errand, and the Woolly Lambe took his sullen, handcuffed prisoner into the empty class-room. In less than a minute Canon Wyndham arrived.

"Good gracious, Mr. Lambe!" he exclaimed, staring aghast at the prisoner. "Who is this?"

The Woolly Lambe, with a couple of jerks, stripped the captive of his wig and whiskers, and showed him for the evil, bullet-headed ruffian he really was.

"Edward Jacques, the Hatton Garden burglar," said Mr. Lambe, "lately escaped from Longmoor. I assisted the police in running him to ground two years ago, and it seems he's broken prison in the hope of getting an interview with me—for the sake of old times, you know."

"Yus, an' I'd ha' done yer in, too," snarled the convict, glaring, "if I 'adn't been given away!" He looked savagely from Mr. Lambe to the Head. "You're the boss o' this bloomin' school, ain't yer? I knows yer! You may like to know it was three o' your nice, smart young gents as stole these 'ere clothes an' wig for me, so as I could lie up an' out the bloke you call Lambe!"

"Had not this ruffian better be handed over to the police at once?" said the Head, looking bewildered.

"They were sent for half an hour ago, and will be here very shortly," said Mr. Lambe. "I think, Canon Wyndham, you had better hear what this man says," he added, looking grave. "There is some truth in what you have just heard from him, and it will be better for us to deal with the affair here than let it go outside first. He means to let the police know, of course, how he was helped."

"You bet yer life I do!" said the convict savagely. "You listen ter me, Mr. 'Eadmaster, an' I'll let yer know what sort o' young gents you bring up 'ere!"

And straightway he plunged into the story, telling how he had met the three boys on the moor, how they had helped him, and why. The Head turned pale as he listened, and nearly cried with shame to think such a thing was possible in the school.

"I would not have believed," he said brokenly, "that such a blot as this could fall on Codrington."

"It shall not fall," said Lambe. "It looks worse than it is, canon. I have influence with the police, and I will see that they take no proceedings against these three misguided youngsters."

The Head gripped Mr. Lambe by the hand.

"You're the finest fellow I've ever had here, Lambe! No wonder the boys swear by you. Be it so, then, if you are willing. But those three scamps, Ferguson and his companions, they must be removed at once, and if I expel them I must make my reason known."

"Don't expel them, then, canon. Give them a sound swishing apiece, and write to their parents, asking them to withdraw the boys from the school. Then they can get a fair start elsewhere, and there's little doubt they'll pull up after this. They're having a bad fright."

"Very well! You have a very good right to a say in this matter," said the Head. "And I think your request a wise one."

"As to Kempe," said Mr. Lambe, "it seems that he was struck with remorse, and gave warning of the affair in time, trying at the same time not to give his companions away. He showed some decent feeling, and may make a man in time. I should suggest letting Kempe off his flogging."

"I agree with you," said the Head.

"And now I'll go to Fordbury, and settle matters with the police," concluded Mr. Lambe.

The Head rang the bell as soon as Mr. Lambe departed, and Lodgey appeared.

"Bring Ferguson, Kent-Williams, and Kempe to my study at once," he said.

When Taffy took leave of the Woolly Lambe and the prisoner, and had delivered his message to the Head, he

fled to his chums in the lower corridor, bursting with excitement.

Dereker, Birne, and Jellicoe were all on fire for news, and in delirious sentences Taffy told them what had happened.

"And he said I might jolly well tell the Form what they've been puzzling their rotten, silly heads over all the term!" cried Taffy, ignoring the fact that he had been rather more puzzled than most of them. "Come on!"

They swept like a whirlwind down the corridor and into the bosom of the Remove, which was tossing like a stormy sea in No. 12 class-room.

Taffy leaped up on a form, and howled for silence.

"Stop rotting, you asses! Lambe's jolly well authorised me to let you know what's what, an' set your miserable minds at rest. Listen to me!"

"A lot of drivellin' idiots here have believed for a long time that the Woolly Lambe was wanted by the police!"

"And so he jolly well was!" (Sensation.)

"He was wanted because he's one of the best detectives in England, and they couldn't get on without him! He's nabbed more criminals than half Scotland Yard, and when he chucked it to come and take charge of such a lot of nincompoops as I see around me, you all thought he was a giddy criminal, because he hid from the bobbies who kept pesterin' him night an' day to give them a leg up with their work!" (Cheers and cries of "Oh, oh!")

"The chap he brought in just now winds up the biggest jape of the lot, for he's an escaped convict from Longmoor, who came here to murder Lambe for havin' arrested him for burglary!" (Sensation.)

"He laid in wait for him in the grove, with a bludgeon as big as a tree. I could tell you a lot more about that if I liked!" (Cries of "Speech! Speech!")

"I was there, an' saw the finish. He crept up behind Lambe, an' was just goin' to dash his brains out, when Lambe nipped round an' had the darbies on him before you could wink!" (Loud and prolonged cheering.)

Throwing restraint to the winds, the Remove charged out of the hall like a herd of buffaloes.

Mr. Lambe was just starting for Fordbury, and when he saw the Form coming he barely escaped, laughing heartily, down the road.

The Remove mobbed together at the gates, and cheered him to the echo. They cheered till the night rang with the noise, and till every window in the School House was opened and bristling with heads. They cheered till he was out of sight, and one last stentorian bellow echoed down the road:

"Good-night, sir—and good luck!"

The rest is soon told. Ferguson and Kent-Williams, after a short but painful interview with the Head, disappeared quietly from Codrington, and in due course were sent to other and less particular establishments. Where they are now the present author does not know, nor does he particularly care.

Kempe is in the Lower Fourth of a big school in the west of England, and is doing well. He captured the long jump and the one hundred yards at the sports held recently, and is voted not a bad sort, but rather quiet, by his new schoolmates. They had expected something livelier from the Codrington Remove, for of Kempe's past they knew nothing.

Taffy, Dereker, Birne, and Jellicoe are still the shining lights of that great institution. The latter is developing into a remarkably nippy footballer.

The Woolly Lambe is still master of the Form, and the police are beginning to give him more peace. He has not yet completely tamed the Remove, nor, perhaps, does he want to, which is fortunate, because even the greatest men are liable to disappointment if they set their ambitions too high.

THE END.

(And so rings down the curtain on this grand serial. But don't worry, chums, there's something extra-special to follow! Have you read the announcement of our great new story on page 13? If not, turn to it now, and then look forward to the greatest adventure serial it's ever been your lot to read—the first instalment of which will appear in next week's GEM.)

The Fugitive Schoolboy!

(Continued from page 24.)

The Head gasped.

"You—you say, Taggles, that this is the man who has been taking your fowls all along?" he demanded.

"No doubt about it, sir!" said Taggles grimly. "I might have known it were some sneak-thief, an' not that there dorg. What's more, I reckonise Joe Tuttle now as the villain as struck me, though it were only moonlight, and I only got a glimpse of 'im!"

"Good heavens!" muttered the Head. "Mr. Railton, how exceedingly fortunate that—that the flogging did not take place this morning. I should never have forgiven myself had such an injustice taken place. This—is this astounding! Taggles, kindly relate clearly what has happened!"

Taggles did so, not forgetting to express his humble regrets for having unjustly charged Pongo and his master. The Head's face grew grim, and his eyes rested on the hapless Joe Tuttle.

"Do you deny that what Taggles has stated is true, my man?" he said harshly.

"Which I never meant to 'urt Mister Taggles!" panted Joe Tuttle. "I swear to that! Only he caught my foot, and I struck to make 'im let go, and it was dark, like. I wouldn't 'ave taken 'is fowls neither, only I were hungry. It—were the eggs I was arter first, and then I were tempted and started takin' the fowls."

"Good heavens! D'Arcy, my boy, I am exceedingly thankful that you escaped your sentence this morning, though you acted very wrongly in running away," said Dr. Holmes gravely. "But it was your own fault—you should have explained why you were out of your dormitory. Your refusal weighed heavily against you."

"I think it is now clear why he refused," said Mr. Railton, with a glance at Wally's bright face. "D'Arcy refused to speak because he did not wish to let us know that his dog was within the school. Is that not so, D'Arcy?"

"Yes, sir!"

"It was very foolish of you, my boy—very foolish!" said the Head quietly. "However, this clears you absolutely—also your dog. As for this rascal, he must be handed over to the police without delay. Mr. Railton, kindly phone through to the police station."

"One moment, sir!" gasped Tom Merry. "Before you do that, please listen to me, sir!" he begged, with a glance at Joe Tuttle's terrified face. "You have called Joe Tuttle a rascal, and I suppose he is. But he's something more—he's a fellow who was ready to risk his life for an enemy—a chap who was anxious to capture him!"

"What ever do you mean, boy?" exclaimed Dr. Holmes. "Explain yourself, Merry!"

"I'll soon do that, sir," said Tom eagerly. "I knew it was this chap who had been taking Taggles' fowls, and I knew it was he who had struck down Taggles. I knew it when D'Arcy minor was charged!"

"You knew!" almost shouted the Head.

"Yes, sir. I did my utmost to make you believe D'Arcy did not do it; I even claimed to have done it myself so that he shouldn't be unjustly punished for it. This morning I was determined to tell the whole truth, but you would not hear me. At noon yesterday I went after Tuttle. I

found him, and tried to persuade him to come here to confess to you. He was afraid to do so. But—"

"Then," thundered the Head angrily, "why did you not do your duty and explain the full facts, Merry? You did not attempt to tell the facts; you merely told untruths, claiming to have done the thing yourself—attempted to clear D'Arcy without giving any evidence in his support."

Tom Merry flushed.

"I'll tell you why, sir," he said quietly. "I know I ought to have spoken out at the beginning. But—perhaps you'll understand when I tell the full story."

Dr. Holmes listened to every word, and when Tom Merry finished at last, his expression had changed considerably.

"I quite understand, Merry," he said gently. "I will not say that your conduct in the matter was justified. But I understand. After hearing this I have no wish to give this unfortunate youth in charge, and I am sure Taggles has not!"

"Which I ain't, sir!" gasped Taggles, staring curiously at the white-faced Joe Tuttle, who was nervously twirling his ragged cap in his hands. "Arter all, he's a lad as never had a chance—I knows him well! But there's more in 'im than anyone'd think, it strikes me, sir," said Taggles.

"There certainly is, Taggles," said the Head, smiling grimly. "You had better see the youth to the gates, and we will let the matter drop here."

"Very good, sir!"

Taggles nodded to Joe Tuttle quite genially, and that astonished and relieved youth followed him out quickly enough. The Head turned to Wally D'Arcy.

"I am exceedingly sorry that this ever happened, my boy, and that you have had this unpleasant ordeal," he said quietly. "In view of your narrow escape, and what you have already suffered, I am prepared to overlook your defiance and reckless conduct to-day. You may go."

Mr. Selby spluttered.

"But, sir, after his impudent behaviour to me, and those other young rascals—"

"That will do, Mr. Selby," said the Head icily. "I should like a few words with you in private. Merry, you may go."

Nothing more was said to Wally D'Arcy or his chums about the strange affair. So far as they were concerned the authorities had evidently dropped the matter completely. And Pongo, like Wally, resumed his usual place as a member of St. Jim's, returning to his kennel behind the chapel as of yore.

Reuben Piggott hoped devoutly that the same applied to him, but he was mistaken.

He had already had one terrific thrashing from Mr. Selby. But the headmaster did not seem to take that into account when dealing with the amateur blackmailer. When the Head had finished with him the cad of the Third had good reason to realise the truth of the saying that the way of the transgressor is hard—and painful.

Police-constable Crump, the arm of the law in Rylcombe, never knew how near he had been to having an easy capture. He had always had an eye on the ne'er-do-well of the village, and great hopes of catching Joe Tuttle up to something some day. And his astonishment was great indeed when he heard that Joe had suddenly obtained a job at Rylcombe Grange, thanks to the Head of St. Jim's.

THE END.

(Next week's bumper number of the GEM will contain another thrilling story of Tom Merry & Co., entitled: "UNDER TRIMBLE'S THUMB!" You can't afford to miss this grand treat, so order your copy WELL IN ADVANCE!)

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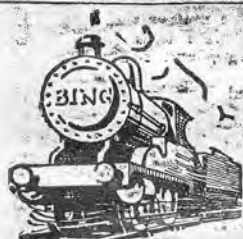
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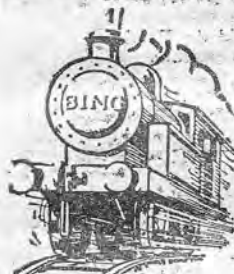
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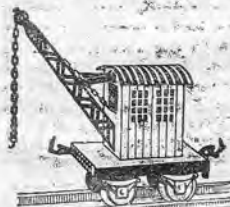
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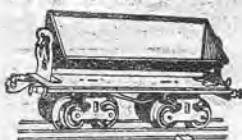
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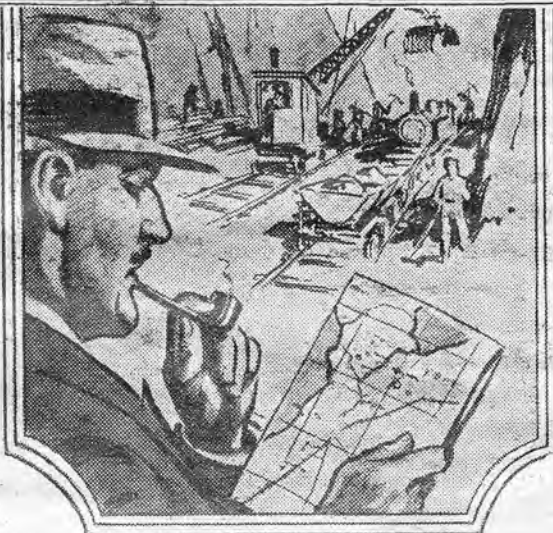
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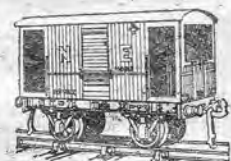
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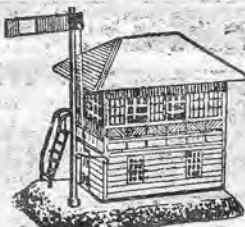
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