

OPENING CHAPTERS OF A SMASHING SERIAL BY DAVID
GOODWIN.
INSIDE.

THE GEM ^{2d}

EVERY
WEDNESDAY.



FEMININE 'FLUENCE !

POOR OLD CYRUS !
He's given up chewing-
gum because
ETHEL ASKED HIM !

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gum because

ETHEL ASKED HIM!

Handcock Changes His Mind !

"WELL, for the love of Mike!"

A voice with an American accent that could almost have been cut with a knife, came floating out of the tuckshop doorway to the ears of Arthur Augustus D'Arey, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's. "Great Bohunkus! Can you beat that?"

The voice from the land of skyscrapers and chewing-gum was filled with deep disgust.

Judging by its tone the owner of that voice was "sore" about something.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy grinned, and sailed gracefully into the tuckshop.

Mrs. Taggles, the proprietress of the little establishment under the old elms of St. Jim's, was standing behind her trim counter surveying very pertly a figure in horn-rimmed spectacles, ankle-length plus-fours, black-and-white

shoes, and gaily-coloured stockings, who stood on the other side of the counter, returning the old lady's gaze with a mixture of astonishment and disgust.

"Carry me home to die!" ejaculated the junior in horn-rimmed spectacles as Arthur Augustus entered. "Bury me and dig me up! Gee—"

"It is no good arguing, Master Handcock—"
 "But say, lady—"

Cyrus K. Hancock of the Shell, the new fellow who had crossed the Atlantic from New York City for the benefit of education at an English Public school, was evidently exasperated. He tapped a finger on the counter emphatically.

"Say!" he said, "Handcock's gum is chewed wherever civilisation reigns! It sure is! From Chili to China! The world chews it! Say—"

"I am very sorry, Master Handcock," said Mrs. Taggles pertly, "I do not stock it, and I do not intend to stock it! I—I—"

—D'ARCY, AND FASCINATING COUSIN ETHEL!

Champion!

By Martin Clifford

A stunning long complete
adventure and school story
of Tom Merry & Co. at
St. Jim's.



"Great Bohunkus!" Cyrus K. Hancock almost groaned with exasperation. It seemed amazing to the son of Hiram Q. Hancock, the chewing-gum king and multi-millionaire, that Mrs. Taggles could not see his point. "Listen, lady—"

"I am very sorry, Master Hancock—"

Cyrus K. Hancock caught sight of Arthur Augustus. He clutched the swell of St. Jim's by the arm.

"Say, buddy, can you beat it? They don't stock Hancock's gum! For the love of Mike, what do you know about that?"

Arthur Augustus grinned.

On the other side of the Big Drink, as the American junior usually referred to the Atlantic Ocean, Hancock's gum was apparently almost a necessity of life. Hancock himself chewed it regularly. But he had evidently run out of supplies, and his consternation and exasperation at discovering that Mrs. Taggles not only failed to stock it, but had no intention of stocking it, caused the swell of St. Jim's to chuckle.

"You see, deah boy," he explained, with a grin, "Mrs. Taggles wouldn't get much demand for chewin'-gum heah. We don't chew gum vewy much in this country—"

"Aw, shucks!" grunted Hancock disgustedly. He turned to Mrs. Taggles. "Say," he said, shaking his head sadly,

"you want to remember this is the twentieth century! You're behind the times, I guess!"

Mrs. Taggles sniffed, and turned to Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, Master D'Arcy?" she inquired, with a beaming smile, that was in great contrast to the pert expression she had been bestowing upon the son of the chewing-gum king. "And what can I do for you?"

"I want you to send a few things up to Study No. 6, please, Mrs. Taggles. A couple of large iced cakes, a few dozen mewingucs, a couple of dozen tarts, four tins of sardines, some stwawbewwy jam, some eclairs, and cweam-puffs—about two dozen—"

"Certainly, Master D'Arcy!"

Cyrus K. Hancock was staring at the swell of St. Jim's in astonishment.

"Gee, buddy!" he ejaculated. "You sound as if you reckon on being hungry at tea-time, I guess."

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus sniffed. "Weally, deah boy, I am not expectin' to eat all those things myself. I am givin' a little spweed aftah the match."

"Match?" queried Hancock. "Put me wise! What match?"

"The House match, of course, deah boy! You know that School House is playin' New House at cwicket this aftahnoon?"

"Search me!" said Hancock briefly.

Cricket was one of the English institutions that the American junior failed to appreciate. Cricket, in his opinion, was a "dumb" game.

Arthur Augustus surveyed the American through his gleaming monocle, with a look that was pitying rather than anything else.

"The Spaldin' Hall gals are comin' ovah to see the match," he explained kindly. "I am givin' them tea in my studey. Pewwaps you would like to come, deah boy? Ethel and Dowis and Peggay are vewy charmin' gals—"

Cyrus K. Hancock shook his head.

"Thanks—no!" he said. "I guess I'm gonna go for a ride in the auto this afternoon. No cricket match for me. I guess I'd sooner watch a funeral. Now, if it was baseball—"

"Bai Jove! Baseball be blowed!" snorted Arthur Augustus warmly. "I considah—"

"Great Bohunkus! Say, baseball—"

"Bai Jove! I tell you, cwicket—"

"Well, don't let's argue about it," grinned Hancock cheerfully. "Maybe I don't appreciate cricket; but listen, buddy. If ever I watch another cricket game, it'll be because I'm tied to the fence, with my eyelids propped open."

"Weally, deah boy, I considah—"

"I guess Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther will be playing in the cricket game?" cut in Hancock gloomily.

The American junior shared Study No. 10 in the Shell with Tom Merry, the captain of the junior cricket eleven, and his chums, Harry Manners and Monty Lowther. Hancock got on very well with the Terrible Three. They liked the American junior, as did most of the other Shell and Fourth-Formers.

"Yaas, they'll be playin'," nodded Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, gee!" grunted Hancock. "This cricket! I guess

I'll have to go ridin' in the auto by myself, then. So long, buddy!"

He strolled from the tuckshop, with a last sad shake of his head at Mrs. Taggles. Even Handcock, apparently, realised that it was hopeless to try further to persuade the dear old dame that it was her bounden duty to stock Handcock's world-famous gum.

Ten minutes later the new junior was roaring down Rylcombe Lane in his glittering thousand-pound car, with a decidedly gloomy expression on his usually cheery countenance.

He swung round a corner.

"Great Bohankus—"

A startled circulation broke from the American's lips as he swerved to avoid three girlish figures on bicycles that were riding towards St. Jim's. Missing the outermost of them—a pretty girl with flaming, red hair—by inches, Cyrus K. Handcock swung sideways across the road.

Crash!

The radiator of the big yellow car ended up embedded in the hedge. Handcock heard breathless cries of alarm from the girls, and jumped out hastily.

"Gee!" he panted. "I'm plumb sorry! I guess I nearly hit you!"

The three girls had dismounted. They were wearing the hat ribbon of Spalding Hall School, a girl's school near Wayland. But Cyrus K. Handcock knew nothing of Spalding Hall, and did not guess from that fact that the trio of schoolgirls were Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's Cousin Ethel, Doris Levison, the pretty sister of Ernest Levison of the Fourth, and their great chum, Lady Peggy Brooke, the red-headed tomboy of Spalding Hall.

"My hat!" cried Lady Peggy indignantly. "You silly ass! What did you want to come round the corner at that rate for?"

"I—I guess I was thinking about something else," said Cyrus K. Handcock humbly, crimsoning to the roots of his hair as he raised his cap. "I'm sure sorry! I guess—"

"Well, this isn't a guessing competition, anyway," said Lady Peggy, rather crossly.

"Oh! I—I—I guess—"

Cousin Ethel laughed. Her eyes danced merrily as she surveyed Cyrus K. Handcock.

"Well, there's no harm done, luckily," she said, "unless your car is damaged. You must be the new American boy, aren't you?" she added, in a friendly way. "Tom Merry was telling us about you."

"I guess I'm Amurrican!" nodded Handcock. He surveyed Ethel admiringly, as he spoke, through his horn-rimmed glasses. "I guess so! Say, are you the Spalding Hall outfit? If so, I guess I've heard of you, too!"

"That's us!" agreed Lady Peggy cheerfully. "But, I say, where were you off to? It's the House match this afternoon. We're just going along to see it, you know. You don't mean to say you weren't going to watch it?"

Cyrus K. Handcock coughed.

"Hem! I—I—I guess—"

He broke off, colouring, as he glanced from one to another of the three smiling girls. He grinned suddenly.

"Sure! You bet I'm watching that cricket game!" he declared emphatically. "Yeah! Miss a cricket game? Not me! If there's one thing I guess I jest can't understand, it's any guy not watching a cricket game. Can't understand it: it gets right past me!"

"Oh, good!" said Ethel. "We shall see you on Little Side, then?"

"Sure!" grinned Handcock. "Say, it's a hot day for bicycling around. I guess you'd better let me give you all a lift in the auto! The bikes can go on the back. It's a cinch. O.K.?"

"Rather!" said Doris Levison eagerly.

Ethel nodded and smiled. The American junior jumped back into his car, and hastily backed it out of the hedge. It was quite undamaged luckily. He turned the car in the direction of St. Jim's.

Two minutes later Cyrus K. Handcock was speeding towards the school again with three fair passengers.

"Do you like cricket?" asked Cousin Ethel brightly.

"Cricket?" echoed Cyrus K. Handcock. "Like it? Me? Why," he said fervently, "I eat it alive!"

CHAPTER 2.

Arthur Augustus Fails to Shine!

CLICK!

The soaring leather leapt away from the bat of Redfern of the New House, and sailed towards the boundary.

The House match was in full swing!

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School House had batted first, and collected between them the useful total of 140 runs, Tom Merry contributing a workmanlike 52. But the New House looked like piling up a big score, too, with 70 already showing on the scoreboard for the loss of only three wickets.

Dick Redfern had opened the innings with Kerr, the Scottish junior, in the absence of George Figgins, the leader of the New House, who was away from St. Jim's for a short while for family reasons. And while other batsmen had come and gone Redfern had continued to slog the School House bowling all over the field, and was already nearing his half-century.

"Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus, fielding near the boundary, jumped as he heard that excited yell from several throats.

The cricket ball was soaring towards him—a beautiful catch, that looked like dropping right into his hands.

Unfortunately, Arthur Augustus—usually the keenest of cricketers—had not been paying attention to the game at that moment!

Where Arthur Augustus stood, immaculate in the whitest of white flannels, the spectators seated in deck-chairs on the grass in front of the pavilion were quite close. Among them were the Spalding Hall girls—and Cyrus K. Handcock!

Cyrus K. Handcock had been the cause of Gussy's failure to concentrate on the game.

The swell of St. Jim's entertained a very deep regard for Ethel Cleveland, his pretty cousin. As a rule, his great rival for Ethel's regard was George Figgins of the New House; but Figgy was away from St. Jim's, and for once Arthur Augustus had looked forward to an afternoon and evening free from rival claimants for Ethel's favours!

But it had become only too clear to Arthur Augustus, as he stood near the spot where Ethel was seated, with Handcock standing beside her, that the American school-boy was "keen" on Ethel, and that Ethel seemed to find pleasure in the company of Handcock!

It was a bitter blow.

For a long while Arthur Augustus had been seething with a jealous wrath, casting furtive glances through his gleaming monocle at Ethel and Handcock as the two talked and laughed together. Could looks have killed, the swell of St. Jim's looks would have stretched Handcock lifeless on the grass.

"Gussy, you dummy!"

"Look out, there—"

Arthur Augustus' thoughts had been far, far away. But suddenly he realised that the cricket ball was dropping straight towards him. He jumped, and made a frantic grab.

"Oh, the ass!"

There was a disgusted growl in the voice of Robert Arthur Digby, one of the swell of St. Jim's studymates in the Fourth. At the same moment there was a howl from Arthur Augustus.

For the ball had slipped clean through Arthur Augustus' hands, and plumped on to his elegant foot. The swell of St. Jim's danced, clapping his toe, while from all along the boundary-line came exasperated shouts.

"Butter-fingers!"

"Oh! Yoooop! Bai Jove!"

"You dummy!" roared Herries of the Fourth. "They're running!"

Arthur Augustus cast an anguished glance at the wickets. Redfern and his partner were racing to and fro busily. He stooped and picked up the ball, and flung it in.

"You burbling ass!" snorted Kerruish of the Fourth, the junior from the Isle of Man. "Fancy missing Redfern! Dare say he'll get a century now, and they'll lick us!"

Arthur Augustus glared at the line of juniors watching from beneath the elms. But before he could frame a suitably cutting reply a cheery voice from near the pavilion—a voice with a transatlantic drawl—cut in:

"Say, Archibald! I guess I dunno much about this cricket game, but aren't you supposed to catch the ball, buddy?"

Arthur Augustus crimsoned, and surveyed Handcock, with feelings almost too deep for words. Ethel was smiling.

"Bai Jove! Weally, Handcock! Pway wemembah that my name is not Archibald! I considah—"

"Look out, there!" yelled the angry voice of Tom Merry, from the centre of the field.

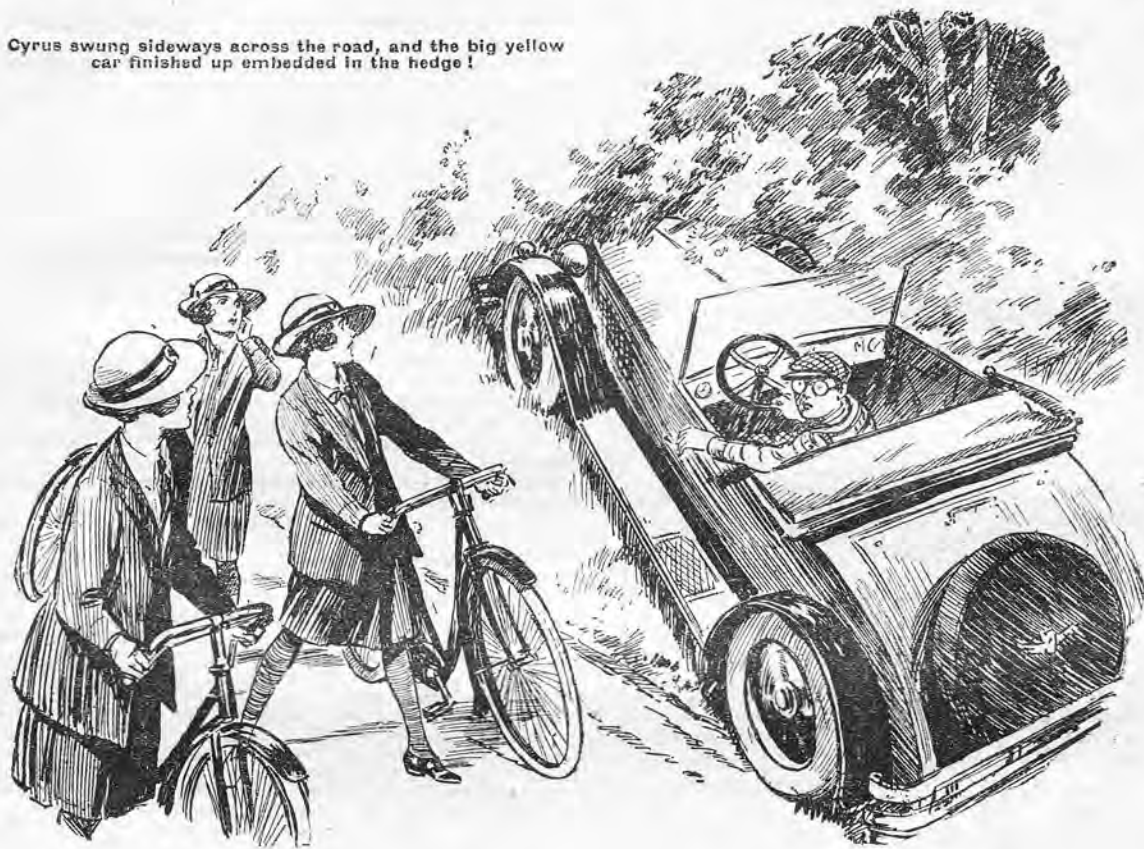
Arthur Augustus jumped, and returned his attentions to the game—just in time to see another slashing hit of Redfern's bound past him to the boundary-line.

"Oh, somebody drown Gussy!" groaned the voice of Herries. "He's hopeless! What do they want to play him for?"

There was a chuckle from Cyrus K. Handcock.

With feelings too deep for words, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy retrieved the ball and returned it to the bowler.

Cyrus swung sideways across the road, and the big yellow car finished up embedded in the hedge!



He dared not cast so much as a single glance in the direction of the chairs by the pavilion now. But he knew that Cousin Ethel and the American boy were chatting cheerfully together, and his heart seethed within him.

Soon after that Redfern was caught on the wicket by Jack Blake, and with his dismissal something like a rot set in. New House batsmen came and went rapidly, until their last wicket fell with their total score at 96.

It was a smashing victory for the School House, even taking into consideration the absence of George Figgins!

But the aristocratic countenance of Arthur Augustus was anything but cheerful, as Blake & Co. and Tom Merry & Co., Talbot, and one or two others set off in company with the Spalding Hall girls for the feast in Study No. 6.

For Cyrus K. Handcock was close at Cousin Ethel's side! The transatlantic junior had not only changed his mind about the pleasures of watching cricket; he had also changed his mind about his invitation to tea in Study No. 6.

Cyrus K. Handcock was coming!

CHAPTER 3.

Trouble in Study No. 6.

"SARDINES, Peggy?"

"Pass Ethel the cake, somebody——"

"What about an éclair for you, Doris?"

The spread in Study No 6 was vanishing rapidly before the onslaught of the School House juniors and their girl chums!

"After you with the strawberry jam, Blake, old hoss!"

"I guess I'll give my inside a surprise with one of those tarts——" drawled a transatlantic voice.

Cyrus K. Handcock was enjoying himself!

Handcock had collared a chair beside Ethel, and he was getting on famously. Handcock considered, inwardly, that Ethel was "a peach of a dame!"

There was only one fellow present who did not join in the cheery talk and laughter.

That was Arthur Augustus!

Arthur Augustus, having failed to secure a seat beside Ethel, had had to take a chair on the other side of the table, opposite her, as the next best thing.

But it was a poor consolation.

From his seat across the table, the swell of St. Jim's had a full view of his hated rival, as Cyrus K. Handcock

chatted brightly with Cousin Ethel—and the sight was gall and wormwood to Arthur Augustus!

Had Handcock's fate been in his hands just then, Arthur Augustus would undoubtedly have chosen something lingering, with boiling oil in it, for the American schoolboy.

Tom Merry, catching sight of the swell of St. Jim's gloomy countenance, grinned.

He could guess the cause of it!

Ethel was laughing merrily at some humorous remark of the American junior's, and Arthur Augustus, glaring across the table with eye-glass jammed in his eye, almost choked with indignation as he gulped down his tea.

"Ethel, deah gal——"

Ethel did not hear him. She was busy talking to Handcock.

"Ahem! I say, deah gal——"

Ethel broke into a laugh at something that Handcock had said, without noticing Arthur Augustus. The swell of St. Jim's glared at Handcock and ground his teeth, and gave up the attempt to draw Ethel into conversation across the table.

Handcock, glancing up, caught the swell of St. Jim's look and grinned cheerfully.

"Say, Archibald!" he suggested. "Try one of these tarts! They're swell!"

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus glared. "My name is not Archibald——"

"Sorry, Marnaduke! I guess——"

"My name is Arthur Augustus!" hooted the swell of St. Jim's.

"Sure! I knew it was some mouthful," grinned Handcock. "No tarts for you? I guess you're not eating much. Feel bad?"

"No!" snapped Arthur Augustus.

"I guess you look as if you've got the Willies," said Handcock, critically surveying the swell of St. Jim's through his horn-rimmed glasses. "I guess you need some physic, Reginald."

"Bai Jove! Pway wemembah that my name is Arthur Augustus!" snorted the swell of St. Jim's, in a choking voice. "I considah——"

But already Handcock was chatting once more with Cousin Ethel.

Arthur Augustus lapsed into a seething silence.

Once or twice Ethel cast a curious glance in his direction. Suddenly she realised what the matter was, and a faint flush came into her cheeks. Her lips tightened a fraction.

Ethel Cleveland was a very level-headed girl, despite her prettiness. And she told herself that Arthur Augustus was being very ridiculous to be jealous of Hancock, as he undoubtedly was. She liked the cheery American junior, and she certainly did not mean to hide that fact to soothe what she considered the absurd jealousy of her cousin.

"Ethel, deah gal—"

This time, Ethel heard. But she deliberately ignored the swell of St. Jim's.

Once more, Arthur Augustus relapsed into a gloomy silence.

"Have another eclair, Miss Cleveland?" suggested Hancock, seeing that her plate was empty. "They're swell!"

"Thank you!"

The eclairs, however, were at the opposite side of the table, in front of Arthur Augustus. The swell of St. Jim's rose quickly to his feet, seizing his chance.

"Pway allow me to bwing the eclairs wount to you, Ethel, deah gal!" said Arthur Augustus gallantly.

He sailed round the table, bearing the plate of eclairs. Ethel's lips twitched.

"Thank you, Arthur," she said, relenting after her first annoyance at the realisation of the swell of St. Jim's resentment over her friendliness towards Hancock. "I—oh! Good gracious!"

Cousin Ethel broke off with a startled exclamation.

Hancock had been sitting with one foot thrust out a little underneath his chair. Arthur Augustus, in sailing up to them, had failed to notice that little fact—with the result that Arthur Augustus, and the plate of eclairs, went flying!

"Yawoooooop!"

Crash!

The swell of St. Jim's landed on the floor in a sprawling heap. His aristocratic countenance found a resting-place among the fallen eclairs, and in a moment he was unrecognisable.

"Oh! Gwooooooh! Oh deah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a shriek of laughter from the juniors.

Arthur Augustus was scrambling up with a face that was almost completely hidden beneath a generous plastering of squashed chocolate and cream. An eclair was entangled with his ear, and another was stuck in his hair. His eyes glared out from the sticky mess wildly, as he gasped and gurgled.

"Yow! Oh! Gwooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co., Blake & Co., and the others shrieked. So did Lady Peggy. Doris was laughing, too, and Ethel was smiling despite herself. Cyrus K. Hancock chuckled loudly.

"I guess you look like the chocolate-coloured coon all right!" he grinned.

"You—you—"

Arthur Augustus, glaring out through the sticky mess that was plastered over his aristocratic countenance, surveyed Cyrus K. Hancock with feelings almost too deep for words.

The swell of St. Jim's did not realise for a moment that it had been a sheer accident that the American schoolboy's foot had been in the way.

He believed that Hancock had tripped him up on purpose, to make him look a fool before Cousin Ethel—and he fairly gasped with rage.

"You wottah!" panted Arthur Augustus.

"Eh?" ejaculated Hancock in astonishment. "I guess—"

"You uttah wottah!" hooted Arthur Augustus furiously.

It was seldom indeed that the swell of St. Jim's forgot his manners when there were ladies present. As a rule, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the very last fellow in the world to make a scene in the presence of the fairer sex! But this time he had forgotten himself with a vengeance!

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was seeing red!

"You—you—"

"For the love of Mike!" ejaculated Hancock. "Say, you wouldn't think I did that on purpose, you mutt? I—oh, gee! Yaroooooh!"

Arthur Augustus had seized a plate of cream-buns from the table, and jammed them down, squashily, over the astonished junior's head.

Cyrus K. Hancock yelled.

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"Gerroooooop! Oh, Mike! You—you silly mutt—"

He staggered to his feet, frantically wiping the sticky mess from his eyes. Cousin Ethel sprang up with an exclamation of consternation and anger. And Arthur Augustus, catching sight of her expression, suddenly realised the horrid breach of manners that he had committed.

His jaw dropped.

"Oh, cwikey!" gasped Arthur Augustus, as scarlet as a pillar-box. "Oh cwumbs! I—I—I am fwightfully sowwy, Ethel, deah gal! I—I—I—"

"How—how dare you behave like this!"

Ethel was almost sobbing with vexation. She faced her cousin with angry, gleaming eyes.

"How dare you!" she cried hotly. "You have behaved like—like a hooligan! Oh!"

Arthur Augustus looked as though he would have given a good deal for the earth to have opened and swallowed him, so far as his aristocratic countenance was visible beneath the layer of squashed eclairs that ornamented his features.

"I—I—I'm awfully sowwy, deah gal. I—I uttally forgot you gals were here for the moment, don't you know?" groaned the swell of St. Jim's miserably. "Oh deah! Pway forgive me, deah gal—"

"I shall not!" cried Ethel warmly. "I am ashamed of you, Arthur!"

"Oh cwumbs! B-b-but—"

"Be quiet!" she cried breathlessly. She glanced at Doris Levison and Lady Peggy. "I think," she went on, in a voice quivering with vexation, "that it is time we went!"

She walked quickly from the room, followed by the blank looks of the dismayed juniors.

"Ethel!" cried Tom Merry quickly. "I—"

But Ethel had gone!

Doris and Lady Peggy followed her, Peggy casting a rueful grin at the juniors. Tom Merry hurried out after them, and Manners and Lowther slipped after their chum.

The Terrible Three were going to do their best to make amends by seeing the girls home, it was evident.

Blake, his face very grim, closed the door.

"Now, Gussy, you burbling lunatic—" he began hotly, "Bai Jove! I—I—I—"

"You footling ass!" roared Talbot.

"You dummy!"

"You utter chump—"

"Bai Jove! I considah—"

Arthur Augustus broke off. Cyrus K. Hancock, who had wiped the squashed cream-buns from his face more or less by now had grasped him by the shoulder. The American junior's eyes were gleaming.

"See here, you poor fish!" said Cyrus K. Hancock grimly. "I guess I've got a lot to say to you, Archibald, and—"

"My name is not Archibald!" hooted Arthur Augustus.

"Well, whatever your sassy name is, you total loss!" snapped Hancock angrily. "Where do you think you get off, parking cream-buns on my cabeza, with dames present? I guess I ought to slosh you! You may be the world to your mother, buddy, but you're a pain in the elbow to me! I've a good mind to beat you up!"

"B-bai Jove!"

It was too much for Arthur Augustus.

Biff!

"Whooooooough!" gasped Hancock, as the swell of St. Jim's fist landed squarely on his nose. "Yowp! Great Bohunkus—I'll slay you, I guess!"

"Yaroooooop!"

It was the turn of Arthur Augustus to yell as the American's fist landed in his eye.

But before the little "argument" could develop further, the door opened, and the frowning face of Eric Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, looked into the study.

"What's all this row, you kids?" exclaimed the captain sharply. "Hallo! Scrapping? Chuck it—and take a couple of hundred lines each, D'Arcy and Hancock! Any more noise from this study, and I'll double that!"

The skipper departed, leaving Arthur Augustus and Cyrus K. Hancock glaring at one another, panting.

"You poor fish—"

"You silly wottah—"

Blake pushed his way between the two angry juniors. "Look here," he said grimly, "chuck it! Kildare'll drop on the lot of us if he comes back! If you want to scrap, try the gym!"

"Yaas, wathah! Come along to the gym, Hancock—"

"O.K. with me!" snapped Hancock.

"Come on, then, you asses," grinned Herries, swinging open the door.

A minute later Blake & Co. and the rest, with the swell of St. Jim's and the American junior in their midst, were trooping down the steps of the School House into the quad, on their way to the gym!

CHAPTER 4.

No Luck For Gussy!

"HE, he, he!" Wally D'Arcy of the Third Form, the swell of St. Jim's inky-fingered minor, stopped and stared.

Together with his chums, Reggie Manners, Frankie Levison, and Curly Gibson, the leader of the fag fraternity had been crossing the Hall towards the quad, when Baggy Trimble, the Falstaff of the Fourth, had rolled up the steps into view. At sight of Wally an explosive snigger had broken from the fat figure of Baggy.

"He, he, he!" "What on earth are you sniggering about?" demanded Wally curiously.

"He, he, he!" "What's up, you fat porpoise?" roared Wally.

Baggy stopped sniggering, and glared.

"You'd better keep civil, young D'Arcy, or you'll get a thick ear!" snorted Baggy loftily. "You blessed fags are a sight too cheeky!" Suddenly another explosive snigger escaped him. "He, he, he!"

"What are you sniggering about?" yelled Wally, in great exasperation.

"He, he, he! Your blessed major!" sniggered Baggy. "He's had a row with Handcock, the giddy American! They had a row over Cousin Ethel—"

"What?" gasped Wally. "They're scrapping in the gym!" grinned Baggy, with a malicious chuckle. "Your blessed major's getting the licking of his life! He, he, he! I—oh!—Yow! Yar—oooooh!"

Wally had waited to hear no more. He rushed for the steps, with Reggie, Frankie, and Curly at his heels, and since Baggy Trimble was in the doorway, the Falstaff of the Fourth was sent flying.

Baggy was no light-weight, but the fags' rush had been too much even for him! With a frantic roar, he went flying down the steps backwards, and landed in the quad with a crash.

The fags poured over him, leaving him dazed and gasping at the bottom of the steps as they raced towards the gym.

The gym was crowded as Wally & Co. burst in.

An improvised ring had been formed, but it was utterly hidden amid the crowd of spectators. The news of the fight between Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Cyrus K. Handcock seemed to have spread like wildfire among the juniors, and all the Shell and Fourth, almost, had rushed to the gym to witness it.

"Gus!" gasped Wally.

He thrust his way excitedly through the dense throng, and burst into view of the ring at last.

"My hat!" gasped Wally in utter dismay.

A battered, gasping figure on the floor, with blackened eyes and a swollen nose and thickening ears, had met his startled gaze.

"Gussy!" ejaculated Wally in breathless consternation. "Oh crumbs!"

Then he jumped.

In the opposite corner of the ring, another battered, gasping figure lay, also with blackened eyes and a swollen

The flying table landed on the man's head and sent him spinning!



nose and thickened ears. It was Cyrus K. Handcock, and at the sight of him Wally's face broke into a grin.

The Fourth-Formers and Shell fellows were all grinning and chuckling as they surveyed the exhausted combatants.

Arthur Augustus and the American junior had been too well matched.

They had knocked each other out!

"Afternoon, Master D'Arcy!"

Sammy Thrupp, the ex-sailor who was porter and gate-keeper at Spalding Hall School, touched his hat, with a cheery grin on his rubicund countenance.

It was the following afternoon.

"Good afternoon, Thwupp," said Arthur Augustus, rather gloomily.

Though nearly twenty-four hours had elapsed since his fight with Handcock, the swell of St. Jim's still bore plentiful signs of that battle. His nose resembled a beetroot still, rather than an aristocratic nasal organ, and his left eye had as many colours as Joseph's celebrated coat.

Arthur Augustus had done his best to conceal those little points, but it had been impossible to restore his features to their usual classic appearance.

In all other respects Arthur Augustus was a thing of THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,172.

beauty and a joy for ever, as he stood at the gates of Spalding Hall. His topper was the glossiest topper within Mr. Thrupp's memory. His spats were of a snowlike whiteness, and the crease of his trousers was worthy of Beau Brummel in all his glory. A silver-headed stick was tucked under his arm, and in his hand he bore a large bunch of flowers.

Arthur Augustus had come to make his apologies to Cousin Ethel.

Never in his life had Arthur Augustus been so filled with remorse, as he was now concerning his horrid breach of manners in Study No. 6.

He could not imagine how he had ever come so to forget himself. But he had, and he had to face the consequences.

"Wishin' to see the young ladies?" grinned Sammy Thrupp, eyeing Gussy's black eye and swollen nose curiously.

"Yaas," nodded Arthur Augustus uneasily. "Yaas, wathah! Is Miss Cleveland in, Thwupp?"

Arthur Augustus was not looking forward to his interview with Ethel. But he had to go through with it.

"Miss Cleveland?" echoed Mr. Thrupp. "Yes, the young lady's in, sir. But there's another young gentleman visitin' her."

"B-bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus' aristocratic jaw dropped.

"Young gent came in a big yellow car," nodded Sammy Thrupp cheerily. "An American, I fancy, from the ruin way he spoke. I— Why, here they come, sir!"

The roar of a forty-horse-power car had suddenly broken the quiet of the quadrangle of Spalding Hall.

Arthur Augustus gazed through the gateway with eyes that seemed almost to protrude from his head.

"G-g-great Scott!"

A big yellow car had come into view round a corner of the school buildings—Handcock's car! The American junior was at the wheel; his face, like that of the swell of St. Jim's, still bore obvious traces of their meeting in the gym on the previous day.

And at Handcock's side sat Cousin Ethel.

"Oh!" gasped Arthur Augustus faintly. "Oh, bai Jove!"

The big car came roaring towards the gates.

In his consternation it did not occur to the swell of St. Jim's for the moment that he was full in the path of the oncoming car. When he did realise that little fact he gave a wild leap aside—only just in time.

For a moment the swell of St. Jim's eyes met Cousin Ethel's. Ethel started, then glanced deliberately away, coldly. The car roared past, Handcock grinning; and Arthur Augustus, failing to keep his balance after his wild leap, collapsed against Mr. Sammy Thrupp. He and the porter went sprawling in a gasping heap.

"Yow!" gasped Mr. Thrupp. "By the great Horn Spoon—"

He sat up dazedly. Arthur Augustus was already scrambling to his feet.

"Hi!" yelled the swell of St. Jim's. "Hi! Stop! Bai Jove—"

Handcock either did not hear, or did not heed. At any rate, he did not stop. The car vanished round the bend, and Arthur Augustus stood gazing in dismay at his beautiful bunch of flowers—his peace-offering to Cousin Ethel. One of the wheels of the car had gone over them, and rendered them quite unfit for presentation to anybody.

Arthur Augustus picked up his topper, which had gone

flying from his head. There was, to complete his afflictions, a large dent in it now.

"Oh cwumps!" groaned the swell of St. Jim's.

Without so much as a glance at Mr. Thrupp, who was rising dazedly to his feet, Arthur Augustus jammed his battered topper on his aristocratic head, kicked the flattened flowers from his path, with a savage snort, and sailed out of the gates with as much dignity as he could muster.

He strode away towards St. Jim's with feelings too deep for words.

It was only too clear that Ethel would have nothing to do with him. She did not want his apology, however humble. She would not forgive him.

And she was spending the afternoon with Cyrus K. Handcock.

Arthur Augustus groaned as he stamped on down the road in the direction of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 5.

The Mysterious Americans!

"**S**AY!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy glanced round in surprise.

The swell of St. Jim's was crossing Wayland Moor, on his way back to the school from Spalding Hall, when that hail, in a very American voice, caused him to turn his head.

Two men had appeared from a little group of trees to the right of the road, and were hurrying towards him. From the cut of their clothes, though they were fairly well dressed, it was obvious that they were both Americans.

"Yaas?" queried the swell of St. Jim's, halting.

"Say, younker!" The larger of the two men, a broad-shouldered individual with a swarthy countenance and a long cigar projecting from the corner of his square mouth, addressed Arthur Augustus as the pair came up. "I guess you don't happen to be one o' those college boys from St. Jim's?"

Arthur Augustus surveyed them in surprise.

"Yaas!" he nodded. "As a mattah of fact—"

"That's a lucky break for us, then," grinned the man, with the cigar. "Say, tell me! Do you know a younker at the college named Handcock—Cyrus K. Handcock, from Neo York City?"

Again Arthur Augustus nodded, feeling more surprised than ever.

"Yaas, I know him," said the swell of St. Jim's, rather grimly. "But—"

"You know him?" cut in the other American, a short, thick-set individual with a protruding jaw. "That's swell. Maybe you can tell us where he sleeps?"

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "Where he sleeps, bai Jove?"

He stared at the men in utter bewilderment. The one with the cigar nodded hastily, and shot what looked rather like a warning glance at his companion, though Arthur Augustus failed to notice it.

"We aren't wise to these hyer English colleges," he explained quickly. "We—we're Amurricans, sightseeing in this country, and I guess we're interested in your schools. I guess they're mighty different from ours, most ways. I—I had a little bet with my friend here, whether you younkers sleep in separate rooms, or in dormitories, or how—"

Potts, the Office Boy. He's very light-headed



"Sure," nodded the man with protruding jaw. "We had a little bet, I guess. Well, kid, where do younkens sleep—hey?"

"In dormitories," explained Arthur Augustus. "Yaas, wathah! Ewery Form has its own dormitoway, you see, except the Sixth."

"What Form will young Hancock be in?" asked the man with the cigar eagerly.

"The Shell—"

"The Shell? I guess that sounds like the seashore to me," grinned the other American. "So young Hancock sleeps in the dormitory of the Shell Form—hey?"

"Yaas. But—"

"We're interested in him particularly, I guess," said the one with the cigar, cutting in, "because—because we know his pop quite a bit—see? Friends of his pop, I guess. That's us. Say, tell us more about it, kidoo. Where is this Shell dormitory?"

Arthur Augustus kindly explained, as well as he was able, just whereabouts in the School House building the Shell dormitory was situated. The two men listened intently.

It did not occur to Arthur Augustus that their intense interest in Hancock's sleeping quarters was rather surprising, despite the fact that they were—or said they were—friends of Hancock's father. What did surprise him was that friends of a multi-millionaire should be wearing clothes that proclaimed a decidedly second-class tailor. But then the swell of St. Jim's had an idea that even the wealthiest Americans had no idea of "decent clobber."

"So that's where he spends his nights, hey?" murmured the man with the cigar thoughtfully. "Thanks! Very interesting, I guess. But say, listen! Don't tell young Hancock we were asking about him. You see, we haven't time to pay him a visit—only around here to-day—and he might feel kind a hurt, I guess, that we didn't look him up."

"I guess he might," nodded the other.

"Oh, wathah not!" agreed Arthur Augustus quickly.

He felt rather relieved. He had been fearing that the two Americans would want him to deliver a message to Cyrus K. Hancock, and in the present state of friction between himself and the American boy, that would have been decidedly awkward for Arthur Augustus.

"Guess we'll be gettin' along!" murmured one of the pair. "S'long!"

"S'long!" grinned the other.

They turned and walked away along the road. Arthur Augustus watched them curiously for a moment or two, then turned and sailed away towards St. Jim's.

Yes, it was certainly lucky, he told himself, that they had not wanted a message delivered to Hancock!

He and Hancock were not likely to be on speaking terms for some while to come.

Arthur Augustus heaved a sigh as, some ten minutes later, he entered the gates of St. Jim's.

"I am afraid I am in the soup wopably with Ethel!" he muttered to himself. "And all through that wotten American!"

CHAPTER 6.

The Hold-Up in the Dorm!

BOOM! Boom!
Two o'clock had just boomed out through the night, from the school clock over the old gateway.

St. Jim's was sleeping.

Most of St. Jim's, at any rate, was sleeping. But there

was one fellow lying awake—a fellow in the Shell dormitory.

Cyrus K. Hancock, of New York City!

"Gee!" muttered Hancock to himself, as he lay staring thoughtfully at the ceiling. "She certainly is some dame!"

He was thinking of Ethel Cleveland. It was through thinking of her that he was still lying awake, though all the other juniors were breathing steadily in their beds—a few of them, such as George Alfred Grundy, snoring steadily.

There was no doubt that Hancock was badly "smitten" with Cousin Ethel—no shadow of doubt—no possible doubt whatever!

"Some dame!" repeated Cyrus K. Hancock emphatically to himself. "Fancy her being a relation of that sassy dude, Archibald, or whatever his name is! Can you beat it?"

He rubbed his ear, which was still thick, and grinned a trifle ruefully.

"Not that Archibald can't scrap some!" he admitted. "He may be a dude, but he can use his mitts, I guess!"

Suddenly he started.

He fancied he had heard a faint sound at one of the long windows of the dormitory that showed dim and grey on the far side of the long room.

Hancock sat up, puzzled, peering through the darkness. Again it came to his ears—a faint scraping sound in the stillness, as though someone were climbing the wall outside.

"Great Bohunkus!" muttered Hancock. "What's that?"

He slipped out of bed, and stole across to the line of windows. He could see nothing—could hear nothing now. But it was from one of the end windows that he believed the sound had come. He moved towards it.

"Maybe it was only some goldarned bird in the ivy!" he told himself. "But—"

He stopped by the window, and softly raised the lower sash, peering out.

The next moment a breathless ejaculation broke from him, as he found himself staring into the masked face of a man clinging to the sill outside. It was quite evident that the man had climbed by means of the ivy and a thick drain-pipe that ran down the wall at that point. So much Hancock had time to realise, but no more, before a snub-nosed automatic was thrust under his nose.

"Great Bohunkus!" ejaculated the American junior.

"Squawk, and I guess you'll get an ounce of lead that'll surprise you some!" growled the masked man, in a voice that Hancock had no difficulty in recognising as that of a fellow American. "Put 'em up!"

"Sure!" said Hancock coolly. "I guess I never argue with a gun, buddy!"

He put his arms up, surveying the man clinging to the sill curiously.

"Get a couple of yards back from this hyer window, an' be slick!" snapped the man softly. "I got you covered, plumb!"

Hancock obeyed. As soon as he was clear of the window, the man swung in over the sill, climbing into the dormitory without once failing to keep the American junior covered.

"And who in heck are you, anyway?" muttered Hancock calmly. "I guess you come from the United States, though. Chicago?" he queried dryly, as an afterthought.

The man peered at him.

"Come to think uv it," he breathed, "you're Amurrican!"

but he's a burden for all that!



You ain't an English kid? Say, are you Hancock? Are you old man Hancock's son?"

"I'll say Hancock sure is my name," nodded the American schoolboy coolly.

The man drew a sharp breath. An eager grin appeared on his face, underneath the black mask.

"Gee!" he whispered. "That's a lucky break! It sure is! I guess this saves a lotta trouble! I'd expected to have to stick up the whole outfit to find you. An' here you are, all ready to hand! If that ain't just dandy!"

Hancock was still outwardly very cool. But his brain was working fast.

"You sure know a lot about me," he murmured, with a shrug. "Maybe I can guess somethin' about you. I'll take a bet your name's Lessing—Leon Lessing."

The man in the mask chuckled and nodded. "It sure is!" he grinned boastfully. "So you know sumthin' about me?"

"Sure!" nodded Hancock. "You bet your sweet life I do! You're the guy that makes a little habit of kidnapping millionaires' kids, for a ransom. Think the pop wasn't scared to death over you way back home? He sure was!"

Hancock chuckled dryly.

"I guess this has its funny side," he admitted. "The pop thought I'd be plumb safe from you and your sort here in England. Didn't think you'd have the rind to follow me over, I guess!"

"I'll guess he didn't, sonny!" grinned Lessing. "Waal, your pop was wrong. And I guess I'm gonna get half a million bucks out a him, to ransom you!"

Still keeping Hancock covered with his wicked-looking automatic, the man unfastened his coat. A light rope-ladder, of strong, thin cord, was wound round his body. He loosened it, let it fall round his ankles, and stepped out of it.

"Now," he said grimly, "you'll fix that rope-ladder, sonny, down the wall outside. There are hooks for the sill. Better fix it O.K., too, because you've got to go down that. There's a friend o' mine waiting at the bottom for you, with a gun, too, so don't try any funny business, if you don't want lead-poisonin'!"

"I get you," said Hancock dryly.

He glanced round the dim dormitory.

The sleeping juniors were lying quietly enough, except for an occasional sleepy movement. There seemed little chance enough for Hancock to raise the alarm without getting a bullet—for he knew that Leon Lessing, the famous New York crook, who specialised in the kidnapping of millionaires' sons, would not hesitate to shoot!

"Get going!" snarled Lessing fiercely, under his breath. "Fix that ladder—and get out!"

"I guess I'll put a coat on first," said Hancock.

"You guess wrong!" snapped Lessing. "It's warm out there—you'll be O.K. 'Git movin'!"

He took a menacing step forward. The dull metal of the automatic gleamed ominously in the dim light that fell through the open window behind him. The weapon was fitted with a silencer, Hancock noted.

He stooped and picked up the rope-ladder and moved with it to the window. He flung it out, holding the hooked end, and it snaked down in the darkness.

"Say," breathed Hancock inquiringly, "what happens if I'm dumb enough to let this ladder drop—by accident?"

"By thunder! If you do—"

Lessing's harsh whisper snapped off.

Cyrus K. Hancock, in fumbling as if to fix the hooks inside the window, had allowed the ladder to slip from his fingers. It vanished over the sill, and there was a faint sound in the quad below as it struck the gravel.

Hancock faced the man with the mask coolly, and grinned.

"Gee!" he observed calmly. "Careless of me, I guess!"

"You—you little cub!"

The man named Leon Lessing took a quick step forward, thrusting the automatic into Hancock's stomach, while his eyes glittered, raging, down into those of the American schoolboy.

"Think you're clever, don't you?" he hissed.

"Never mind that!" grinned Hancock. "What happens now, Lessing? That's all I'm wondering, I guess. What happens now?"

CHAPTER 7.

The Tables Turned!

LESSING breathed hard.

A grim smile appeared on his face.

"Waal," he drawled, "I guess you've only got yourself to blame, you smart Alec, you! You've gotta climb down, anyhow. You've dropped the ladder, so you can climb down the ivy, the way I came up!"

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Hancock chuckled.

"Oh, yeah!" he murmured. "O.K. But suppose I slip and break my neck, Lessing? What happens then? I might, you know, easy enough. If that happened you couldn't hold me to ransom half as well dead as alive. Get me!"

The man seemed taken aback for a moment. There was something in what Hancock had pointed out! He did not want to take any risks of that nature with his captive.

Hancock was worth too much alive for Leon Lessing to take any chances of seeing him dead.

"I guess you're right!" the man nodded grimly. His eyes went to the door. "But if you think I can't get away with you O.K., you're all wrong! Turn round!"

Hancock obeyed, and felt the gun thrust into the small of his back.

"Now march!" ordered his captor savagely. "We're gonna get downstairs, an' let ourselves out, just as if we've paid an ordinary afternoon call, social-like! 'Git movin'!"

Hancock moved across the dormitory towards the door, the gun pressed hard into his back as he went. He could feel the chill of the metal through his thin pyjamas.

A desperate plan leapt suddenly into his mind. A grin came on to his face in the darkness.

There were pairs of boots standing at the foot of some of the beds. Grundy's big boots at the foot of one of the beds near the door were lying where George Alfred Grundy had thrown them down when undressing, well out into the room—Grundy was never noted for tidiness! But his untidiness was useful to Hancock now.

He deliberately walked into them, stumbling heavily forward.

There was a breathless ejaculation from the man in the mask. Not for a moment, however, did he guess that Hancock's "accident" had been deliberate.

"You little fool!"

Hancock scrambled up. He chuckled softly to himself. Already several of the Shell fellows were stirring beneath the sheets. A dim figure sat up near him. It was George Alfred Grundy.

"What the thump!" gasped Grundy, peering forward.

"What the dickens!" came another voice—that of Talbot. "Who's that?"

Leon Lessing glared round through the eyeholes of his mask. Dim though his figure was, it was clear to the waking juniors that it was a man standing there in the centre of the dormitory, and to one or two of them at least the gun in his hand was visible, outlined against a window behind him.

"Ow!" gasped the terrified voice of Clarence York Tompkins, the most timid fellow in the Shell. "Oh! Help! He's got a gun! Yooooooop!"

And with a squeal of terror Tompkins dived under the bedclothes, a quaking heap.

The next moment the dormitory was flooded with light, as Monty Lowther sprang from his bed and switched on the electric light.

There was a deathly silence in the dormitory as Lessing glared round. An imprecation broke from him. He put his back swiftly to the wall, his automatic sweeping round menacingly.

"Hands up!" he snarled. "All of you! Not a sound, or the kid that squawks gets plunked!"

Half the juniors had already scrambled from their beds. The others were all sitting up, staring at the apparition of the masked man, revealed in the sudden light, as though they thought they must be dreaming. But at the harsh command the hands of each junior rose above his head—with the sole exception of Clarence York Tompkins, who was still grovelling in abject terror under the bedclothes.

Again there was a tense, electric silence. Lessing stood breathing hard, an ugly twist to his lips. He was clearly at a loss to know what to do.

Though he had reckoned on having to hold up the whole dormitory when he came for Hancock, he had relied upon having his rope-ladder! It would have been easy enough to order Hancock to climb down into the quad by it, while he held up the rest of the juniors.

He had not quite realised, however, just what he was up against with a fellow like Cyrus K. Hancock!

The tense hush, as he glared round the dormitory, with the silent juniors standing or sitting up in bed with their arms raised above their heads, was broken by the cool, drawing voice of the American schoolboy.

"Say, buddies!" he said calmly. "Guess I'd better introduce you! Meet Mr. Leon Lessing, of New York City! One of our very best-known gangsters! He's come all the way from li'l ole New York to visit me!"

"What—what the dickens do you mean, Hancock?" breathed Tom Merry.

(Continued on page 12.)

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COUSIN ETHEL'S CHAMPION!

(Continued from page 10.)

"He's come to kidnap me—I guess that's what I mean!" said Hancock. His tone was suddenly grim. "He wants to prise half a million dollars out o' my pop for a ransom! But you're a bit dummed now, Lessing, eh?" he added, with a grin. "Go on—do something!"

"My hat!" breathed Tom Merry.

"A—giddy kidnapper!" gasped Grundy. "Crumbs!" There was a sound of movement from Tompkins' bed. A scared white face came peeping over the top of the sheets. But at sight of the man in the mask standing there with his levelled weapon, Clarence York Tompkins gave a despairing squeal and plunged out of sight once more beneath the heaving blankets.

Lessing laughed harshly.

"I guess it's the ivy for you, after all, young smarty!" he rasped, his eyes on Hancock. "I'll take the chance of you breaking your goldarned neck! Git movin'!"

For a moment Hancock hesitated. But the grim weapon in the man's hand was an unanswerable argument! He turned and walked to the open window.

"Climb out!" snarled Lessing.

Hancock swung a leg out over the sill as the nose of the automatic turned menacingly in his direction.

"Aw—all right!" he grunted.

It was at that moment that Tom Merry acted.

Seizing his chance, while the man's eyes were riveted upon the American junior climbing out over the sill, the captain of the Shell stooped and snatched up a boot lying near his feet. Like a flash, he sent it hurtling at the masked figure, and there was a yell of pain from the gangster as it struck his right arm. The automatic went flying from his fingers—and in another instant, at a yell from Tom, the Shell fellows were leaping at him.

"Collar him!" panted Tom fiercely.

Lessing gave a curse, and hit out savagely. Manners reeled back before a smashing blow, dazed and blinded for the moment. Kangaroo, the Australian junior, staggered back as well, and Frederick Burkett crashed over on top of him. But then odds told! With Tom Merry, Monty Lowther, Grundy, and Talbot, Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn and many others clinging to him wherever they could hang on, Lessing was dragged to the floor and submerged beneath a struggling mass of Shell fellows.

"Good work, I guess!" chuckled Cyrus K. Hancock, as he climbed coolly back into the dormitory.

"Quick!" panted Tom Merry. "Fetch the prefects—"

"Sure!" grinned Hancock.

He raced from the dormitory.

Lessing was still struggling fiercely beneath the swarm of juniors piled on top of him. Many of them though there were, it was not easy to hold the man down, as they were finding to their cost.

Bernard Glyn was knocked flying, and so was Wilkins and Monty Lowther. For a moment Lessing almost fought free, but a crashing blow on the jaw from Tom Merry's fist—though the man was down, it was no time for standing on ceremony!—dazed the scoundrel for a moment or two, and he was securely pinned down as he lay gasping.

And then, from the open window, there came a sudden harsh command:

"Hands up, the lotta you! Quick!"

A second man was glaring into the dormitory, with a blunt-nosed automatic gripped in his fist—a man, with a heavy, protruding chin, whom Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, had he been present, would have recognised despite his mask, as the other transatlantic gentleman of the pair who had accosted him that afternoon on Wayland Moor.

Lessing's companion, at the fall of the rope ladder, had guessed that something was wrong. He had already started to climb up, by way of the ivy, when the light had flashed on behind the long row of windows above.

He had arrived on the scene now at a decidedly awkward moment for the Shell juniors!

With one leg swung over the sill, the new arrival repeated his grim command.

CHAPTER 8.

Escaped!

"O H crumbs!" panted George Alfred Grundy.

There was no help for it!

One by one the juniors let go their hold of the ruffian on the floor, and stood with raised arms, facing the scoundrel at the window. Lessing staggered to his feet.

He reeled across towards his companion. He had had a pretty rough handling, and he was still dazed and breathless. "We gotta get out of this!" he panted.

"Where's the kid?" demanded the other fiercely.

"Gone!" snarled Lessing. "He ain't here! It's no good—we gotta quit!"

The other scoundrel did not argue with his leader! He vanished, clinging to the ivy as he climbed swiftly down towards the dark quad below. Lessing, with a last baleful glare at the juniors, swung over the sill, and vanished, too. As he disappeared from sight, there came running footsteps in the passage outside. The tall figures of Kildare, Darrell, North, Baker, and several other Sixth-Formers, racing into the dormitory.

"Quick!" yelled Tom Merry. "They've gone—down the ivy!"

Kildare rushed to the window and leaned out, staring down.

"Look out!" panted Tom. "They're armed—"

Even as he shouted the warning a bullet came whining up past Kildare's head, as the man with the gun shot upwards from where he clung to the ivy. The shot missed the captain's temple by an inch. His face was white as he jumped swiftly back.

"Good heavens!" he breathed. "They must be caught—"

But that was easier said than done!

By the time the prefects, with Mr. Railton, the young Housemaster of the School House, had reached the quad—Mr. Railton carrying a heavy stick—the fugitive crooks had reached the ground, and made good their escape. There was no sign of them, though Mr. Railton and the Sixth-Formers scoured the quad and the school premises for a long while.

Leon Lessing and his accomplice had gone!

"Well, of all the dummies—"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Blake—"

"You silly ass, Gussy!"

"Look heah, Lowther—"

"You're hopeless!"

"Bai Jove! I considah—"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the centre of a big crowd of Fourth-Formers and Shell fellows, in the junior Common-room. His face was pink with exasperation.

It was during first break, next morning. Arthur Augustus, in leaving Mr. Lathom's Form-room after first lesson, had suddenly connected in his mind his meeting with the two mysterious Americans on Wayland Moor with the staggeringly daring attempt to kidnap Cyrus K. Hancock from the Shell dormitory.

He remembered how interested the two transatlantic gentlemen had been in the exact whereabouts of the dormitory in which Hancock slept—information which Arthur Augustus had graciously supplied them with!

He had told his suspicions to Jack Blake. Blake had listened in utter amazement. So had the other juniors whom Arthur Augustus had excitedly informed of his meeting with the men on the moor. And at the end of his story Arthur Augustus had found himself not being congratulated on his cleverness in connecting the two incidents, but roundly abused for having failed to suspect the two mysterious strangers in the first place.

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Gussy, you ass! Do you mean to say you didn't twig there was something fishy about them? Particularly when they told you not to mention it to Hancock?"

"No, deah boy. You see—"

"You dummy!" groaned Blake. "If only you'd had the brains of a blessed maggot, you'd have smelt a rat, and told somebody! Hancock would probably have guessed then what was in the wind, knowing all about this chap Lessing as he did, and the police could have been put on to them yesterday, before they had a chance of jolly nearly kidnapping old Hancock!"

"Look heah, Blake—"

"Br-r-r!"

"I wegard that sound as uttably senseless, Blake—"

"There's one thing," interrupted Ralph Reckness Cardew of the Fourth. "If old Gussy had had the sense to smell a rat he might have robbed St. Jim's of the biggest jolly thrill it's known for years!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Rather!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"I considah—"

"Anyway," cut in Talbot, "I don't suppose Lessing & Co. will try again to kidnap the giddy American! With the police hunting for them now, they'll have to make themselves jolly scarce! I expect they'll get out of England while they've still got a chance."

"That's so," nodded Tom Merry.

"Say, what's the pow-wow all about?" broke in a drawing voice pleasantly.

It was Cyrus K. Hancock who had just strolled into the Common-room.

"Tell Hancock about those chaps you met, you dummy!" growled Herries.

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus was still not on speaking terms with Cyrus K. Hancock!

"Sure, put me wise, Archibald!" grinned Hancock.

"My name is not Archibald!" hooted Arthur Augustus.

And, with a frigid glare at the grinning American, the swell of St. Jim's sailed with great dignity from the Common-room, followed by the chuckles of the School House juniors.

CHAPTER 9. Lessing Again.

"O gee!"

Cyrus K. Hancock sighed.

It was the evening of the following day, and the American junior was seated in a chair by the window in Study No. 10. Tom Merry & Co. were busy with their prep at the table.

"Gee!"

Tom Merry glanced up at the new occupant of Study No. 10.

"What the thump's the matter with you?" he demanded, with a grin. "You keep sighing like a blessed burst tyre!"

Cyrus K. Hancock grinned a little ruefully.

"I guess I've got somethin' to sigh about, too," he ejaculated.

"Three thousand miles between you and Noo York City?" chuckled Manners.

"No," said Hancock. "Not home-sick—no, sir. I guess I like England pretty well. It's swell. About a thousand years behind the times; but I guess—"

"Look here, you ass—" snorted Monty Lowther.

"Sorry!" said Hancock hastily. "It's swell, anyway. I guess I like being here. St. Jim's is dandy. But—"

"What's the blessed groaning about, then?" queried Tom.

"It's tough," sighed Hancock. "Gee, it's tough! I guess I was wrong to make the promise. But I did, so—"

"What promise?" yelled Monty Lowther, in great exasperation. "Don't keep burbling on! Tell us what's wrong!"

"I promised Ethel," said Hancock gloomily, "to quit chewing-gum."

The Terrible Three stared at Hancock. Then they stared at each other. A yell of laughter rang through Study No. 10.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nothing to cackle at, darn it!" snorted Hancock.

"When I saw her this evening—" chuckled Tom.

"Yeah," nodded Hancock, colouring. "She told me she didn't like me chewing gum. I guess I may have been a poor mutt, but you know what it is when a dame asks you something. I promised to quit chewing, like a poor goof—"

He broke off gloomily. Apparently to Cyrus K. Hancock the future seemed rather a dreary time for him, without being able to chew Hancock's world-famous gum.

"Well, that's a good thing, anyway," said Tom Merry heartily. "Good for Ethel."

"What?" yelled Hancock. "For the love of Mike! I guess when I see her to-morrow I'll ask to be let off my promise. Don't expect she will, though," he added gloomily. Then he brightened. "Anyway, she's a great dame. I mean to take her for a run in the auto again to-morrow afternoon—"

"Sorry, Hancock," cut in Tom. "Can't be did! I want you to run in the School House team against the New House. There's a seven-mile cross-country stunt on. You're an athletic sort of chap, although you don't play cricket. I'm putting your name down on the list."

Hancock beamed.

"Say, that's great!" he ejaculated. "I'll put off seeing Ethel till the evening." He rose to his feet. "Waal, I guess I'll just push along and see Mrs. Taggles a minute. May as well put her wise that I won't be worrying her any more to stock Hancock's gum."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cyrus K. Hancock left the study. He had scarcely gone when there was a tap on the door. The elegant figure of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy appeared. On seeing that the American junior was not in the study, a look of relief appeared on the aristocratic features of the swell of St. Jim's. He stepped into the room.

"Hallo, Gussy! Why the gloomy countenance?" grinned Tom.

"I wathah wanted to ask your advice, deah boys,"

(Continued on next page.)

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explained Arthur Augustus gravely. "About Ethel, you know."

Monty Lowther grinned, and winked at his chums.

"Ethel still ratty with you?" he inquired.

"I'm afraid she is," nodded Arthur Augustus forlornly.

"It's wotten! I am afraid I put my foot in it vewy badly with Ethel. All though that wottah Hancock— He broke off, and produced a letter from his pocket. "This has just awwived 'by the evenin' post. A lettah of mine to Ethel. She has sent it back unopened."

"My hat!"

"It's wotten," grunted Arthur Augustus. "I don't know what to do about it. The deah gal is vewy offended indeed. She won't see me when I go to Spaldin' Hall, and now she's sent this lettah back unopened. What ought I to do?"

"You might die a lingering death," suggested Monty Lowther solemnly. "She'd probably forgive you as you lay expiring, old chap."

"Bai Jove! Pway do not be an uttah ass, Lowthah!" Arthur Augustus surveyed the humorist of the Fourth very frigidly through his gleaming monocle. "I had wathah thought of goin' ovah to Spaldin' Hall again to-morrow, with some flowahs and a box of chocolates, don't you know, and—"

"Nothing doing, Gussy," chuckled Tom. "I want you to run in the cross-country to-morrow against the New House."

"Oh—oh, vewy well, deah boy! In that ase, I'll go ovah and twy and see Ethel in the evenin'—"

"Good idea," grinned Manners. "Hancock's going, too. You'll enjoy seeing him, I know."

The Terrible Three chuckled. Arthur Augustus goggled at them in utter dismay.

"Oh, bai Jove! In that case, I had bettah nos go! Blow Hancock! The wottah has no wight to use so much of Ethel! I considah—"

"Sorry, but we're busy with our prep, old chap," grinned Tom. "Do you mind saying what you think of old Hancock in the passage, instead of in here?"

Arthur Augustus snorted and departed, followed by the chuckles of the Terrible Three.

"Poor old Gussy!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "He's in the soup with Ethel all right. Hancock's cut him out properly."

"Phew! Oh, gad!

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was puffed.

It was the following afternoon, and the cross-country run against the New House was in full swing.

It was a gruelling course, over seven miles of lonely moorland beyond Wayland for the most part, and the sun was much too hot to be pleasant. Arthur Augustus, trotting on at a steady pace, was about half-way round the course, and he was very hot and perspiring.

There were no other runners in sight. The field had strung out long ago, and the swell of St. Jim's, trotting along a quiet lane between high banks, was alone.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus had turned a corner, to find a long, straight stretch of road before him, in which a solitary figure could be seen—a white-clad figure in running kit.

It was Cyrus K. Hancock.

Hence Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's sudden exclamation.

The swell of St. Jim's had no wish to meet Hancock. But he was clearly overhauling the American gradually, and it looked as though the two of them would be running abreast before very long, which, in the circumstances, would be a very awkward state of things, in the opinion of Arthur Augustus.

"Oh deah!"

But Arthur Augustus certainly did not intend to slow his pace up for Hancock. After all, it would be something to get home before his rival. He quickened his pace, his aristocratic features set with the grim resolve to pass the American schoolboy.

Hancock grinned as, glancing back at the sound of footsteps behind him, he caught sight of the perspiring swell of St. Jim's. He slowed his pace, allowing Arthur Augustus to overhail him, then quickened again so that the two were running abreast.

"Why, it's Marmaduke!" chuckled Hancock, who seemed very fresh and cool.

Arthur Augustus gave a furious snort.

"My name is not Marmaduke, you boundah—"

"Sorry! I mean, Fitz Percy—"

"Look heah, Hancock—"

Arthur Augustus did not get any farther. As the two

ran on round the next bend in the lane, a startled gasp broke from the American junior.

A motor-car was drawn up at the edge of the road, its occupants standing beside it with levelled automatics in their hands. Arthur Augustus recognised them. They were the two men with whom he had spoken on Wayland Moor.

Hancock had recognised them, too.

"Lessing!"

"Sure," grinned Leon Lessing, tapping his automatic



Like a flash Tom Merry sent the boot hurtling at the mask

in a meaning way as the two St. Jim's juniors came to a startled halt. "Thought we'd quit these parts, kid? Waul, we haven't. And I guess this time we've got you!"

CHAPTER 10.

The Gangsters' Lair!

"B—BAI Jove!" stuttered Arthur Augustus.

"Why, it's the dude!" grinned Lessing's companion, the man with the granite jaw. "It sure is!"

Hancock stood surveying the pair coolly enough.

"Waul?" he drawled. "What happens now?"

"Hop in!" snapped Lessing, opening the door of the big closed car. He cast a swift glance up and down the lane. It was utterly deserted. "Don't get fresh, either! Be slick!"

Hancock's fists had clenched. But in the lonely lane, with the two armed ruffians covering him, resistance was clearly useless.

"O.K." said Hancock calmly. "A pity I came on this run. Looks to me as if it'll cost the pop a million bucks!"

"It sure will!" grinned Lessing.

Hancock, under the menace of those levelled weapons, stepped coolly into the car, and sat down. Lessing quickly followed him, sitting beside the kidnapped youngster, the gun thrust in Hancock's ribs. The other scoundrel jumped into the driving-seat.

"If you squawk as we pass anybody on the road, I guess you'll be plumb sorry!" snarled Lessing.

"Don't you worry," drawled Hancock. "I never argue with a gat!"

He glanced at Arthur Augustus, standing dazedly in the road.

"So long, Reginald!"

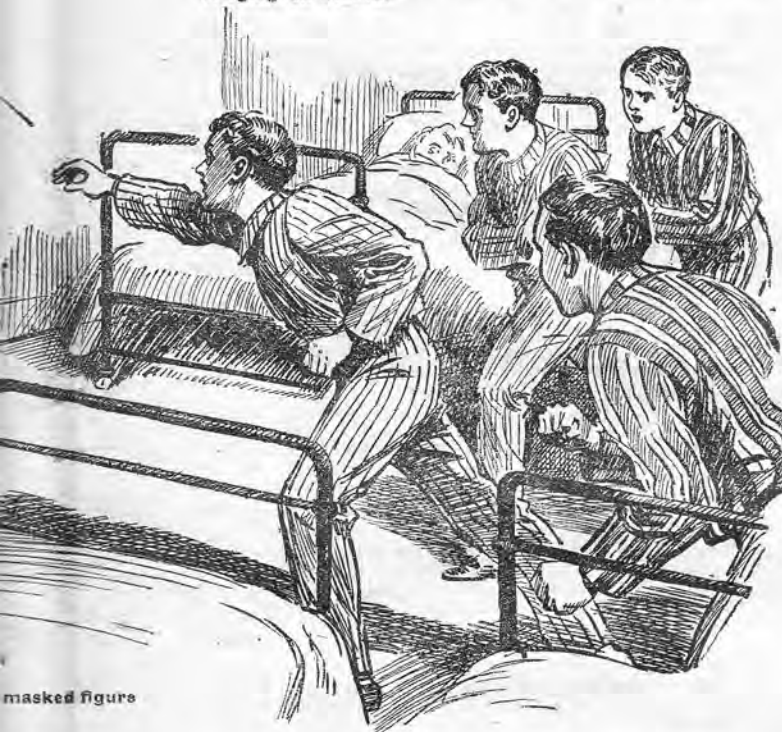
"G-g-gweat Scott!" stuttered the swell of St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus was wondering if it could be real, or whether he was dreaming the amazing scene. For such a thing to happen in a peaceful English lane was almost too staggering to be true, he felt.

The man at the wheel of the car slipped it into gear, as Lessing banged the door shut. The car began to roll forward up the lane.

Arthur Augustus suddenly collected his scattered wits.

He sprinted forward as the car accelerated, and with a breathless spring, climbed on to the big luggage grid at the back of the car, out of sight of the little window at the rear. The car swept away up the lane, churning up the dust—with the gasping swell of St. Jim's clinging on behind.



masked figure

"Bai Jove!" breathed Arthur Augustus, as he clung on for dear life. "M-my only hat! Daylight kidnappin'! Oh, the scoundwels!"

But one thing was certain. The men had not paid him another thought, had not seen his last-minute rush for the luggage-grid! He was safe enough from observation there—and where that car went, there would Arthur Augustus D'Arcy go, also!

"Oh deah!"

Arthur Augustus gasped. The luggage-grid was anything but a comfortable seat—particularly as the car was travelling fast, and had been for some time, over very bumpy by-roads, far from the usual traffic routes.

"Yaroooop!"

The swell of St. Jim's gave a breathless groan as the car flew over a large bump, almost unseating him.

They had passed scarcely anyone in the lonely country roads during the five miles or so that they had covered since the hold-up on the moor. And the few people that had been on the road had been going in the opposite direction, as luck would have it, so that their backs had been to Arthur Augustus as the car swept past. He had not dared to shout out, for fear of betraying his presence. His only hope was that someone would see him, someone to whom he could signal. But that hope seemed to be growing very small indeed!

The car was slowing down at last, as if approaching its

destination. It swung round through a big, rusty gateway, and roared up a long drive, between dark, overgrown trees.

Arthur Augustus, peering round the corner of the back of the car very uneasily, saw a large, forbidding-looking mansion some distance ahead.

An empty house, it seemed to be. But it was evidently Leon Lessing's headquarters.

"Oh cwumbs!"

Unless he was to be discovered, Arthur Augustus had to act quickly.

The car was travelling fairly slowly now. But even so, it was not going to be an easy job to drop off the carrier safely! But it had to be done, and, with a stifled gasp, the swell of St. Jim's jumped off.

"Yow!"

He went rolling on the gravel, tearing his immaculate running-kit and grazing his legs and arms badly. But he was unhurt. He scrambled up breathlessly, and dived into the trees beside the drive as the car went speeding on towards the house.

From the concealment of the trees Arthur Augustus crouched, peering out.

He saw the car stop before the stone steps that led up to the big front door. The door swung open, and a rascally-looking man appeared. Though he was some distance away, the swell of St. Jim's caught his words as he cried in a very American accent:

"O.K., chief?"

Lessing jumped out.

"Sure, Lefty! We've gotten old Hiram's kid all right! Come out, you!"

Cyrus K. Hancock appeared from the car, and was hustled into the house. The big front door slammed shut.

"Bai Jove!" breathed Arthur Augustus. "Oh, cwikey! I wondah what I had bettah do?"

It was certainly a problem! The house was a lonely one—terribly lonely. If Arthur Augustus set off in search of the nearest police-station, it might be many miles before he found one. By the time he could bring police to the spot, the scoundrels might have gone with their captive.

Even the help of a few yokels might be hard to obtain—and, perhaps, would not prove of very much use against these armed scoundrels, even if he obtained it!

"Oh deah!"

Arthur Augustus was "up against" Cyrus K. Hancock over the little matter of Cousin Ethel. But in such circumstances as these, the swell of St. Jim's was not thinking of his personal feud.

At all costs, he meant to rescue the American schoolboy! But how?

"Bettah see how the land lies, anyway, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus rose to his feet, and keeping well in cover of the trees, which grew up close to the side of the house, he stole forward towards the gloomy building!

CHAPTER 11.

Gussy to the Rescue!

"W^HERE the dickens—"

"What the thump—"

"Talk about the giddy vanishing trick!"

"Blow the silly asses!"

The School House juniors in the Common-room were divided between bewilderment and disgust.

The cross-country run had finished long ago, and thanks to the non-appearance of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Cyrus K. Hancock, the New House had won by a few points.

Had the missing juniors succeeded in completing the course at all, victory would have gone to the School House, and when the time-limit came and went, indignation was high. But as time went on, and still there was no sign of the two vanished runners, bewilderment began to take the place of wrath.

"It's thundering rum!" exclaimed Tom Merry, frowning.

"The two asses must have met somewhere on the run, and had another scrap, if you ask me," growled Herries. "That ass Gussy is like a bear with a sore head when he runs up against that blessed American!"

"But hang it all, they wouldn't scrap on the run!" said Tom, shaking his head. "No, it can't be that. I jolly well can't understand it!"

He glanced at his watch.

"Even if they'd walked it," he said grimly, "they could have been in an hour ago!"

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"He, he, he!" There was a snigger from Baggy Trimble. "Perhaps the two asses have gone off to see Cousin Ethel! They're both mashed on Ethel! He, he, he! I expect—oh! Yarooough!"

Baggy broke off with a wild howl, as Manners' boot landed on the seat of his tight trousers.

"Shut up, you fat beast!" snapped Manners. "Keep Ethel's name out of this!"

"Shan't!" said Baggy defiantly. "I'll say just what I think. I'm not like you. You're frightened to say that this new American kid's spoons on Ethel. What ever would poor old Figgins say if he knew someone else was trying to win his girl's hand? He'd scrag him alive, I know he would!"

Manners gripped the fat Fourth-Former by the shoulder.

"Look here, you fat ass, you've said enough. Another word, and I'll spifficate you!" He raised his foot threateningly. "I'll give you one second—get while the going's good!"

Baggy glared, and rolled away.

A tall figure appeared at the Common-room door. It was Eric Kildare. He was in cricket costume.

"Any of you kids care to come along and do a bit of fielding at the Sixth Form nets?" he asked.

"I say, Kildare!" exclaimed Tom Merry, before anyone could answer. "Something rather rummy's happened. I was wondering if Mr. Railton ought to be told. Gussy and Hancock haven't come back from the cross-country run! They've done the giddy vanishing trick!"

"That's queer," said Kildare sharply. "They ought to have been in a long time ago! Hang it, I think Mr. Railton ought to know—something may have happened to them!"

"I'll go and tell him," said Tom quietly, and left the Common-room.

When another hour had passed, still without any sign of the missing juniors, the excitement at St. Jim's grew to a high pitch. Mr. Railton was seriously alarmed, and so was the Head, when he was informed of the mystery. He telephoned to the police; but neither the police nor the local hospitals could throw any light on the strange disappearance of Hancock and the swell of St. Jim's.

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Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Cyrus K. Hancock, the School House rivals, had vanished utterly!

"Great Bohunkus!"

Cyrus K. Hancock gave that exclamation.

The American junior was sitting with his hands deep in his pockets, his legs thrust out in front of him, as he tilted back the wooden chair he was seated upon in an upstairs room of the big old mansion where he was a prisoner.

The room was almost empty of furniture. A rough deal table, dusty and rickety, stood in the centre of the bare room, and there were one or two chairs. The wallpaper was peeling off the walls, and there were cobwebs in plenty. It was a dismal-looking apartment, if ever there was one. And Cyrus K. Hancock, who had been gazing round through his horn-rimmed glasses at his surroundings, gave a dry laugh as his sudden exclamation broke from him.

"Great Bohunkus! I guess this is a swell room to stick a guest in!"

He glanced across at the man seated in one of the other chairs, near the window—the man called Lefty.

Lefty had an automatic lying on the table in front of him, within easy reach. He had been left to guard the prisoner. Lessing was taking no chances with the son of the chewing-gum multi-millionaire!

The man grinned.

"Sure it's a swell room!" he agreed. "Glad you like it! 'Cos I guess you've gotta get used to it! You'll be here long enough, I guess, while we're fixing things with your pop!"

He took a cigar from his waistcoat pocket and jabbed it into the corner of his mouth. He was an evil-looking scoundrel, with a gaunt, sallow face and black, beady eyes. He lit his cigar, and blew a cloud of evil-smelling smoke into the air.

"Phew!" Hancock surveyed the cigar critically. "That smells like a gas-leak, I guess. If you're gonna smoke many of those, I'll rent a gasmask."

The man glared at him.

"Don't talk so much!" he snarled.

Hancock grinned calmly. With his eye he was measuring the distance between himself and the automatic on the table. But he realised that it would be futile to attempt to gain possession of the weapon from where he sat. He rose to his feet, and began to stroll about the room, whistling. But as he drew near the table, the crook picked up the weapon.

"Keep away from this gun!" he grinned mockingly.

"That's your side of the room, I guess! Keep to it. See?"

"O.K.," nodded Hancock, with a grin.

He returned to his seat.

Suddenly he started.

From where he sat he had a full view of the window behind his guard. There was a balcony outside, the rusty iron rail round it choked with untrimmed creepers. And above the tangle of creepers, a head was rising into view.

Someone was climbing up on to the balcony!

"Gee!" breathed Hancock, staring. "What in thunder—"

He shifted his eyes quickly as the man in the chair by the table glanced towards him. He must not make the scoundrel look round by watching the window too intently! But a few moments later, as if casually, he glanced at the window again.

"Great Bohunkus!" gasped Cyrus K. Hancock to himself.

A white-clad figure was crouching on the balcony outside—a familiar figure.

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of St. Jim's.

For some moments Hancock was almost stupefied with astonishment.

How the swell of St. Jim's came to be there was an utter mystery to the American junior. But there was no doubt about it—it was no daydream! Arthur Augustus was out there, signing to him through the window. And if his guard turned his head, the scoundrel would see him!

Hancock rose abruptly to his feet to distract the man's attention. But even as he did so, some sixth sense, or perhaps a faint sound from without, caused the scoundrel to glance over his shoulder. A breathless shout of astonishment broke from him as he saw the crouching figure outside the window.

He leapt to his feet, and his hand shot out towards the automatic on the table.

But already Hancock had darted forward. He knocked the man's hand aside, and it was his own fingers that closed on the butt of the weapon. As he snatched it up, there was a shattering crash of glass.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, flinging all further caution to the winds, had seized a slate that was lying on the balcony, fallen from the roof, and hurled it at the window. The next moment the swell of St. Jim's was struggling in through the jagged opening in the glass.

The American crook, however, was not troubling about Arthur Augustus just then!

He leapt at Handcock, and before the American youngster could bring the automatic up, he had been knocked flying by a terrific blow between the eyes. He crashed to the floor, and the automatic went spinning across the room.

Lefty made a spring for it, with a furious snarl.

But Arthur Augustus was on him like a flash. An arm came round the man's throat from behind, jerking up his chin, almost throttling him. He struggled desperately, but the swell of St. Jim's clung on.

"Quick, deah boy! The weyolvah—"

Cyrus K. Handcock was struggling up dazedly. His head was swimming from the sickening blow that had been dealt him. But at the panting words of Arthur Augustus, he pulled himself together, and reeled stumblingly to where the automatic lay gleaming dully on the floor.

With a terrific wrench, the scoundrelly crook flung Arthur Augustus off, and hurled himself at Handcock. But he was too late. He was brought up abruptly in front of a levelled muzzle, with the grinning face of Cyrus K. Handcock above it.

"Stick 'em up, Lefty!" chuckled Handcock grimly.

With a stifled curse, the man obeyed. Arthur Augustus picked himself up, gasping, from the floor.

"Wippin', deah boy—"

He broke off sharply, listening.

Pounding footsteps were coming up the stairs within the house. Evidently the sound of the struggle had reached the ears of Leon Lessing and his other accomplices, and they were on their way to the room!

"Oh cwumbs!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's.

He leapt across towards the door. There was a key in the lock, and a heavy bolt. As the footsteps came racing along the passage outside, he shot home the bolt, and turned the key. The next instant the door shook violently.

"Lefty!" roared the voice of Leon Lessing.

But it was Handcock who answered him.

"Get away from that door, Lessing, or I guess I'll drill a hole through it!" he shouted. He took a step towards Lefty. "Get back against that wall!" he snapped. "Quick! And put your face to it! Jump to it!"

With a snarl, the man obeyed. He stood with his arms raised, facing the opposite wall. Handcock glanced swiftly at the door. It was quivering beneath reverberating blows from without.

"I guess I warned you, Lessing!" cried Cyrus K. Handcock grimly, and sent a bullet whining through the door.

There was a gasping cry from the other side of it. Someone was hurt!

The blows on the door ceased abruptly.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and the American junior glanced at one another. Handcock grinned, and shifted the automatic to his left hand.

"We're in a pretty awkward hash here, bully!" he said. "We'll be lucky if we get out of this dump, I guess! But while there's the chance—what about shaking hands, Percy?"

Arthur Augustus did not, on this occasion, point out that his name was not Percy.

He shook!

CHAPTER 12.

In Desperate Straits!

FROM outside the door came faint, angry mutterings, and the groaning of the man who was hurt.

Handcock glanced swiftly at the window.

"Quick!" he breathed. "It's our only chance!"

We gotta hop that way—"

He broke off, as there was a sudden movement on the part of Lefty.

"Keep still, you!" rapped out Handcock fiercely. "If you don't, I guess it'll be a pleasure to plug you!"

"O.K.!" gasped Lefty hastily. "I'll do nuthin', son!"

"Come along, deah boy!" muttered Arthur Augustus.

He hurried across to the window. Handcock backed after him, keeping a watchful eye on the man standing facing the wall. The swell of St. Jim's swung open the shattered window and stepped quickly out on to the balcony.

Even as he did so the sound of running footsteps came to his ears from round the corner of the building.

A man came racing into sight, a man with an automatic in his hand. It was the gentleman with the protruding jaw.

He caught sight of Arthur Augustus on the balcony, and a hoarse cry broke from him.

"Oh deah!" groaned Arthur Augustus, jumping quickly back into the room. "Too late, deah boy! We're cut off!"

"Oh, Mike!"

Handcock's face set in grim, desperate lines.

"Say!"

The voice of Leon Lessing had come to them through the door.

"Keep clear of that door, you skunk!" cried Handcock fiercely.

"Listen, kid!" snarled Lessing's voice. "You're done! You can't get out! Can't you see that? We've got you trapped! Better quit playing the fool, or you'll get hurt some!"

"Aw—hire a hall!" cried Handcock impatiently.

Arthur Augustus adjusted his monocle and surveyed the American junior ruefully.

"I say, deah boy!" he muttered. "This is pweetty wotten, don't you know? Whatevah are we to do? We're twapped all wight, as he says, with that wottah underneath the window! Oh deah!"

"Yeah, it's awkward!" grunted Handcock.

Again there came a shattering blow on the door. The scoundrels without were apparently taking their chance of another bullet.

Crash, crash, crash!

The thick old door shook and quivered. A long splintering gash appeared in one of the upper panels. Someone was evidently beating on it with a heavy chair.

Crack!

Again Handcock's automatic spoke, drilling a hole clean through the woodwork. Once more the blows upon the door ceased abruptly. But at the same moment there was a gloating laugh from the man called Lefty.

"Now—" he began fiercely, and swung round, dropping his hands.

"Keep back, you!" shouted Handcock, flashing the automatic round to cover him.

"I guess not!" grinned the man evilly. "Say, you didn't reckon there were only a couple of shells in that gat, hey?"

He came leaping forward.

There was a startled gasp from Handcock, whose face had gone suddenly white as he realised that he was now utterly unarmed.

"Bai Jove!" panted Arthur Augustus. "Look out!"

The swell of St. Jim's sprang forward, thrusting out a scratched leg as the scoundrel came forward in a menacing rush. The man went sprawling over it, at Handcock's feet. He struggled up, cursing—and Handcock, with desperate strength, brought the butt of the automatic crashing down upon the rogue's head.

With a groan the man dropped in a heap, and lay crumpled, motionless.

"Oh, wippin'!" panted Arthur Augustus.

Lessing and the others in the passage had heard their unlucky accomplice's shout, however. They knew now that Handcock was unarmed.

Crash, crash, crash!

Splintering blows were raining upon the panels. At any moment the door would burst open, it was clear.

(Continued on next page.)

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Handcock and Arthur Augustus felt sick with their feeling of utter helplessness.

"The window!" muttered Arthur Augustus, licking his dry lips. "It's our one chance, deah boy!"

"Sure!" nodded Handcock. He seemed amazingly cool. "I guess we've got to risk that guy waiting out there for us! If we jump together he'll get one of us, maybe, but the other might get clear! And, anyway, he won't shoot to kill!"

"B-bai Jove! I—I hope not, deah boy!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

Crash, crash!

The door was still standing up valiantly before the onslaught of Leon Lessing and his companions, as the two hurried to the window.

Arthur Augustus crept out on to the balcony and peered over. Instantly there was a chuckle from below. The man standing tip underneath was staring up, grinning. He tapped his automatic.

"Hallo, sonnies!" he said viciously. "Not thinkin' of comin' this way? I'm waitin' for you, I guess!"

Arthur Augustus drew back with a gasp. Suddenly Handcock seized his arm.

"Great Bohunkus!" Handcock's eyes were gleaming. "I've got a peach of an idea!"

He dragged the swell of St. Jim's swiftly back into the room. It echoed to the crashing upon the door.

"The table, buddy!" breathed Handcock. "We'll drop the table on that guy—and if we're lucky it'll settle him plumb!"

"Gweat Scott!" The face of the swell of St. Jim's lit up. "That's a gweat wheeze! Bai Jove, yaas!"

They seized the table. It was fairly small, though heavy, and there was room enough to carry it out of the open windows that gave on to the balcony. Bearing it between them, they crept out.

"Now!" muttered Handcock. "Over she goes, Percy!"

For the second time that afternoon, Arthur Augustus did not bother to point out that his name was not Percy.

With a heave they swung the table over the creeper-clad rail and sent it hurtling downwards.

There was a startled shout from the man below.

Utterly taken by surprise as he was, he had no time to leap aside, though he made a desperate attempt to do so.

Crash!

The flying table landed on his head, sending him spinning. He lay on the gravel, silent and still, completely stunned. Handcock, peering down over the edge, gave a gasp of triumph.

"We've outed him, sure!" he panted.

A moment later the two St. Jim's juniors were swinging over the rail, and dropping to earth. As they jumped they heard the door of the room crash in, and the pounding footsteps of Leon Lessing and several others thunder into the room.

Arthur Augustus went sprawling as he landed on the gravel beside the unconscious man. He staggered to his feet. Handcock was already up again.

"Come on, buddy!" yelled the American junior.

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

They raced towards the trees, across the narrow strip of lawn. The big figure of Leon Lessing appeared on the balcony.

"After them!" roared the gangster. "By thunder, we'll catch 'em yet!"

A shot came humming over the heads of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Cyrus K. Handcock, as they plunged in among the trees.

CHAPTER 13. Pursued!

ZIP!

The bullet came cutting through the leaves above them as they tore along side by side. Arthur Augustus gave a startled gasp.

"Oh! Bai Jove! They're pottin' at us, by gad—"

"Come on!" panted Handcock. "Run, buddy!"

The American junior flung a swift glance over his shoulder. They were out of sight of the kidnappers now, but through the low-growing foliage he could see Lessing and two other men dropping from the balcony into the garden, in hot pursuit.

Cyrus K. Handcock's face set in grim lines.

It was going to be a difficult job to get clear of Lessing's lair. But of one thing he was certain—the scoundrels would be very careful with their guns. Though they had fired to frighten the youngsters into surrender, the rogues certainly would not wish to injure them, for their own ends.

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Handcock would be an awkward prisoner if he were injured. They were desperate to capture him again, but they wanted him caught unharmed!

Again a bullet came zipping through the trees above them.

"Oh deah!" panted Arthur Augustus. "Wun, deah boy!"

"Don't you worry about their shooting!" muttered Handcock breathlessly. "That's jest to scare us, I guess!"

It was dim and shadowy under the trees. Both the St. Jim's juniors were in running kit, with rubber-soled shoes, and their footsteps made practically no sound as they raced away from the house, twisting and dodging among the trunks of the big trees in an attempt to throw their pursuers off their track.

But they could hear behind them the crashing pursuit of Lessing and his two satellites hanging grimly to their heels, nevertheless. They heard Lessing's raucous voice shouting furiously to them to stop, and a third bullet whined over their heads, to thud into a tree-trunk near them.

Arthur Augustus and the American junior broke out of the trees on the farther side of the plantation. A narrow field separated them from a high brick wall. They raced across the long grass towards it, and sprang for the top of the wall just as the big figure of Lessing appeared from the trees behind them.

They swung themselves over the top of the wall, and dropped down on the farther side into a narrow lane, with woods on the other side of it, behind a barbed-wire fence.

"Come on!" panted Cyrus K. Handcock. "Into the sticks, Archibald!"

They scrambled through the wire fence, and there was a ripping sound as the swell of St. Jim's caught his running-vest on the wire, tearing a jagged rent in what had once been the most elegant running-vest at St. Jim's. But even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not worrying about his garments just then, for once in his life!

They dived in among the thickly-growing trees, fighting through tangled brambles, heedless of their scratched legs.

They could hear their pursuers coming over the wall after them. But they were already hidden from sight by the thick foliage.

Handcock came to a breathless halt, grasping Arthur Augustus by the arm.

"Quick!" he panted. "We've gotta hide, I guess! Up a tree, buddy, and I guess we gotta be slick!"

"Bai Jove! I considah—"

"Keep your considering till after, Archibald!" urged Handcock, and sprang for the lower branches of a thick-foliaged tree. He swung himself up into the branches. Arthur Augustus, with a gasp, followed suit. The two juniors vanished among the leaves just as the big figure of Lessing came pounding towards the spot, his two satellites at his heels.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, lying pressed to a thick branch high above their heads, scarcely breathed as the three rogues came racing along through the trees. But he caught his breath as Leon Lessing and his companions came to a gasping halt directly beneath the tree in which he and Cyrus K. Handcock were hidden.

"Oh deah!" muttered the swell of St. Jim's in dismay.

He peered down. Lessing was peering round him.

"Say, chief—" began one of his companions eagerly.

Lessing turned on him with a snarl.

"Quiet, you sap! Listen! I can't hear them now! But they can't be far away! Listen!"

The three stood listening intently. But there was no sound in the woods. A furious imprecation broke from Leon Lessing.

"They can't be far away!" he snarled. "We gotta find them! I guess they're hidin' in these hyer bushes somewhere. Search around!"

"O.K., boss!"

The two other men hurried off in different directions among the trees, peering among the thick bushes. Lessing stood breathing hard, muttering furiously to himself.

In the branches above his head, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Cyrus K. Handcock scarcely breathed.

Well hidden by the foliage though they were, if Lessing happened to glance up, they would be seen, without a doubt.

"Oh deah!" groaned Arthur Augustus to himself. "I wish the scoundwel would go away, bai Jove!"

Lessing was peering round into the trees. A big automatic was clenched in his rugged fist. With his free hand he took a cigar from his waistcoat-pocket, bit the end savagely, and stuck the weed in the corner of his mouth, lighting it.

"When I ketch that perishin' boy, I'll make him plumb sorry he ever got fresh with me!" Arthur Augustus heard him mutter. "An' as for that sassy English kid—"

He broke off suddenly.

The swell of St. Jim's foot had been pressing against a twig. The twig snapped suddenly, with a sharp, cracking sound. Lessing looked up, and the next moment Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, lying flattened along the bough above, found himself staring down into the momentarily astonished eyes of the big gangster.

They were discovered!

"By hokey!" gasped Leon Lessing. "So there you are!"

"Oh cwumbs!" groaned Arthur Augustus.

Lessing's eyes had swept past the swell of St. Jim's, however, to the figure of Hancock, clinging to the next bough. The gangster's arm came up in a swift movement, to cover the son of the New York millionaire with his gleaming automatic.

"Got you!" he began, with a triumphant snarl.

And at that moment Cyrus K. Hancock took a desperate chance. With a lithe movement, he swung down, hanging from the bough with his hands. His foot shot out, delivering a terrific kick on Lessing's jaw. The man reeled back, and Hancock dropped clean on to his shoulders, dragging the big scoundrel to earth with a crash.

Arthur Augustus saw the pair struggling for possession of Lessing's automatic, which had fallen from the man's hand as he went down under Hancock's weight. Then, without waiting further, the swell of St. Jim's leapt to earth.

He dropped to his knees, but staggered up in a moment—to find Cyrus K. Hancock kneeling over Leon Lessing, with the automatic pressing into the scoundrel's heart.

"Move an inch, make a sound, and I guess you're dead mutton!" breathed Cyrus K. Hancock cheerily.

CHAPTER 14.

Making it up with Ethel.

LEON LESSING lay on his back, glaring up in baffled fury at the grinning face of the American youngster. But with that cold rim of steel hard against his heart, he dared neither to stir nor shout.

"Oh, good fellow!" panted Arthur Augustus jubilantly.

Hancock rose to his feet, and stepped back a few paces, covering Lessing.

"Get up!" he commanded.

Lessing scrambled to his feet, raging, but helpless.

"Stick up your fins!" muttered Hancock.

Lessing obeyed.

"Turn round!"

The gangster turned, his arms above his head, with a furious curse. Hancock chuckled.

"Now march!" he commanded. "Remember, I've got you covered. If you yell to your pals, or try to make a getaway, you'll be plumb sorry! Get moving!"

Arthur Augustus glanced round anxiously. But the other two gangsters had vanished among the trees in their search for the two juniors—they were quite a distance away, as could be guessed from the faintness of the sound they made as they crashed about among the bushes.

The strange little procession set off down the road.

They had scarcely gone twenty yards when the sound of a motor-car came to the ears of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. An open four-seater came into view round a distant bend, driven by a young man. Arthur Augustus gave a gasp of relief.

"Oh, good egg! Heah's a cah, deah boy—"

"Gee, that's swell!" grinned Hancock. "Flag it, Archibald!"

But there was no need for the swell of St. Jim's to signal to the approaching car! Already the young man at the wheel had caught sight of them. He brought his car to a sharp halt, surveying the three with startled astonishment.

"What the dickens—" he began breathlessly.

"I say, deah boy!" cried Arthur Augustus, running up to him. "Can you dvice us to a police station? We've captuahed a fwrightful wuffian—"

"Great Scott!" The young driver of the four-seater

looked as though he could not believe his eyes. It had certainly been an amazing scene to come upon in a quiet English lane! But he did not stop to ask questions. With a nod, he opened the door of the back seat. "Right!" he said, grimly. "I don't know what it's all about, but hop in!"

"Get in, Lessing!" chuckled Hancock. "I guess we're taking you for a little ride!"

Without a word the gangster climbed into the car. Hancock jumped in beside him, still keeping him well covered.

"My hat! Here they are!"

It was Tom Merry who gave that excited shout.

Tom was standing at the gates of St. Jim's, staring eagerly down the road, to where a motor-car had appeared, approaching the gates at a rapid pace.

In it could be seen seated Mr. Railton, a police-inspector, who was at the wheel, and two grinning figures in dishevelled running-kit—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Cyrus K. Hancock!

It was late that evening. Mr. Railton had been to Wayland to see the police, and Tom Merry & Co., Blake & Co., Reginald Talbot, Kangaroo, and many other School

House juniors had been waiting in anxious groups near the gates, hoping for news of the missing pair at the House-master's return.

But, apparently, Mr. Railton was doing more than bring news! He was bringing Arthur Augustus and Hancock back in person!

"It's them!" yelled Jack Blake, with more excitement than grammar.

"Hurrah!" ejaculated Monty Lowther excitedly.

"Oh, good egg!"

It was a wonderful relief to the juniors to see the missing pair safe and sound. They had been filled with all kinds of anxious forebodings for several hours. A tremendous cheer burst from the crowd by the gates as the car came slowly into the quad and drew to a standstill.

In a moment it was surrounded.

"Gussy, old hoss—"

"Hancock, old chap—"

"Where on earth—"

"What the dickens—"

Mr. Railton stepped out of the car, smiling. But it was rather a grim smile, for he knew the facts! He turned to the inspector.

"If you will accompany me to the headmaster, we will put the facts before him at once," he said. He glanced at Hancock and Arthur Augustus. Mr. Railton was "human" enough to realise that the excited juniors were dying to question the pair. He smiled. "D'Arcy and Hancock—come to Dr. Holmes' study in ten minutes or so."

"Vewy well, sir!"

"O.K.!" grinned Hancock.

Mr. Railton and the inspector hurried into the School House, leaving Arthur Augustus and the American junior surrounded by the excited throng.

"Where on earth have you two asses been?" cried Manners.

"My giddy aunt! I believe they've been having another scrap!" scoffed Burkett, eyeing their tattered garments. "Looks to me as if they've been rolling each other in the road, you chaps!"

Tom Merry surveyed the pair curiously. When they had left St. Jim's on the cross-country run, Gussy and Hancock had not been on speaking terms! But from the look on their faces now, it seemed to Tom that something had happened to heal the breach between them. And he wondered very much what it could have been.

Hancock glanced at Burkett coolly.

"You've missed it by a mile, you poor sap," he said quietly. "No, Archibald and I haven't been scrapping! I

(Continued on page 24.)

ROARING COMPLETE HIGHWAYMAN YARN!

By Cecil Fanshaw.



Nick o' the Highway!

CHAPTER 1.

Pursued!

ART sure you know the part you must play in this venture, lad?" Highwayman Swift Nick asked his young pal somewhat anxiously.

"Faith, but I do, cully," Roy grinned reply.

"To-night you impersonate me," nodded Nick.

"But I fly directly after bidding the coach 'Stand and deliver!' cully?"

"Ay, in seeming alarm, lad, as though dismayed to find the coach well guarded. You must lure those guards away across country."

Roy's eyes sparkled excitedly through the slits in his black mask. Greatly was the lad looking forward to a dangerous adventure, which promised rich spoils if successful.

"Count on me, cully!" he grinned.

"I know I can. And while you lead yon guards on a wild-goose chase, I'll collect the plunder. Ho, ho!" Swift Nick laughed. "Rich plunder indeed! Bullion for the London banks, by thunder!"

"No one will think we dare try for it!" chuckled Roy. "Tis a game worth playing for the adventure alone!"

"A plaguey dangerous game!" Swift Nick laughed grimly. "But, by my life, we'll pull it off! Come on! Rouse Sultan, lad!"

For the purposes of this night's venture, young Roy was riding Sultan, Nick's famous black horse, with the white star on its forehead. He also wore Nick's dark blue riding-coat and laced cocked hat, in order to impersonate his famous cully.

He clapped home his heels, and down the moonlit turn-

pike trotted the two adventurous highwaymen, with their three-cornered hats pulled down to their masks and their coat-collars turned up to their ears.

They were bent on pulling off the most desperate venture they had yet planned together. They had learnt that this night's London mail coach would carry a quantity of treasure, banknotes and golden guineas, destined for London banks.

That the coach would be guarded by outriders, that no one would dream of highwaymen daring to attack it, only made Swift Nick and Roy the more determined to do so.

The pals' plan was for Roy to hold up the coach, then bolt, feigning alarm at sight of the mounted guards. The lad wore Nick's clothes and rode Nick's horse, Sultan, in order to draw the guards away on a wild-goose chase.

Surely the fooled guards would pursue Roy! They would take him for Swift Nick, and be eager to capture such a famous highwayman, on whose head was a big reward. Thus the coast would be made clear for the real Nick to emerge from cover, and collect the plunder.

"And I warrant the numskull guards will never catch you on Sultan, lad!" Nick laughed.

He glanced admiringly at the speedy black horse he had loaned to Roy. He himself was riding a fine bay, acquired at pistol-point from Squire Hudson, the local magistrate and bullying tyrant.

"And we meet again come midnight at the Fox and Hounds Inn!" grinned Roy.

"Ay, to divide the spoils!" laughed Nick; and they trotted on briskly.

It was a good night for highwaymen, with banks of cloud drifting across the moon, and fields and woods mostly wrapped in shadow. The two pals knew, however, that they were running a great risk in tackling this reckless

There's a price on Nick's head
There's a smile on his lips.
And with black Sultan to carry him
Nick blazes into the most daredevil
adventures!

adventure, for in this year of 1740 no mercy was shown to Gentlemen of the High Toby.

But their spirits were high as they trotted down the road, and at last came to a dark belt of overhanging trees. Here they pulled up, reined back in the shadows, then drew bell-mouthed pistols from their pockets, carefully to examine flint, charge, and priming.

Then they sat in their saddles, motionless and invisible, straining eyes and ears.

They had not long to wait.

All of a sudden they heard the thunder of hoofs and wheels, and stared excitedly from their cover to see the yellow glimmer of coach-lamps. The glimmer grew rapidly to swaying beams of light. The London coach was coming with the treasure!

The pals' nerves thrilled. They could see the galloping coach horses, the straining postilions; but also they could see two cloaked horsemen in front of the coach, and two more alongside it.

Without doubt here came the treasure. But what a formidable equipage! Enough to make any highwayman hesitate! But no thought of backing out occurred to Swift Nick or Roy.

Roy thrilled in every nerve as he saw the guarded coach come thundering down. On his speed and boldness would depend success. Half-deafened by the volleying hoof-beats, he saw riders, horses, and swaying coach thunder towards him.

"Now, lad!" barked Swift Nick.

Roy clapped home his heels, and forth from the shadows of the overhanging trees leapt black Sultan to bar the way. "Stand and deliver!"

Hardly was Roy's shouted challenge heard above the din. But there was no mistaking the masked lad's meaning as he sat Sultan, with his bell-mouthed pistols levelled at the leading outriders.

There was instant confusion and uproar. Startled, hardly able to believe their eyes, the mounted guards reined their horses back on their haunches. The postilions pulled up, too, and the big coach came to a halt with a clatter and jingle of harness.

There rang out fierce and angry shouts. But almost instantly the leading outriders recovered their wits; and the two others, who had been riding alongside the coach, spurred forward, whipping out horse-pistols.

"Zounds! Who dares to—!" bawled one, in amazement. "Faith, 'tis Swift Nick himself! I know that horse o' his with the white star, and his coat, too!"

"Have at him, cullies!" roared another. "Darn his impudence! By thunder, he'll pay dearly for this! Surrender, Nick!"

Forward spurred the four horsemen, braving the disguised Roy's weapons.

Instantly Roy played his part.

"Four guards! By thunder, I was misinformed!" he yelled, in disguised tones. "But you do not take me, cullies!"

With that he wheeled Sultan, ducked low, then was off at full split.

Forward charged two guards in pursuit, shouting in triumph. For a minute it seemed that all the guards would not pursue, however. But from out of the coach window leaned a man wearing a cocked hat and brandishing a great blunderbuss.

"Is you villain Swift Nick?" he croaked furiously. "Then seize him at all costs! I and the postilions can guard the coach until ye return. Make haste, darn ye!"

The man in the coach seemed a fellow of authority, and instantly all four guards were roaring in pursuit of the disguised Roy. The lad let out a yell of feigned dismay, set Sultan at a gate, and popped over it.

Bang, bang, bang! Pistols belched smoke and flame, and bullets whistled around Roy.

But the plucky lad was flattened out on Sultan's neck, and the flying lead missed him in the gloom. He glanced back, to see two guards thundering close after him, the other two riding at the gate. Then he uttered a grim chuckle, and went drumming away across the dim meadows.

"'Tis Swift Nick himself!" went up a bloodthirsty chorus.

Concealed in the shadow of the trees the real Swift Nick heard the hue-and-cry go sweeping away after Roy.

"Good lad! I lay they don't catch him on Sultan!"

He laughed softly, then clapped heels to his bay.

From out of the darkness leapt the big bay horse; and sight of this second masked highwayman with levelled burkers caused consternation and amazement. Yelling wildly, the postilions snatched up their whips and made to drive on, and a shout of fury sounded from inside the coach.

But Nick grimly and swiftly silenced the postilions and made them dismount. Then he rode up to the coach door and looked inside. It was to see a hatchet-faced, elderly man, bewigged, and wrapped in a huge cloak. This man was the only passenger, but several iron-bound boxes were stacked high on the seat beside him.

"Aha!" laughed Nick triumphantly. "Treasure indeed!"

"Who the plague are you, villain?" barked the passenger.

"Swift Nick, sir!"

"Swift Nick!" howled the pop-eyed passenger. "But my guards are chasing him."

"Nay." Came the reply with a bantering laugh. "They are after my young cully, who will doubtless slip them, since he is riding my horse, Sultan. But enough o' this, sir! Pass out two of your strong-boxes. I warrant their contents in guineas and banknotes will repay me and my cully for the risk we have run i' this venture."

But the passenger only glared in fury. He seemed thunderstruck, at realising the trick the two pals had played on the guarded coach.

"To blazes with you!" he yelled. "I'm Richard Aldworth, a director of the Bank of England, you scoundrel! Not a guinea shall you take, but I'll take you, Swift Nick!"

With that, Aldworth, who had been bracing his muscles, abruptly jerked forth his blunderbuss from under his huge cloak, and squeezed the trigger.

Boom! Swift Nick was half-blinded by the spurt of flame and cloud of smoke, was half-deafened by the roar of the weapon. But he was accustomed to swift action. In the nick of time he ducked, heard the heavy bullet whistle past his ear, then let fly with a pistol.

His bullet shattered the stock of the blunderbuss, even as old Aldworth swung it up clubbed. With a howl, Aldworth snatched out a pistol and fired again, but Nick struck the weapon up, and in self-defence was forced to strike the man a blow on his head.

Aldworth fell back on his seat, and Nick reached inside the coach and seized a strong-box by its handle.

But he had not a second to lose. Aldworth was only slightly dazed and made a grab at the box, and the postilions came shouting to his aid. Worse still, angry shouts sounded from across the fields. Swift Nick realised that the hindmost of Roy's pursuers had heard the shots,



The bay horse hit the top bar and Nick went flying through the air!

had guessed that an attack was being made on the coach, and were coming back.

"Plague take it!" gasped Nick.

With a heave, he dragged forth the small iron-bound box and swung it across his saddle. Then he wheeled his bay horse with his knees, to charge full split at the postilions, a pistol gleaming in his right hand.

"Out o' the way, fellows!" he roared. "Ye will not? Then take the consequences!"

Thud! His pistol barrel descended on a postilion's head, to send the man reeling. The other postilion went crashing to the ground, struck by the bay horse's shoulder, then away galloped Nick, tucking the captured box under his arm.

"Only one box, Mr. Aldworth!" Swift Nick hooted over his shoulder. "But I lay the contents are worth a pretty penny. Tell the London folk that it takes more than four guards to rout Swift Nick and his cully!"

But, even as he galloped down the road, Nick glimpsed the two returning outriders racing to head him off. In fact, the fellows had not gone far when they heard the shots, for Nick's attack on the coach had not taken many seconds.

"Plague take it!" Swift Nick gasped. "'Twill be a mighty close shave after all! Nor am I mounted on Sultan! And I vow this bay nag I took off the squire is touched in his wind!"

CHAPTER 2.

Sentinel to Death!

HOOF-BEATS rolled like muffled drums as Swift Nick galloped down the road, hugging his plunder. Quickly the shouts from the coach grew faint; but, out of the corner of his eye, Nick glimpsed the spurring outriders on his right.

The latter were racing across the field, making for a gap in the hedge to head the highwayman off. On the left of the road the hedge loomed big and black, and there was no jumping it. All Nick could do was to go full split down the road before the guards headed him off.

"By thunder, my scheme has not gone quite according to plan," he gritted. "But I'll not drop this plunder."

The small iron-bound box was in fact a heavy burden to Nick. But on he galloped, teeth set, eyes flashing through his mask-slits, coat tails flying.

And he dashed past the gap in the hedge in the nick of time. A second later the two cloaked guards came flying over it, then settled down to grim pursuit, shouting and yelling.

Nick urged his bay horse for all he was worth. But the animal was touched in the wind, and was soon reeling, its breath whistling in its lungs, and Nick was sore burdened by the heavy box.

He had gained ground by his spurt, but glanced round in a few minutes to see his pursuers overhauling him again.

"By my life, I must hide the spoils after all," Nick gasped furiously. "Without this box I can get across country and lose yon numskulls yet. A plague on old Aldworth and his blunderbuss. But for him—"

Nick knew there was a pond at the roadside round the next bend. He put on a spurt and thundered round the bend to see the pond. Then out shot his arm, and away whirled the box to vanish in the water with a dull splash.

Then on galloped Nick again, his eyes flashing as he rode at a five-barred gate.

But his two pursuers were round the bend a split second later, to utter grim whoops of glee. Nick laughed defiantly as his bay horse rose at the gate, but his laugh broke off in a sudden shout of dismay.

Crash! The bay horse hit the top bar fair and square, smashed it in half, then came down on its head in the field beyond. Swift Nick went flying through the air, to land on all fours.

He was up again quick as a cat. But, even as he found his feet and whirled round, the outriders were on him.

"Got ye, tobyman!" they roared exultantly.

Two of Nick's pistols were in his saddle-holsters on the scrambling bay horse, and one spare weapon had flown from his pocket in his fall. With the other, which was empty, he put up a desperate fight, but it was no use. The outriders urged their horses on him, then leapt to the ground striking fiercely with their weapons.

In a few minutes, bruised and bleeding, Swift Nick was overcome by his two burly assailants and was thrown to the ground and bound with his own stirrup-leathers.

The daring plan to rob the well-guarded treasure coach had ended in Swift Nick's capture!

True, the disguised Roy escaped on Sultan, as Nick realised with a chuckle, when the other two outriders

returned snarling over their failure. Nor was the strong-box recovered from the pond, and Nick's captors had no idea where it had been dropped.

"No matter, fellows!" Old Aldworth chuckled in grim glee, when the coach arrived on the scene. "What is the loss of one box compared with the capture of Swift Nick! Ay, you numskulls, that was but his cully you chased. Throw him in here. We shall see him hang at Tyburn. Ha, ha!"

And into the coach with the bullion for the London bank the bound Nick was thrown.

The news of his capture spread fast, and at every posting-inn on the road, folk gathered to stare excitedly at the famous highwayman. Escape was impossible for Nick, and there was no attempt at rescue in the face of the armed guards. And, on arrival in London, Swift Nick was lodged in Newgate prison, heavily ironed.

Terrible were the conditions in gaol in this year of 1740. Nick was thrust into a large, dim-lit dungeon, together with several other luckless malefactors, many in rags, some already sentenced, others still awaiting trial, all heavily manacled. Straw was their bedding, and the clanking of chains, groans, and angry yells filled the stifling air.

Still Nick reckoned to escape, however, but all his efforts proved in vain. Moreover he received no visits from friends in gaol, received no smuggled messages, hinting at efforts to rescue him. It seemed that even Roy had abandoned Nick to his fate.

And the trial of such a famous highwayman was hurried forward.

Within ten days of being gaoled in Newgate, Swift Nick found himself on trial on many charges of robbery on the King's highway.

The court was crowded.

People gathered from far and near to see Nick tried. There were fashionable London folk wearing bob-wigs, silk stockings and buckled shoes; there were tanned, weatherbeaten country squires, and beetroot-faced farmers in breeches and leggings.

The whole presented a blaze of colour. And there was a burst of cheering when Swift Nick, gaily-dressed, but manacled, was marched into the dock between two Bow Street Runners.

Nick knew his plight was desperate. But he forced a cheery grin as he glanced round at the sea of faces below him, and cheekily bowed acknowledgment of the applause. But his grin faded somewhat when he glanced up at the judge, to see the latter was none other than Mr. Justice Humphreys, nicknamed the hanging judge. He was the very man whom Nick and Roy had once plundered and made a fool of.

"Zounds!" muttered Swift Nick to himself. "My luck is out!"

It seemed so, for Judge Humphreys was notoriously severe on highwaymen. He sat perched aloft like a watchful vulture, ruffling his scarlet and black plumage, glaring at Nick, and scratching his beak of a nose with his quill pen.

"Silence in court!" he barked savagely, and the applause ceased.

Old Aldworth, the director of the Bank of England, was the first witness, and venomously he told how Swift Nick had got away with a box of guineas from the well-guarded coach.

"Despite the fact that there were four outriders, myself, and the postilions, my lord!" he yelled at the judge.

"Faith!" grinned Nick from the dock. "If seven o' you could not guard the box, you deserved to lose it!"

At that, there was laughter in the court, quickly suppressed by the grim-looking judge, however.

Then Nick cross-examined old Aldworth.

"I was riding a bay horse, was I not?" he demanded.

"And wearing a green coat?"

"Ay," snarled old Aldworth.

"Then prove I am Swift Nick," flashed Nick. "'Tis well known that Swift Nick rides a black horse with a white star on its forehead, and wears a blue riding-coat. And how much of the bank treasure was found on me?"

"None," admitted Aldworth sullenly.

"Then how canst prove I robbed your coach at all?" grinned Nick, and glanced round the crowded court triumphantly.

In fact it seemed now that Nick stood a chance of getting off, after all. The prosecution felt sure they had Swift Nick in their clutches, but saw they were going to have a job to prove it.

But the next witness was Squire Hudson from Hanley Grange, and he vowed he recognised Swift Nick, having once seen him unmasked. He also vowed that his was the bay horse on which Nick had been captured. After that,

Nick's defence soon collapsed, and Judge Humphreys boomed down from his perch.

"Indeed, it is plain that you are Swift Nick, scoundrel. I believe that I have myself encountered you."

Swift Nick saw that his game was up. There were several people in court who swore to him and vowed he had robbed them on various occasions. He could no longer dispute his identity, so he bowed to the judge in ironical fashion.

"Faith, my lord, we have met," he grinned. "But you were not harmed. I and my cully merely took you for a drive in your coach and left you in the woods. Had you not previously defied us, we would have driven you to the assizes!"

At that there was renewed laughter in court, and the judge flamed in fury. He realised his mistake in recognising Nick, for he had not wanted it known publicly that Nick had made a fool of him, too.

"Silence in court," he croaked furiously.

Shortly afterwards he summed up, describing Swift Nick as a dangerous, impudent villain; then the jury retired. The verdict was a foregone conclusion.

"Guilty, my lord!" declared the foreman after ten minutes' absence.

"A proper verdict," snarled Judge Humphreys triumphantly, and scratched busily on paper with his quill.

Then in croaking tones, he pointed out to Nick the wickedness of his career on the High Toby, and ended up by pronouncing the dread sentence of death.

It was all over. Condemned to hang at Tyburn in three days. Swift Nick was taken back to Newgate Prison, fairly loaded with chains. It seemed the end of his dashing, adventurous career; seemed that he would never again ride black Sultan, or bark "Stand and deliver!"

"But good luck for Roy!" Nick muttered with a forced grin. "The lad has deserted me. But I vow Sultan will never fail him!"

CHAPTER 3.

Roy to the Rescue!

"**R**OUSE up, Swift Nick! 'Tis your last day on earth, rascal, but methinks you will die game."

It was the burly gaoler rousing Nick. The dawn of the day fixed for the famous highwayman's execution had come, and the first rays of the rising sun slanted through the barred window of the condemned cell.

Perforce Swift Nick had almost given up all hopes of escape or rescue. But he scrambled up cheerily from his straw bed with a clank of chains.

"By my life, I'll die game, gaoler," he grinned. "No one shall ever say Swift Nick was a poltroon. But I'm not hanged yet, look you."

"But you soon will be, knave," broke in a rasping, gloating voice. "Then I shall take your fine clothes, according to law, and I shall sell the rope for a crown an inch to the onlookers. Ho, ho!"

The speaker was Dave Datchet, the public hangman, an ill-looking fellow, bald, with a bent nose, and having a black patch over his left eye. According to law, the executioner always claimed the clothes of a hanged highwayman, and could sell the rope to ghoulish souvenir hunters.

It seemed that wall-eyed Dave relished his grisly job, but Swift Nick only laughed at the fellow defiantly.

"Sell the rope if you can, cully," he grinned. "Faith, but you need the cash to buy a wig with."

But other turnkeys hurried into the cell to cut short Nick's jesting. They struck his irons off, allowed him to sprig himself up as much as he pleased, and at last, looking spruce and smart, Nick left the gaol for Tyburn Tree.

He left in a one-horse cart, with the gaoler and hangman Dave, riding in it with him, and on each side of the cart marched a dozen soldiers.

Swift Nick was taking his last ride. But he was dressed as though for a jolly outing, with lace at his cuffs and throat, and he rode through the streets like a public hero, bowing right and left, waving his cocked hat.

The streets were crowded. Every window was filled with faces, and folk had even clambered to the roofs. Arose deafening cheers, handkerchiefs and hats were flourished as Nick in the low cart rumbled along.

But the soldiers pushed the crowd back. It was known that Nick had many sympathisers, and no risk of a rescue was being run. The red-coats carried loaded muskets, and solidly they tramped forward with the car in their midst.

The cheers increased, swelling in volume, and here and there a rush was made towards the cart, only to be beaten back with musket butts, however.

Swift Nick was being carefully guarded, and the wild rushes were quite useless.

On rumbled the low cart between the tramping soldiers, in long red coats, cocked hats, and powdered wigs. All about him, Swift Nick saw a sea of faces, saw the thronged windows, and house-tops. But he could see no friends he could recognise; his ears rang with cheers, but he could see no genuine effort to rescue him. At last, even Nick began to feel hopeless, but still he laughed defiantly and wore a reckless, gallant air. All the time hangman Dave chanted ghoulishly:

"A crown an inch for the rope! Ho, ho And all your fine clothes belong to me, Swift Nick!"

At last Tyburn Tree was sighted. Over the heads of



Two minutes of furious fighting, then Nick and Roy burst through!

the sun-scorched crowd, Nick saw the grim gibbet standing in a cleared square.

Here were more red-coats, keeping the crowd back, and they parted to let Nick and his escort through.

Then the cart halted under the gallows, and ghoulish Dave made to arrange his noose.

"Make a speech, highwayman," he leered. "'Tis your last chance, I warrant."

Nick, standing in the cart, with gaoler and hangman, surrounded by soldiers, looked round boldly. A speech was expected of him, and the crowd cheered lustily; but even now he was hoping to dodge fate. It all seemed hopeless, however, with soldiers all round the square.

"Speak, Nick!" thundered the crowd invitingly.

"Never steal a broken-winded nag, cullies!" Nick began banteringly.

That moment there came a surprising interruption.

There rose shouts and yells at a corner of the square, the crowd was seen parting, and the line of red-coats bent and bulged outwards. A second later several masked men were seen fighting forward; cudgels rose and fell, and bottles and stones whizzed through the air.

"A rescue! A rescue!" roared the crowd.

It seemed a rescue was intended at the last minute! Roaring and yelling, headed by a burly man in brown breeches and white stockings, the masked men came fighting forward. They broke through the soldiers, and the crowd surged forward on their heels.

"Long live Swift Nick!" rose a din of yelling.

Nick's nerves thrilled with delight and hope. He had no idea who the masked men were, or who was their burly leader. But he saw them press forward in a compact body, striking out and shouting as they made towards the cart. Quickly the crowd pressed round, heaving and swaying. Men fell and were trampled on, but lustily the soldiers plied their musket butts and the fight hung doubtfully. It was soon seen that the masked men would reach the cart, however.

Thud! Thud! Crash! Vigorously their burly leader swung his cudgel, and down before it went red-coats like ninepins. Things looked serious.

But the soldiers' officer summed up the situation. He saw the attack was only being delivered on the west side of the square, that on all other sides the howling mob was leaderless, and could be held in check by a few soldiers.

Swiftly he detached a large number of his men, leaving most of the square thinly-guarded. At the head of his reinforcements he dashed to repel the vigorous onslaught of the fellows in masks. Soon the tables were being turned.

Nick's heart sank as he saw the masked men and their burly leader being driven back, saw the muskets rising and falling. Dust rose in clouds, but it was plain that Nick's would-be rescuers, though fighting grimly, were getting the worst of it.

"Who is their leader?" Nick gasped to himself. "Hats off to him for a gallant knave, anyway!"

"The rescue's failed, Swift Nick!" yelled hangman Dave gleefully. "'Tis all up! A crown an inch for t' rope. Ho, ho!" and he made to drop his noose over Nick's head. But it was not all up.

Even as the fight raged vigorously on the far side of the square, another uproar burst forth, close at hand. There sounded yells and hoof-beats, then through the thin line of red-coats on the east side of the square charged a wild-looking body of ragged horsemen. But not all were unshaven and ragged. Nick uttered a joyous whoop as he recognised their youthful leader, riding black Sultan.

"'Tis Roy!" he shouted. "Bully for you, cully! You've come, after all!"

And Roy, Nick's young pal, it was, at the head of the newcomers, and there was now no stopping them. They charged through the red-coats' depleted ranks, then came swarming and surging round the cart.

Hangman Dave yelled in fury and dismay. But one leap carried Roy into the cart; then a knife flashed, and Nick's armbands were slashed through. Recklessly wall-eyed Dave tried to grapple with Roy, but Swift Nick dealt him a hearty buffet on the jaw and knocked him headlong out of the cart.

But from afar, the soldiers' officer saw what was happening. He had just overcome the masked men, and came charging back with red-coats, shouting in fury.

There was not an instant to lose. Nick vaulted from the cart to the back of Sultan; Roy sprang to the saddle of a led horse; then all this second party swung round, spurred, and galloped, full split, away.

They were still in danger. Red-coats tried to stop them, but most of the soldiers had been drawn to the first fray. Two minutes of furious fighting, then Nick, Roy, and the band of ragged horsemen burst through.

Swift Nick had been rescued by Roy in the nick of time! But it was not until the whole party had got clear of London town that they drew rein, pulling up and dismounting in a small wooded glade.

"By my life, cully!" cried Nick, wringing Roy's hand. "'Twas well done! Who are our friends?" And he indicated the grinning, ragged horsemen.

"The poachers and deer-stealers of Hanley Woods, Nick," chuckled Roy. "You remember they vowed always to help us. I have been collecting mounts for them from farms, since the day you were captured."

Delightedly Nick gasped his thanks. "But you masked men under their brawny leader?" he cried. "Who were they?"

"Hanley villagers under burly John Dunn, o' the Fox and Hounds Inn," grinned Roy. "But they were not trying to rescue you! No; they were only drawing away soldiers, to make my task possible for me. By my life, they succeeded."

"Zounds, they did," laughed Nick, suddenly realising that the attack of the masked men was only a diversion to lure most of the soldiers to one point. "Ha, ha, ha! It succeeded!" he cried. "And now we will ride to a certain pond, cullies, to recover the strong-box which I threw therein, and to divide the spoils. It seems our plan to rob the guarded treasure-coach worked, after all!"

THE END.

(Look out for another yarn of Nick o' the Highway in next week's bumper issue of the GEM. It's chock-a-block full of thrills!)

COUSIN ETHEL'S CHAMPION!

(Continued from page 19.)

guess not. You won't catch us scrapping again in a hurry—eh, Archie?"

"Wathah not!" grinned Arthur Augustus. "But by the way, deah boy, my name is not Archie—"

"Well, what has happened?" cried Blake impatiently.

"Lessing!" said Handcock. "I guess he's what happened! That guy who held us up in the Shell dormitory last night! He kidnapped me—and Gussy perched himself behind the ear the roughnecks were taking me off in! He helped me get away—I couldn't have done it, but for him. Yeah, we got away—and we got Lessing. The police have got him now, and they're hunting round for the other guys with him. Maybe they're all rounded up by now. I guess they are."

"You see," put in Arthur Augustus, "the police-station where we took Lessing phoned through to Wayland police-station, and Wailton was there! He waited for us, and we met him at Wayland—"

"Lessing!" gasped Tom Merry. "He tried to kidnap you again, Handcock? Great pip! And you got him? How? What the dickens—"

Handcock chuckled, and explained in more detail. The juniors listened breathlessly. He had scarcely finished when three girlish figures on cycles came riding in at the gates.

Cousin Ethel, Doris Levison, and Lady Peggy had cycled over from Spalding Hall to find out if there was any news of the missing pair. They had heard of their disappearance when Dr. Holmes had telephoned to Spalding Hall to discover if anything was known there which might have thrown light on their disappearance.

Arthur Augustus suddenly caught sight of them. His face went crimson as Cousin Ethel jumped from her bicycle and hurried across towards the group, followed by Doris and Lady Peggy. There was wonderful relief in the faces of the three girls.

Arthur Augustus looked as though he would have liked the

earth to open and swallow him! Though he had made up his quarrel with Cyrus K. Handcock, the swell of St. Jim's had by no means forgotten that he was very much in Ethel's bad books!

Cousin Ethel was looking a little embarrassed, despite her obvious relief, as she came up, wheeling her bicycle. She had not been able to get rid of the thought that perhaps the quarrel between her cousin and the American junior, of which she knew herself to be the cause, had been in some queer way the reason for their startling disappearance together.

"Why, hallo, Ethel!" exclaimed Cyrus K. Handcock with a grin.

"I say, what on earth has happened?" cried Lady Peggy. "We came over to find out!"

Handcock told his tale again. When he had finished, Ethel's eyes were shining strangely. She turned impulsively to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and held out her hand.

"I—I feel awfully proud of you, Arthur!" she said simply. "I'm sorry I was so—so horrid to you—"

"Oh, wats, deah girl!" cried Arthur Augustus eagerly. "You were quite wight, bai Jove! I made a fwightful bweach of mannaahs, bai Jove! All my fault, deah gal!"

Handcock chuckled, and clapped a hand on the swell of St. Jim's shoulder.

"Waal," he drawled, "I guess that's all over now! You won't catch us two scrapping again, Ethel—you sure won't!"

Ethel laughed happily. Tom Merry chuckled.

"Three cheers for Gussy and Handcock!" he exclaimed.

The crowd of juniors gave the cheers with a will—and the three girls joined in.

It was quite clear that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had not only made up his quarrel with Cyrus K. Handcock for good; he had, in addition, put himself right with Cousin Ethel again by his heroism in going to the help of the boy from New York at the time of the American schoolboy's peril!

THE END.

(There will be another grand long story of Tom Merry & Co. in next week's GEM, entitled "BAGGY TRIMBLE'S GUESTS!" As this is one of the funniest stories Martin Clifford has ever written, it's up to you to see that you order your copy WELL IN ADVANCE.—Ed.)

The Opening Scene of Our Magnificent Serial Story of Adventure in the Royal Navy!



CHAPTER 1.
Court-Martialled!

NED HARDY ripped open the long envelope marked "O.H.M.S." with the Admiralty seal in the corner, and gave a yell of delight. It was the greatest moment of his life.

"What's the row, ass?" said his cousin, a fat youth of nineteen who was lying on the sofa reading the racing news through the smoke of a cigarette.

"Look! Listen, you blithering landsman!" whooped Ned, waving the paper.

"The Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty hereby appoint you midshipman, with seniority dating from June 1st—"

"Clicked!" said Ned joyously. "After nine terms at Dartmouth, and two years on the old Panther as a sea-going cadet. Anyway, what's a cadet but a giddy school-boy afloat, doing nothing but swot? Didn't think I'd passed the final exam. Never could stick exams. Midshipman, by gum!"

Stephen Carr blew out a puff of smoke and yawned.

"Doosid exciting," he said lazily. "And now they'll call you a— What is it they call midshipmen in the Fleet?"

"Snotties," said Ned gravely. "That's so. From the admiral downwards, nobody calls us anything else—unofficially, of course. It's an honourable title. I'll make it shine bright—watch me! Yes, I'm a snotty. And they have a salt old rollicking time, believe me, when people aren't kicking 'em."

"Silly game, going to sea," said Stephen contemptuously. "Much more comfortable ashore. And what's the good of it? War was over years ago. They're cutting out more ships all the time. The Navy's a wash-out."

"You fat worm, Stephen!" cried Ned, leaping on him and smothering him with a sofa cushion. "Take that back, or I'll scrag you!"

There was a furious struggle. Stephen was getting the worst of it—for Ned, though years younger, was as hard as nails, and tough as whipcord—when Mr. James Mytton burst into the room.

"Here, steady, you two!" he exclaimed. "What's the trouble?"

"Why, this blubber-faced landsman, sir," said Ned, get-

ting off Stephen's chest; "he says—and I'm glad he's only a tenth cousin of mine—that the British Navy's a wash-out!"

"When that happens, Britain will be a wash-out, too," said Mr. Mytton. "You asked for it, Stephen. Don't talk that sort of rot here, though I'm only a landsman—a humble official in the Foreign Office. Why, lad, what's this paper? Your commission? Ned, that's fine! Midshipman at last!"

"Sure thing!" cried Ned. "And here's father!" He jumped up and stood to attention. "Passed, sir! Full-blown Snottie! Me for the Fleet!"

Ned's father, Captain Travers Hardy, late R.N., a tall, erect old man, with a handsome, clean-shaven face and white hair, came in. He came of a long line of Hardys that had served the Navy. A Lieutenant Hardy of the Victory, over a hundred years ago, had been beside Nelson when the fatal shot was fired, and had held the great admiral in his arms when he died.

But old Captain Hardy's weatherbeaten features were now looking worn and troubled. They lit up when they saw his son's commission.

"Splendid, Ned!" he exclaimed, shaking the new middy's hand eagerly. "I'll have you to depend on—whatever happens."

"Me!" said Ned. "Why, dad, I'm mud! There's good

old Ralph, first-lieutenant on the Victorious. If I ever do as well as Ralph, I'll be satisfied. I'll take a bigger size in hats. Ralph'll go to the top."

A change came over the old captain's face.

"I hope so," he muttered, and suddenly went out.

Ned stared after him in surprise.

"What's worrying dad, sir?" he said to Mr. Mytton, who shook his head, looking very serious.

"Got plenty to worry him, my boy. We hope it'll come right. Expecting news every minute," he added, and followed Captain Hardy out.

Ned had a feeling there was bad trouble coming.

"Talking of news," said Stephen, switching on the wireless set, "let's see if the racing results are up yet."

"Oh, blow the racing results!" growled Ned. "Try

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,172.

NED HARDY GETS HIS ORDERS!

A Life on the Ocean Wave!

Daventry, and let's hear Stokes sing 'Four Jolly Sailors—men!' I want something with a kick in it."

But the loud-speaker was already going, and the announcer's clear voice rang through the room:

"International news; copyright reserved. Naval court-martial. On board H.M.S. Victorious this morning a court-martial was held—"

"Oh, switch that off!" said Stephen, in disgust. "Who wants Navy stuff?"

"Stop!" cried Ned. "Leave it on! The Victorious? That's Ralph's ship!"

His elder brother Ralph was serving on that famous battle-cruiser. The announcer's voice went on:

"On Lieutenant-Commander Ralph Hardy, in connection with the theft from the ship's safe of £5,000, on the 3rd of May. The accused was found guilty of culpable negligence and dereliction of duty, and was cashiered from the Service."

Ned gave a gasp of amazement and horror. He thought he must be dreaming. Ralph was his hero. He could not imagine any harm coming to him.

"Oh, Ralph! Why, it's impossible!"

It was only too true. The news was official. Stephen Carr, who had been listening, gave a low whistle of surprise, and turned to the door.

"Think I'll pack up and get out of this," he said. And he shook the dust of Briars Hall from his feet.

Ned was left alone; he felt as if he had been stunned. His brother court-martialled on a criminal charge, and sacked out of the Navy. Mr. Mytton came in, and saw him standing with a white face and clenched hands.

"What's the matter, my boy?"

Ned told him. "This is fearful! I hoped they'd acquit him," said Mr. Mytton sadly. "Stay here, my boy; and tell no one yet. I must let your father know."

It was twenty minutes before Mytton returned. He found Ned unable to realise the terrible news, or believe it. He led the newly-made midshipman to the window.

"Ned," he said gently, "we have known for some time that this court-martial would take place. Your father has kept it from you, hoping for the best. But now—he feels he can't speak to you about it—he has asked me to tell you."

"You probably heard a month ago of a big robbery that took place on the Victorious," said Mr. Mytton. "Five thousand pounds was stolen from the ship's safe in a very clever and ingenious manner. You haven't been told that your brother Ralph was responsible for the guarding of the strong-room at the time, in place of the lieutenant of marines. I can't tell you all the details now; but the affair was terribly serious."

"The actual thieves and their accomplices have been caught and sent to the criminal courts for trial; but Ralph has now been court-martialled on the charge that the robbery was due to negligence on his part—and other accusations—"

Mr. Mytton checked himself suddenly, but Ned thought he saw his meaning. The boy started up, with blazing eyes.

"You mean to say anybody believes Ralph had anything to do with the robbery?" he cried. "The man who'd say that to me—"

"I would never say it, Ned. Nobody who knows him believes it," said Mr. Mytton to pacify the boy; "but I'm afraid—the evidence— They would never have cashiered him out of the Navy without strong proof—"

The wheels of a car sounded on the gravel outside, and Ned glanced quickly out of the window.

"Why, here's Ralph!" he cried. "He's driven right through from Portsmouth!"

He ran out into the library, and met his father coming out.

"Dad, here's Ralph himself! Now we'll straighten out these lies! I'll go and fetch him in!"

"Stay here, Ned!" ordered his father.

"But can't I go and—"

"Stay here!" said Captain Hardy sternly.

The old naval officer was standing erect, his bronzed face hard and pale. Mr. Mytton appeared.

"Come in, James!" said Captain Hardy. "I want you to be present."

"Don't be hard on him!" said Mytton under his breath. "There's more behind this than you will ever guess, Hardy."

"There is no appeal from a court-martial!" said the old captain grimly. "The fairest and most just of all trials!"

The door opened, and Lieutenant-Commander Ralph

Hardy entered the room; a good-looking, clean-shaven man, tall and slim, his face very white, showing signs of deep trouble. He looked at his father and halted.

"I see I need not tell you anything, sir," he said in a husky voice. "You've got the news."

The old captain shut his lips tight as he looked at his eldest son.

"It is such news that I would rather have died than heard!" he said slowly. "You see what this means?"

The young officer gulped.

"It means, sir, that his Majesty has no further use for my services."

"Yes, and more than that!" said Hardy hotly. "It means that though they acquit you of the vilest charge—the share in the robbery—it is believed you may be guilty! That shadow will always rest on you. They acquit you, and so will I, as your father."

"But they find you guilty of gross and criminal neglect of your duty to your King! I have followed the evidence, and they are right. You, my eldest son, the first of the Hardys to disgrace our name! Turned out of the King's service—unfit to serve him!"

The old officer's voice rang sharply through the room, his face pale and set. Ralph raised his eyes and looked his father in the face.

"I am innocent, sir. That is all I have to say."

"The facts prove you guilty, and had I sat on the court-martial I should have decided as the president did. I will say no more, Ralph; I have done with you!"

"Father!" exclaimed Ned, starting forward.

"Silence, Ned!" said Captain Hardy, in a voice that made the boy pause and draw back.

Mr. Mytton looked terribly distressed. He knew it was useless to interfere. The old man turned sternly to his eldest son.

"Henceforward, Ralph, I wish to see no more of you! The disgrace you have brought upon my name and your brother's is beyond forgiveness. I do not go through any form of disowning, but you will no longer consider Lyndon Grange as your home, nor will your name be mentioned here again. You have the income which comes to you under your mother's will, and you may go your own way. Whether you will ever win back the respect of gentlemen I do not know, but your path no longer lies with mine. Go!"

Ralph Hardy, white to the lips, cast one appealing glance at his father. But, meeting the flintlike look of condemnation in Captain Hardy's face, the young man turned without a word, his head bowed low, and left the room.

It was hard. But the old sea captain was a hard man. Ned, the moment he could get free, hurried after his brother. He found Ralph sitting in the little morning-room.

"Ralph!" cried the boy. "It isn't going to end like this! Speak to me!"

"You see how it is, old boy," said Ralph. "They've broken me, and I'm done for!"

"I'll never believe it! Dad may, but I won't! You weren't to blame; and I'd say that to a dozen admirals!" cried Ned.

Ralph Hardy straightened himself up.

"It's time I got out. The dad's given me my sailing orders. But though I'm all adrift—his voice rose and grew strong—"I'll work for the Service still! Yes, I can do something for my King, though it's at a bigger risk and on my own. The Navy's all I care for, and though I'm kicked out I'm not crippled."

The brothers shook hands with a firm grip, and a minute later Ralph Hardy was driving down the avenue as hard as he could go; nor did he once look back.

CHAPTER 2. Sailing Orders.

HOW Ned got through the next two days he could scarcely have told. He hardly saw his father at all, and Briars Hall, generally the cheeriest house in Hampshire, was as gloomy as a prison. Mr. Mytton stayed on—Ned was always a favourite of his—but he was down-in-the-mouth as the rest of them.

On the morning of the third day Ned's gloom changed to wild delight on the arrival of the Admiralty message appointing him to a ship.

"Away at last!" he cried, dancing round the table, and



"Silence, Ned!" said his father in a voice that made him pause and draw back.

upsetting the coffee-pot as he waved the stamped paper as if it had been a flag of victory. "Midshipman Edward Hardy to report immediately on board— Look at it, dad! Me for sea!"

Captain Hardy was so roused by his son's delight that he shook Ned's hand with one fist, and grabbed hold of the paper with the other, forgiving the capsizing of the coffee-pot.

"Congratulations, Ned!" he cried. "Here, let me see!" "That's great!" said Mr. Mytton. "Now you can put up the midshipman's white patches on your uniform and sport 'em on the quarter-deck, old boy. What's the ship?"

For the moment Ned had been too excited to notice. There were so many ships in the Fleet that one name was very like another to him as yet, and his father had got hold of the message.

"Why," said Captain Hardy, "it's the— Good heavens and earth, what's this mean?"

The old man broke off sharply, and the paper fell from his fingers.

"Victorious!" he said, in a choked voice. "The Victorious!"

"Hurrah!" shouted Ned, and then he checked himself, and gave a gasp of dismay. "The Victorious! It was the ship on which his brother had been court-martialled and dismissed from the Service in disgrace."

Ned stared at his father in silence. He had never dreamed of anything like this. A week ago, the chance of joining the smartest and most famous battle-cruiser in the Fleet, would have overjoyed him. But now! Was he to join a vessel in which the name of Hardy was in black disgrace?

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Mytton. "What an extraordinary blunder! Send the boy to a ship on which his brother had been cashiered!"

"Can't understand it!" muttered Captain Hardy. "The Navy doesn't do this sort of thing! The boy would be under the worst sort of cloud; he would suffer for his brother's fault."

Ned's ears began to tingle. His own dismay at once gave way to indignation at hearing Ralph pitched into. Why should they hit his brother while he was down? Ralph was innocent.

"There's been a mistake at headquarters!" said Mr. Mytton. "They haven't noticed it. A midshipman's

appointment doesn't get much attention. I'll get it put right for you, Travers. We must apply for an exchange, of course!"

Captain Hardy frowned heavily. "I suppose so!" he muttered. "Much as I hate raking the matter up again! I hate hearing it mentioned!" he said passionately. "I would almost rather withdraw the boy from the Navy altogether than stir up this mud again!"

Then Ned put in his oar. "Why need they exchange me?" he exclaimed. "Why need you interfere?"

Both men looked at him in astonishment. Ned had drawn himself up to his full height; his eyes shone defiantly.

"I'm ready to go to the Victorious, sir!" he said, standing to attention. "Let them send me to her, by all means! Ralph was innocent, and I don't care what they say or do to me! You can call it being under a cloud, if you like, but I don't!"

He turned to his father. "If you don't like applying to the Admiralty, sir, let the order stand! The ship that was good enough for my brother is good enough for me. More than that, sir, I'd rather go to the Victorious than any ship in the Fleet!"

His father looked at him curiously. "You've plenty of pluck, youngster. Perhaps you don't know what you're letting yourself in for."

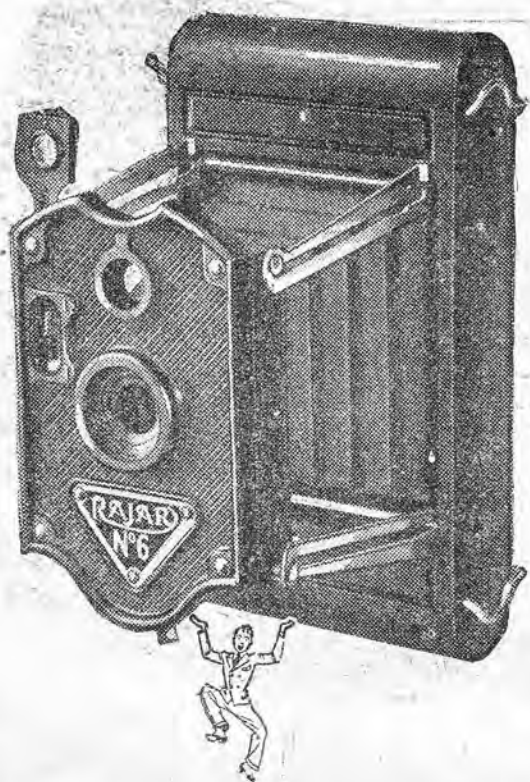
"I do, sir. I wasn't at Dartmouth with six hundred cadets two years for nothing."

"Shall I let him?" muttered his father, half to himself. "My dear Ned," exclaimed Mr. Mytton, aghast, "it's impossible! Your life would be made a misery to you on board that ship!"

"That's enough!" said Captain Hardy, rising abruptly. "If the boy chooses to stick to it, he shall go. It is not for a Hardy to show his back in such a case, or to whine for exchanges. You can go, Ned."

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