

School—Sea—Adventure Yarns! They're All Inside!

THE GEM

2^d

EVERY
WEDNESDAY



100% ALL LAUGHING COMPLETE COMEDY YARN—

CHAPTER 1.
Waiting for Gussy!

"**T**HAT ass!"
"That born idiot!"
"That burbling jabberwock!"

Blake, Digby, and Herries were going it strong!

The three Fourth-Formers stood on the School House steps at St. Jim's, and apparently they were waiting for someone.

From their sulphurous remarks it was clear they were getting exceedingly exasperated with the person who was causing them to wait.

"The—the dummy!" went on Jack Blake. "What's keeping the fathead now? It's always the same; it takes him an hour to dress, and after he's dressed he suddenly discovers he's forgotten his gloves or his handkerchief, or else he finds his necktie doesn't go with his socks, or his waistcoat with his eyebrows!"

"The dummy!"

"The footling fathead!"

"The silly—"

Blake, Herries, and Digby were going it again!

There was a stately, leisurely step in the hallway. Through the doorway an eyeglass gleamed, and accompanying the eyeglass was an elegant form, spotless and without blemish. It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the glass of fashion and the mould of form at St. Jim's.

As usual, Arthur Augustus was faultlessly dressed—or so an ordinary, common or garden observer would have thought. His silk hat glimmered in the afternoon sun; his jacket was spotless and innocent of crease or rumple; his trousers had a crease like a knife edge; his socks were in the very latest fashion; his necktie was a dream, and his natty shoes a revelation.

Arthur Augustus, in fact, looked a picture—a thing of beauty and a joy for ever.

Yet he did not seem entirely satisfied with himself. There was rather an anxious expression on his aristocratic features, and a disturbed look in his eye.

"Here he is!" gasped Jack Blake.

"At last!" snorted Herries. "After keeping us waiting—"

"Bai Jove! I twust you fellows have not been waitin' long for me!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus innocently.

"Waiting long!" spluttered Blake. "You silly owl—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"We've been waiting nearly an hour, you idiot!"

"Weally, Hewwies— Howevah, I am vewy sowwy, deah boys! I have had the gweatest difficulty in choosing the wight socks to go with this new necktie of mine, you know," explained Gussy.

"Oh, you—you—"

"And even now," resumed Gussy, with a frown, "I am afwaid I have made a howwid mistake. I just caught a glimpse of myself in the miwwah in the hall, you know, and I was howwified to notice that there is a gween shade in this necktie that does not go with any shade-whatevah in my socks."

"Your—your socks?"

"Yaas, deah boy! It is wathah annoyin' to have to change again, but it weally cannot be helped, you know! If you will just wait anothah ten minutes, deah boys—"

"A—another ten minutes—" stuttered Blake.

"A—another ten minutes—" gasped Herries.

"A—another ten minutes—" gabbled Digby.

"Yaas, wathah! It will not take me longah than— Bai Jove! What— Welcase me, Blake! Weally, Dig— Yawwooop!"

Bump!

Arthur Augustus sat down hard on the top of the steps. His stick flew one way, his gloves another. His eyeglass

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WHO SAID:—

THE AGE OF MIRACLES.....

Gussy, the dandy, the most fastidious client a tailor ever wept salt tears over, becomes Gussy, the Sloven—the untidiest, worst dressed fellow St. Jim's has ever known!

.....IS PAST?



By
Martin
Clifford

dropped, and his silk hat rolled with a series of hollow flops down the School House steps into the quad.

Blake, Herries, and Digby gave him a final glare and started off towards the gates. Apparently they had no intention of waiting another ten minutes for Arthur Augustus.

"Ow, ow, ow!" gasped Gussy. "The—the feahful wuffians! The—the howwid hooligans! Ow, ow, ow!"

Gussy sat there, gasping for breath, in an astonished, wrathly state.

Mr. Lathom, master of the Fourth, came hurrying out of the School House doorway while he sat there. Mr. Lathom's movements were leisurely and sedate. But he seemed in a hurry now, and not seeing Arthur Augustus until too late, he fell headlong over him.

Bump, bump!

Mr. Lathom was an elderly gentleman, and he might have been very much hurt by such a fall. Fortunately for him, Arthur Augustus broke most of his fall, and took most of his weight.

"Gwoooooogh! Yawwooooo!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's.

"G-goo-good gracious! Ow, ow, ow! What—what—"

Little Mr. Lathom sat up dizzily. Then he sighted the cause of his downfall, and his spectacles seemed to glitter with wrath and indignation.

"You—you careless young scoundrel!"

That was a very strong remark indeed for the usually kindly Mr. Lathom to make. But in times of stress even Mr. Lathom's good nature was liable to crack, so to speak.

"You—you clumsy young villain!" he went on.

"Ow, ow, ow! Weally, sir—weally—"

"How—how dare you play such abominable pranks!" hooted Mr. Lathom.

"P-p-pwanks!"

—STARRING D'ARCY, THE SWELL OF ST. JIM'S!



"Yes, indeed, D'Arcy! How dare you, I repeat! I—I am very much hurt! I have experienced an unpleasant and injurious shock!"

"Gwoogh! Weally, sir—"

"How dare you seat yourself there, a menace to public safety!" hooted the master of the Fourth, staggering to his feet and fairly shaking with indignation. "You are a clown—a buffoon, sir!"

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus was hurt, and Mr. Lathom's remarks were the last straw. "Bai Jove! Am I to understand, sir," he gasped indignantly, "that you are undah the impresson that I seated myself there in ordah that people would fall ovah me?"

"What else am I to suppose, you careless young rascal?"

"Gweat Scott! That is uttah wubbish, sir!"

"What—what—"

"Uttahly wedic, sir!" gasped Arthur Augustus, breathless with indignation at such a charge. "I wepudiate such a suggestion, and I am vewy much surprised that you should make it, Mr. Lathom!"

"What—what— How dare you speak to me in that scandalous manner, D'Arcy!" almost roared the irate master. "Is it not enough to have caused me—to have—"

Mr. Lathom stuttered and choked.

"I wegwet to have to speak so plainly, sir!" said Arthur Augustus, with great dignity. "But you must weally wealise my feelin's in the mattah! I did not seat myself there of my own fwee will—"

"Then—then—"

"I was assaulted by thwee young wuffians, sir!" said Gussy heatedly. "I was seated down forcibly and had no choice in the mattah! Before I could wise again you wushed out and fell ovah me! I am vewy much hurt, and am all in a fluttah! Apart fwm those young wuffians, the fault, if any, was yours in wushin' out in that mannah, sir!"

"What—what— Bless my soul! How—how dare you!"

Mr. Lathom was wrathful, and he was scandalised. But he was a just master, and wrathful as he was, he could not fail to see the justice in the plain speaking of the noble Arthur Augustus.

"Then—then if the fault was not yours, D'Arcy—" he gasped.

"Most certainly not, sir!"

"Then I shall only punish you for your impertinence to me!"

"Weally, sir—"

"You will take one hundred lines!"

"Vewy good, sir!" Arthur Augustus spoke in his stateliest

manner. "As you are my Form mastah, Mr. Lathom, I am obliged to submit to this injustice, sir!"

"What—what, D'Arcy!"

"But I feel bound to point out, sir, that I have already been punished enough! Look at the state of my clobber, sir!"

"Your—your what?" gasped the master.

"My clothes, sir! Look at my jacket—the wumples in my twousahs!" said Gussy indignantly. "Look at my toppah! I spent ovah an hour dwessin'—"

"You—you spent over an hour dressing, D'Arcy?" stuttered Mr. Lathom.

"Yaas, wathah! I considah, in the cires—"

"Utterly absurd! Ridiculous! Monstrous!"

"Weally, sir—"

"Infantile!" snorted Mr. Lathom. "How a boy of your age can spend so much time on dress is beyond me, D'Arcy! You are nothing less than an over-dressed doll, D'Arcy!"

"Wha-at?"

"An empty-headed fop!"

snorted Mr. Lathom. "I abominate a boy who thinks too much of his personal appearance! You spend far too much time and money on your dress, boy! I have long wished to speak to you in this regard, D'Arcy!"

"Bai Jove!"

"A healthy English boy should have other and more manly interests, D'Arcy! It is childish, girlish, and effeminate to dress oneself up like a peacock! I admire a boy who keeps himself tidy and clean. But a boy like you who spends an excessive amount of money on turning himself into a dandy and a fop, and who wastes an hour in such feminine pursuits as over-attention to dress, can only earn and deserve the pity and contempt of more manly fellows. I shall expect those lines before evening preparation, D'Arcy!"

And Mr. Lathom flounced indoors again, to spend the afternoon recuperating from his shock, on the sofa of his study.

He left Arthur Augustus standing with his mouth open like a stranded fish.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped. "Oh, bai Jove!"

Never had Arthur Augustus had such a ticking off as that—not one, at least, that hurt him so badly, and hit him where he lived, as Handcock would have said.

Like a fellow in a dream he picked up his gloves and his stick and tottered down the steps after his hat. He was just dusting himself down when Kildare, the St. Jim's skipper, appeared at the top of the steps.

Kildare looked round him, and then his eyes fell upon Arthur Augustus.

"Hallo! You'll do, D'Arcy!" he said. "Going to the village?"

"Yaas, Kildare. At least, I was goin' to the pictures in Wayland! But—"

"Right, kid! Then call at the post office in the village with this registered packet, will you?" said Kildare. "Take care of it as it contains money—notes, D'Arcy! Here is a shilling for the registration."

"Vewy good, Kildare!" Arthur Augustus took the packet and started off. Kildare called after him.

"Hold on, you young ass! Shove it in your inside pocket for safety!"

"Bai Jove! Impossible, Kildare!"

"Eh? What the thump d'you mean? Shove it in your pocket!"

"Inposs, deah boy!"

"Why?" hooted Kildare.

"Because it would wumple my jacket!" said Gussy innocently. "I never shove bulky articles in my pockets, deah boy! It wuins the shape, you know!"

"Great pip!"

Kildare blinked at him dazedly.

"R-ruins the shape! Oh, ye gods!" he gasped. "You—you young idiot!"

"Weally, Kildare—"

"You footling tailor's dummy!" roared Kildare. "Blessed if you aren't worse than a silly, empty headed flapper, D'Arcy! How a kid like you can dress up like a silly fashion-plate and turn himself into a walking tailor's shop beats me hollow!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, you—"

"You ought to be at a girls' school, not a school for healthy young boys!" snorted Kildare, in disgust. "Great pip! Afraid of rumpling his jacket! Did you ever! Take that chunk of glass out of your eye, and shove that packet in your pocket. Then take your silly topper off and use it as a football as far as the village!"

"Gweat Scott! I uttably wufuse to do anythin' of the kind, Kildare, and I considah your wudeness is uttably uncalled for—Yoooop!"

Arthur Augustus roared as Kildare grabbed him by the collar, rammed the registered packet in his pocket, and ran him along for a dozen yards, and then planted a hefty boot behind him.

"Perhaps that'll help you along, D'Arcy!" gasped Kildare wrathfully. "Rumple his jacket! B-r-rrr! If you aren't outside those gates in two secs I'm coming after you again with my boot!"

"Ow, ow! Yow! You feahful wuffian!"

But Arthur Augustus delayed his departure no longer in order to argue with Kildare further. Well within the two seconds he was outside the gates. He fairly flew.

CHAPTER 2.

Too Bad!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS strode with stately tread along Rylcombe Lane, his brow wearing a deeply thoughtful frown. Yet his mind was in a state of indignation and mental stress.

Mr. Lathom's severe censure had upset him very much. Kildare's slashing criticism had upset him still more. Both attacks were entirely untrue and uncalled for—in his opinion.

He was proud of his habits of dress; he always took a pride in his personal appearance—a great pride. It was up to him, as scion and representative of a noble and aristocratic house, to keep up an appearance, to dress well, and to keep up the credit of St. Jim's.

Other fellows, he admitted, were careless and slovenly. A splash of ink on one's collar did not worry some fellows at all; it caused them no mental distress. A rumpled jacket or baggy trousers caused them no agony of mind, and did not disturb their spirit. A frayed necktie or unpolished boots they seemed to regard as of little moment. They went on their way regardless of one's duty and self-respect.

Not so Arthur Augustus! He regarded himself as a shining light and a noble example to his schoolfellows. Yet—the bitterness and shame of it—both his Form master and the captain of the school, in their blind ignorance, had grossly misrepresented his public-spirited efforts to do the right and proper thing. Instead of acknowledging him as a shining light and a credit to the school, they had actually called him a fop, a dandy, and an effeminate and over-dressed dolt.

Arthur Augustus seethed with the injustice of it all.

Was that how those in authority regarded him? Then how did those not in authority regard him?

Gussy, despite his distress and indignation, could not help wondering.

With stately tread, and careful avoidance of mud and puddles in order not to splash his natty shoes, Arthur Augustus progressed along Rylcombe Lane.

From the gateway leading up to Rylcombe Grange emerged an elderly, military-looking gentleman with a red face and white moustache. It was Colonel Bland, a local magistrate and a Governor of St. Jim's.

With the colonel was a young terrier, who instantly sighted Arthur Augustus. Pelting up to him, the terrier leaped up and pawed Arthur Augustus playfully.

Shaken out of his accustomed calm, Arthur Augustus yelled:

"Yooop! Get off! Bai Jove! Go down, you feahful animal! Gweat Scott!"

"Begad! What the dickens—"

"Pway call your wretched dog off, sir!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "Down, you bwute! Ow! Gweat Scott!"

Arthur Augustus backed and backed. The colonel's whiskers bristled, and he glared.

"What—what—begad! You young donkey!" he snorted.

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"The confounded dog won't hurt you! Here, Fido! Come here, sir! Good gad!"

Fido obeyed his master, giving Arthur Augustus a reproachful look as much as to say: "Silly young idiot! I wasn't going to bite you!"

Colonel Bland still glared.

"Young donkey! Huh! Afraid of a young puppy! Good gad! What is St. Jim's coming to?"

"Weally, sir—"

Arthur Augustus went crimson as he took out his cambric handkerchief and began to rub the mud from his trousers.

"Weally, sir!" he gasped heatedly. "I was not afraid of your wretched animal at all, Colonel Bland. Wubbish!"

"What—what—Then what in thunder—"

"My bags, of course, sir!"

"Your—your what?" barked the old gentleman, staring.

"My twousahs, Colonel Bland!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, gazing down in horror at the muddy paw-marks on his elegant bags. "Just look at them now, sir! Pway look at them for yourself! Look at the howwid mud!"

"M-mum-mud?"

"Yaas, sir! Just look!"

"You—you were afraid of gettin' your—your confounded trousers muddied?" articulated Colonel Bland, nearly speechless with astonishment.

"Most certainly, sir! And now, just look—"

And Arthur Augustus nearly wept as he examined the paw-marks on his bags. The old gentleman eyed him as if he were some strange insect from another world.

"Good gad!" he exploded at length. "Is Dr. Holmes aware that he has a young lunatic at the school, boy?"

"Bai Jove! If you are wafewwin' to me, my good sir—"

"I am referring to you! If you aren't a young lunatic then what in thunder are you?" hooted the old gent. "A confounded tailor's dummy, a female dressed in male attire, or a dashed milksop?"

"M-milksop? Weally, sir—"

"Afraid of getting his trousers muddy!" repeated Colonel Bland dazedly. "Good gad! What is St. Jim's comin' to? Jove! I remember now—I've seen you before—you and your idiotic eyeglass!"

"Weally, sir—weally—"

"I've often wanted to give you a piece of my mind, boy!" snapped the old gent heatedly. "Disgracing the old school, begad!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Only a brainless imbecile would dress as you do!" hooted the old fellow, jabbing Arthur Augustus in the waistcoat with his stick. "You think a dashed sight too much about dress, boy! Why in thunder does a boy of your age want to be trotting about in a silk hat? Huh! Did St. Jim's boys in my day wear silk hats on week-days? Gad, no!"

"Weally, sir!" choked Gussy.

"Allow me to tell you that boys in my day did not care twopence about their confounded dress!" exclaimed Colonel Bland, glowering at Gussy. "They did not go about like walking fashion-plates! They were not afraid of a bit of mud! But, begad, they turned out men—real men—men who have made the Empire what it is!"

"Oh, bai Jove! My good sir—"

"They were men, boy!" snorted Colonel Bland. "Allow me to tell you that the Battle of Waterloo was won on the muddy playing-fields and not in a dashed ladies' drawing-room or an outfitter's shop! Have you no desire to grow up a man, boy?"

"Oh, Gweat Scott! Yaas, wathah! But, weally—"

"Then go and roll in that muddy ditch!" barked the old warrior. "And if your confounded master licks you for being untidy, grin and bear it. That's what will make a man of you—not strutting about like a brainless peacock! Huh!"

And having thus told Arthur Augustus what he thought of him, and given him the benefit of his advice, Colonel Bland marched away with Fido.

Arthur Augustus stood as if turned to stone as he blinked after the old warrior.

"G-good gwacious!" he gasped. "Weally—weally, the feahful old boundah must be potty! Oh, Gweat Scott!"

Crimson in the face, and fairly trembling with indignation, the swell of the Fourth resumed his progress along Rylcombe Lane. But he attempted to remove no more of the mud-marks from his bags. And he took far less care in avoiding muddy puddles now.

The gallant old fellow's fierce thrusts had gone home, to some extent, at least. His advice—whether good or bad—had not fallen on barren ground.

Though his indignation was no less, Arthur Augustus wore a deeper frown of thought than ever now.

A few moments later he met two girls from Spalding Hall School in the lane. Gussy went pink as he noted—or fancied he noted, so great was his agitation—their smiles of amusement. A little later a butcher-boy came riding along on a bicycle. He grinned at Gussy as he passed, swerved in towards him, and gave his elegant topper a gentle tap.

"Gweat Scott!" gasped Gussy, crimson with wrath as he shook his fist after the grinning butcher-boy. "The—the fwrightful young wuffian!"

Near the station Arthur Augustus suddenly halted as he caught sight of himself in a looking-glass of a shop window.

Horror of horrors! His necktie was almost adrift, twisted and rumped! It must have happened during the scuffle on the School House steps, of course. The sight made

smiled Carboy. "Hallo! Your topper's a trifle lop-sided Gussy!"

He gave the topper a gentle tap on the port side. Frank Monk, not to be outdone, "topped" these kindly attentions by giving the topper a smack on the crown that rammed it down over the indignant Gussy's ears.

Plop!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Grammarian jokers roared with laughter.

Arthur Augustus roared with wrath.

"You fwrightful wuffians! You howwid hooligans!" he roared, struggling desperately to release his head from his hat. "I will give you all a feahful thwashin' for that!"

And, having pushed up his hat from his ears, Arthur Augustus rushed in to avenge the deadly insult and assault.

Gordon Gay & Co. promptly collared him and rushed him, struggling furiously, into an entry at the side of an empty shop. There were plenty of St. Jim's fellows in the village, but Gay & Co. did not mind—they were feeling like a bit of harmless amusement. Arthur Augustus, naturally enough, did not regard it as such. He struggled desperately, realising he was booked for a ragging, unless he could escape, or attract the attention of his chums.

Gay & Co. took good care that did not happen, however.

Gordon Gay's eyes were glimmering.

"Hold him and keep him quiet!" he chuckled. "I've got a n idea! A scorcher! Shan't be a sec!"

Gordon Gay hurried out of the entry and into the shop doorway, the fanlight of which was open. Then Gay did a remark-

able thing—he snatched off his own cap and flung it through the fanlight.

Then he hurried along to Mr. Bonewit, the butcher, who did a lot of business with the Grammar School, and who, therefore, looked with a kindly eye upon all Grammarians. Indeed, the Grammar School custom had largely helped Mr. Bonewit not only to buy his own premises but several other shops in the High Street—one of which was the empty shop.

Gay knew the shop belonged to him because on the previous Wednesday, during a rag with St. Jim's fellows, Monty Lowther had grabbed his cap and flung it through the fanlight of the empty shop.

To get it back Gay had been obliged to visit Mr. Bonewit. That gentleman, being too busy at the time, had willingly lent Gay the key to the side door in the entry so that he could recover the cap himself.

Gay was hoping that he would be too busy now to oblige in person.

He entered the shop, and found Mr. Bonewit busy with a customer. After the customer had gone Gay stated his business. Mr. Bonewit frowned.

"This is very annoying, Master Gay," he said, with a grunt. "However, I cannot leave the shop, and you must get the cap yourself! Young rascals!"

He got the key and handed it over to Gordon Gay, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,177.



Mr. Lathom came hurrying out, failed to see Gussy, and fell headlong over him!

Gussy forget recent happenings, and he spent three minutes before the glass, putting his necktie in respectable order.

Then he entered the station—just in time to see the tail-end of the Wayland train disappearing in the distance.

"Oh, bai Jove!" gasped Gussy, in dismay. "What a feahful nuisance! If I had not stopped to put my necktie straight I should have just caught it. And there isn't anothah twain for an hour! Blow!"

Gussy, his emotions too deep for words, left the station. The Wayland cinema was "off" for him now. The whole afternoon was wasted. And—and Gussy could not help seeing it—it was all owing to his over-attention to dress!

"Bai Jove!" murmured Gussy. "Yaas, I am afwaid—yaas, probably I do wathah wowwy too much about my appeahwance! The pater, even, has often told me that! Blake and the west have told me that, and—and—"

Gussy blushed as he remembered how many people had told him that. Their names and numbers were legion.

"Oh, bai Jove!" groaned Gussy. "I have nerval looked at it in that light be— Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus started violently as he nearly walked into three juniors who had planted themselves in his path. They were Gordon Gay, Frank Monk, and Carboy, of the Grammar School Fourth.

"It is, it are!" smiled Gordon Gay. "It's dear old Gussy!"

"The one and only!" chuckled Monk.

"The pride of the school, and the pet of the tailors!"

who chuckled softly and hurried back to his chums. A moment later the side door was open, and the apprehensive Arthur Augustus, still struggling, was hustled through into the little back room.

This was empty save for an old chair, some boxes, several tins of paint and brushes, and a lot of rubbish.

"Just the very thing!" chuckled Gay, as he sighted the chair. "Shove old Gussy in it, chaps, and fasten him up."

"Bai Jove!" yelled D'Arcy. "Look heah, you wascals, what are you about to do with me?"

"You'll see, old fellow!" grinned Gay. "It's a pity that such a beautiful picture as you should not be exhibited! Buck up, chaps!"

"Ha, ha! Yes, rather!"
Monk and Carboy were beginning to grasp the idea now, and they got busy. There was plenty of string about, and soon Gussy's legs and arms were tied securely to the chair in which he sat, squirming. Then Gay rummaged among the rubbish, found a sheet of white cardboard, and started to print on it with a paint-brush and black paint.

When he had finished the cardboard bore the announcement: "This beautiful suit, price 1/11½ only. A bargain!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Monk and Carboy. "What price the tailor's dummy!"

"No need to advertise him as that," said Gay. "Everybody knows him as that, don't they?"

"You feahful wufians!" shrieked Arthur Augustus, suddenly realising their dreadful intention. "Wescue me at once! Oh, Gweat Scott! Wescue! Wescue!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Roaring with laughter, the heartless jokers grabbed the chair. It was no light weight with Arthur Augustus upon it, but they rushed their wriggling burden into the shop and placed the chair in the centre of the otherwise empty window.

Then Gay placed the sheet of cardboard in front of Gussy's legs, and jammed Gussy's eyeglass into place, that having fallen out in the struggle. After which Gordon Gay recovered his hat and donned it.

Then, yelling with laughter, Gordon Gay & Co. departed, closing the side door, and locking it again.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

With goggling, horrified eyes, Arthur Augustus blinked out into the street, where several people, attracted by the roars of laughter, had already stopped to investigate. Then they sighted Gussy. In a few minutes a crowd, growing bigger and bigger every moment, were gathering round the window, amidst howls of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

The luckless Arthur Augustus groaned and groaned in deep anguish of spirit as he blinked out in horror at the laughing crowd in the High Street of Rylcombe.

CHAPTER 3.

The Tailor's Dummy!

"SOMETHING'S up!"

As he passed that remark Tom Merry glanced out through the little, old-fashioned window of Dame Murphy's tuckshop in the village.

Monty Lowther drained his glass of lemonade.

"Those Grammarian rotters, then, I bet!" he grunted.

"Plenty of cackling going on, anyway!"

Tom Merry frowned.

"I spotted Gay and his pals as we came along," he said, shaking his head. "Where Gay is there's bound to be trouble of some sort! My hat! Hark to the cackling!"

There was a howl of laughter from the street. They glimpsed several fellows—Grammarians and St. Jim's fellows—running along the street, obviously to see what was afoot.

"We'll have a squint!" said Tom. "If you've finished mopping lemonade, come on!"

They hurried out into the High Street. Along the street they soon sighted the crowd outside the empty shop, and they joined it.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Haw, haw, haw! Look at the bloomin' tailor's dummy!"

Pushing his way forward, Tom Merry encountered Gordon Gay with his chums. They had mingled with the crowd, being too modest to push themselves forward in any way.

"Hallo, what's going on here, Gay?" demanded Tom, eyeing him not a little suspiciously.

"Better have a squint!" said Gay seriously, nodding to the window. "I always thought old Gussy was a fellow who

hated notoriety. Yet—well, just look at him! So vulgar to make such an exhibition of himself, beautiful as he does look!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry, his suspicions deepened into certainty, knocked Gay's cap off as a preliminary, and then pushed his way to the front.

Then he nearly fell down as he sighted the "tailor's dummy."

"M-mum-my hat!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"It—it's old Gussy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Even Tom Merry could not help a laugh as he sighted the woe-begone face of the swell of the Fourth. The hapless Arthur Augustus was as red as a tomato, and the perspiration fairly glistened upon his noble brow. He writhed and he wriggled and he wrenched in his desperate attempts to free himself.

"M-mum-my only hat!" breathed Tom Merry, ceasing to laugh as he realised the insult to St. Jim's. "This—this is the work of that rotter Gay!"

"Ha, ha, ha! What price St. Jim's?" came a Grammarian yell.

There was a sudden scuffle in the crowd. It usually needed much less than an insult to start a rag between Grammarians and Saints. Grundy of the Shell started it by planting a hefty fist on the nose of the laughing Frank Monk.

"Now laugh at that, you cheeky cad!" bawled Grundy.

"Back up, St. Jim's! We're not standing this!"

"Biff!"

"Yoop!"

The villagers hastily got out of the way. Several Spalding Hall schoolgirls did likewise, spluttering with mirth. The next moment a general free fight between the juniors of St. Jim's and the Grammar School was in progress before the window.

But Tom Merry, Lowther, and Manners took no part in it. The most urgent matter was to release the hapless Gussy from his horrid predicament at the earliest possible moment.

"This way, you chaps!" yelled Tom. "Give me a back, someone!"

Lowther crouched under the fanlight of the door. Tom swarmed on his back, and, aided by Manners, managed to scramble through the open framework over the door.

The next moment he had dropped down into the shop. Another moment and he was cutting the almost hysterical Gussy free from his bonds.

This action was greeted by a roar of satisfaction from the Saints and a yell of wrath from the Grammarians. But the latter happened to be in the minority, and they were much too busy to interfere.

"Come on, Gussy!" snapped Tom. "Never mind your giddy aches and pains. Buck up!"

Gussy did buck up! He freed himself of his bonds, kicked the chair over, and flung the sheet of cardboard viciously away. Then he followed Tom as that worthy shoved the chair under the fanlight. It was a way of entrance that had obviously not occurred to Gay & Co., and it was not an easy way. But Gussy managed to scramble through, and was helped down outside by Manners and Lowther.

Tom Merry followed and joined them in the street where the tide of battle was going strong. The Terrible Three instantly piled into the melee, but Arthur Augustus did not.

He was not feeling like a scrap just then. All he wanted to do was to rush away and hide his crimson, humiliated features from the grins and laughter of the onlookers, who were—many of them, at all events—quite interested in the new development.

Ramming his hat more firmly on his noble head, Arthur Augustus bolted for his life, followed by a howl.

"Haw, haw, haw!"

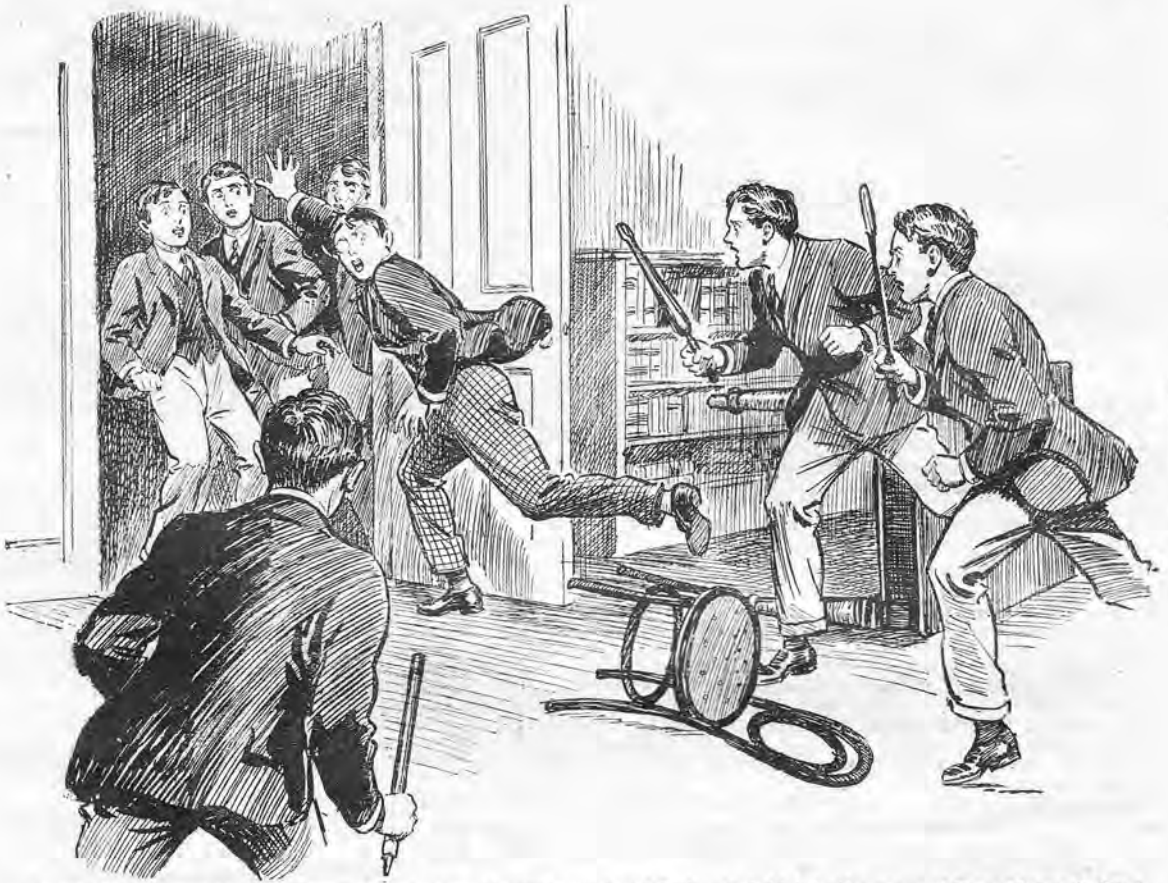
Outside the village he stopped running, panting and breathless.

"Ow! Ow, ow, ow!" he gasped. "Ow, Gweat Scott! What a dweadful speeahwiance! Oh deah! Those—those frightful cads! Oh, bai Jove! I am all in a fluttah! I shall nevah heah the last of this!"

He sat himself on the fence by the wayside to rest and recover his wind. This done, he started to put his dishevelled clothes in something like order and straighten out a dent in his somewhat battered topper.

Then suddenly he sighted a couple of girls coming along the lane. They were Spalding Hall girls he could see at a glance, and they were swaying about with laughter as they walked.

"Oh, bai Jove!" groaned Gussy.



As his three armed chums advanced upon him, Gussy turned and fled—straight into the arms of Tom Merry & Co.!

They were coming from village-wards, and obviously they were laughing at him—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Arthur Augustus did not hesitate. At the best of times he would have avoided a meeting in his present state. But now—

With a gasp, Gussy dived over the fence and crouched down out of sight behind the low hedge.

The girls came nearer, and he recognised them.

"It was too funny for words!" one was saying. "That silly, absurd boy should have more sense than to make himself so conspicuous with his daudified dress! But he was funny!"

"Serves him right!" said the other, who was Pamela Trent, a comparatively new girl at Spalding Hall. "I hate a milksop, and simply cannot stand a boy who is effeminate and foppish. It's a wonder his own schoolfellows don't despise him and rag him. It would do him the world of good!"

"Too bad, though! He looks a nice boy, but—it was funny!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

They passed on, laughing at the recollection of Arthur Augustus, the "tailor's dummy!"

Arthur Augustus, once again, was like a fellow turned to stone.

So—so that was how the girls of Spalding Hall School regarded him!

And he had fondly imagined that they regarded him with admiration as the best-dressed and most attractive fellow at St. Jim's. He had imagined he stood very high indeed in the estimation of the ladies. He had noted and been proud of their smiles of appreciation when they met him walking abroad in stately elegance.

Now he knew the truth. Their smiles were smiles of amusement! Their glances were not glances of appreciation, but of pity—if not scorn! They looked upon him as an object of derision, of laughter; they regarded his pride in dress as effeminate and foppish! He was termed by them a milksop!

Arthur Augustus crouched in the wet grass and felt as if the world were falling around his noble ears. It seemed as if the whole universe conspired that afternoon to

point out to him that he was treading the wrong path and that his lordly and dignified opinion of himself as a credit to St. Jim's was a snare and a delusion.

"Oh, bai Jove!" breathed Gussy.

There was a tramp of feet, and sounds of cheery laughter and voices. Along the lane came Tom Merry, Manners, Lowther, and several more St. Jim's fellows. They were adjusting disarranged attire and mopping damaged noses and hugging damaged eyes. Tom Merry & Co. had won the battle, but they had not come out of it unscathed by any means.

But there was a yell as the cause of the battle was seen. "Here he is!"

"Here's the giddy tailor's dummy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Though they had fought hard to rescue and back up Gussy against the enemy, Tom Merry & Co. could not fail to see the humour in the situation.

Arthur Augustus crimsoned and glowered at them.

"You—you cacklin' wottahs!"

"Dear old Gussy, the one and only!" chortled Lowther. "Any offers at one and eleven-pence halfpenny?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you cacklin' wottahs!" gasped Gussy.

"Your own fault, you know, old man!" said Tom Merry affectionately. "You will go about like a tailor's dummy, so what can you expect. You will sport a glimmering topper, so you mustn't complain if fellows will use it as a cockshy or a footer. If you will be a walking fashion-plate, then—Oh, my hat! Look out!"

The laughing juniors scattered as Arthur Augustus made a ferocious rush at them, the light of battle gleaming in his noble eye. When roused—as undoubtedly he now was—Gussy was a terrific fighting man. And knowing this, the hilarious ones did not wait to do battle. They fled, roaring with laughter.

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, almost choking with emotion, and in a state of mind bordering on the hysterical, gave up the chase and wended his dismal way homewards to St. Jim's, to hide his blushes there.

CHAPTER 4

Reformation!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS sat in the easy chair of Study No. 6, a deep frown of thought on his brow. He was thinking over the adventures of the afternoon, and he brought all his intellect to the task.

The swell of the Fourth, as a matter of fact, felt that he had reached a crisis in his career.

Many times and oft had he been adversely criticised by his own family, by his chums, by his Form-fellows, and by those in authority. But it had been like pouring water on a duck's back.

Criticism regarding his attention to matters of dress and personal appearance he had regarded not, like the idle wind that passed him by. Leg-pullers and other japers he had treated with disdain and contempt. He had gone on his way serene and sedate, living in a lofty plane far above those Philistines who cared nothing for a well-cut jacket or well-creased trousers.

But now his eyes were opened. The events of the afternoon had been taken to heart by Arthur Augustus. First his own chums, then Mr. Lathom, then Kildare, then Colonel Bland, then the butcher-boy, then the fact of the lost train, then Gordon Gay & Co., then the Spalding Hall girls, and finally his schoolfellows—all had combined in a thrust which had pierced the shell of his fatuous self-complacency.

He saw things clearly now, not, as before, "through a glass darkly."

Had he been wrong in placing such importance upon the necessity of keeping up a smart and well-groomed appearance? Had he been mistaken in imagining that by such exceptional attention to being well dressed he was being a credit to the school and a shining example to his misguided schoolfellows? Was it necessary to be so particular about an ink spot on his collar, or a speck of dust on his jacket?

Was he actually looked upon as an empty-headed top, get tea ready, knowing his chums would be hungry on their return from Wayland.

Arthur Augustus shuddered. Why, even the fags derided and ridiculed him. Even butcher-boys knocked his topper off. Yes, he had been merely an object of derision and ridicule—a laughing stock!

But his eyes were open now. It must not be—he must reform and become a normal boy, heedless of dress and appearance. No longer would he be the glass of fashion and the mould of form at St. Jim's. No more would a crumpled jacket cause him acute agony, or baggy trousers distress of mind. Never again would the latest in silk socks or a magnificent new necktie bring rapture to his soul.

He had done with them. As Colonel Bland had stated, the Battle of Waterloo was not won by fellows who worshipped at the shrine of dress, and who moved and had their being in a world of silk socks, neckties, and fancy waistcoats, but by fellows who revelled in mud and were only happy in rumpled jackets and baggy trousers.

For a long time Gussy sat, deep in serious, anxious thought. And at last he reached his decision. The great resolve was taken. He would, indeed, reform—the die was cast! He would become the manly fellow Colonel Bland spoke about, a fellow with no respect or regard for clobber!

Arthur Augustus rose at last.

His brow was sad; his eye beneath, like the eye of the fellow in the poem, "Flashed like a falchion from its sheath!"

It fell upon the silk hat reposing on a chair, and Arthur Augustus took a running kick at the hat and sent it whizzing through the air.

Unfortunately the door opened just then and Tom Merry poked his head in. His face met the hat in full flight, and he howled.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Arthur Augustus, just a trifle half-heartedly.

Tom Merry blinked from him to the hat.

"You—you born idiot!" he gasped, in amazement. "What on earth d'you think you're playing at, Gussy?"

"Kicking my toppah, deah boy!"

"Your—your topper?"

"Yaas!"

"Your own topper?"

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"Yaas!"

"K-kicking it?" stuttered Tom.

"Yaas!"

"Well, my hat! Then—then you won't mind if I kick it?"

"Not at all, deah boy!"

"Great pip!"

Tom Merry fairly blinked at him. Then he took Gussy at his word and took a running kick at the silk hat.

Plop!

The topper sailed through the air, missed Gussy's head by an eighth of an inch, and whizzed through the open window.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom. "It—it's gone, Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah! Ha, ha!"

"You—you don't mind?"

"Not at all, deah boy! Aftah all, a fellow mustn't attach too much importance to clobber, you know. What is a toppah? Blow toppahs!"

"Great Scott!"

Arthur Augustus chuckled and kicked one of his natty shoes out of his way. Tom Merry backed away from him, quite alarmed.

"Gussy, old fellow, you—you feel all right?"

"Quite all wight, deah boy!"

"You—you don't feel ill—no pains in the head, I mean, old fellow?" asked Tom nervously.

"Certainly not! Wight as wain, deah boy!" said Gussy, in surprise.

"You—you wouldn't care to see the matron, or—or a doctor, old fellow?"

"Bai Jove! Whatever for, deah boy?"

"Oh! Oh, nothing—nothing at all, old chap!" gasped Tom.

And he backed out hastily and closed the door. He had intended to speak to Blake about cricket, but now he determined to speak to Blake about something more serious—Gussy's mental condition!

Arthur Augustus shook his head seriously, and started to get tea ready, knowing his chums would be hungry on their return from Wayland.

While lighting the fire he got his fingers blacked, but he wiped them on his trousers quite cheerfully, taking a delight in doing so. By accident he brushed the black kettle against his sleeve, but the soot on his jacket gave him great satisfaction. While putting the jam out he

dropped some on his trousers, but wiped it carelessly off with a handkerchief, treating the accident as a matter of light as air.

He was still in a mood of exaltation over his new resolves when Blake, Herries, and Digby tramped in. Blake was looking quite disturbed, and he had something hidden behind his back. The others also looked very serious.

"Hallo, you fellows back, then?" said Gussy.

"Ye-es, Gussy," said Blake nervously. "I—I say, old fellow, we've had news for you."

"Bai Jove! Whatevah—"

"It's your best topper, I'm afraid!" said Blake, slowly and apprehensively bringing to view a battered muddy topper. "It was found in the quad a few sees ago, old fellow, and it has your name inside! Some heartless villain has been using it for a footer, by the look of it."

"Oh, yaas!" said Gussy, chuckling as he recognised the hat. "That is quite all wight, deah boys!"

"All—all right!" stuttered Blake.

"Yaas!"

"But it's your best topper, Gussy!"

"I know! I kicked it at Tom Mewwy, deah boy!"

"You—you kicked it—you did?" yelled Blake.

"Yaas! Then Tom Mewwy hoofed it through the window," said Gussy cheerfully. "That's all wight! Blow the toppah! What does a toppah mattah? There are more important things in life than silly toppahs, you know!"

"Oh, my only hat!"

Gussy's chums blinked at him dazedly. They had expected him to go into hysterics, at least, on sighting that battered silk hat.

"Pway sit down to tea, deah boys!" said Gussy, apparently quite ignorant of the sensation he was causing. "Blow! I've splashed the beastly tea ovah my bags! Nevah mind, all in the day's work, you know!"

"And—and there's jam on your trousers!" gasped Digby.

"And d'you know there's soot on your sleeve and on your bags, too!" said Herries, staring at Gussy. "And what on earth's that on the kettle handle, Gussy?"

"Only one of my gloves, deah boy! The handle was wathah hot, you know, so I used that to hold it! Quite all wight!"

"Great pip!"

Arthur Augustus sat down to tea. So great was Blake's agitation and confusion at this amazing change in Gussy that he upset the milk, and it streamed over the cloth and swept over Gussy's waistcoat and trousers.

"Oh! Oh, my hat! Frightfully sorry, Gussy!" gasped Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wha-what?"

"Accidents will happen!" laughed Gussy cheerfully, carelessly mopping his trousers and waistcoat with a silk handkerchief.

"Quite all wight, deah boy!"

"Oh, ye gods!"

"One mustn't bothah too much about clobber, you know!" said Gussy severely. "I'm afraid you fellows are wathah given to payin' far more attention than is necessary to such things. Yaas, wathah!"

"Great Scott!"

Blake, Herries, and Digby exchanged glances—eloquent glances. Herries tapped his head significantly, and they all looked very anxiously and agitatedly at Gussy.

"You—you feeling quite well, Gussy, old fellow?" gasped Blake desperately.

"Bai Jove! That ass Tom Mewwy asked me the same silly question, Blake! Of course, I'm quite all wight—wight as wain!"

"Oh dear!"

"Oh, my hat! It's come at last!" groaned Jack Blake.

CHAPTER 5.

Not Potty!

BLAKE, Herries, and Digby exchanged further eloquent and meaning glances. If Tom Merry had already noticed something wrong, then their own suspicions were verified. There was something wrong—sadly wrong—with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"You—you haven't any pains in your head, Gussy?" stammered Blake.

"Not at all, deah boy! Bai Jove! Tom Mewwy asked me that question also. Are you all pottay?"

"Nunno! Now don't get excited, dear old fellow! Keep calm!"

"Bai Jove! I am not gettin' excited at all, Blake. Weally—"

"You—you'll perhaps feel better after tea, old man!" stammered Digby. "I suppose that affair this afternoon has upset you. We heard about it, of course!" Digby couldn't restrain a grin. "But don't worry, we'll make Gay and his pals sit up for it!"

"Yes, rather! It was rather thick, Gussy, making a show of you like that. But—Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is nothin' to cackle at, Blake!" growled Gussy.

"But you do ask for it, you know you do," grinned Blake. "And, after all—But never mind that; don't think about it, old man!"

"I am not thinkin' about it at all, Blake!" said Gussy, with some dignity. "I considah that wottah Gay is an uttah wuffian! None the less, I am prepared to admit that he had some excuse, you know!"

"You—you are? Ye gods!"

"Yaas. I have weached the conclusion, deah boys," said Gussy, eyeing his chums very seriously, "that I have hitherto spent far too much time and given far too much attention to clobber!"

"Oh, great pip!"

"I have made myself wathah too conspicuous, you know," confessed Gussy. "I admit that I have ovahdone things in that respect! The Battle of Trafalgh—Bai Jove, I mean the Battle of Watahloo was not won on the—I mean, by fellows who took too gweat an intahwest in neckties and socks, you know!"

"Oh dear! Gussy—"

"I think I shall get wid of all my surplus clothin'," remarked Gussy confidentially. "There are othah things in life more important than clobber, you know!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Blake.

He was beginning to understand a little now. Obviously, the afternoon's adventures had had a profound effect upon the noble mind of Arthur Augustus.

Blake winked solemnly at Herries and Digby.

"This—this has taken us by surprise, Gussy!" he mumbled. "You—you're sure you're quite all right?"

"Bai Jove! What evah do you mean, Blake?"

"You—you really don't mind your best topper being busted?"

"Not at all!"

"Nor jam on your bags?"

"Not a bit, deah boy?"

"Nor milk over your jacket?"

"Wathah not!"

"And you wouldn't mind egg on your jacket?"

"I shouldn't wowwy at all, deah boy!"

"Good! You won't mind if I wipe my fingers on it, then," said Blake. "I've just spilt some egg on them, old chap!"

And Blake wiped his fingers on Gussy's jacket, leaving a smear of egg there.

Arthur Augustus leaped up, but just as quickly his agonised expression changed to a grin, and he sat down again.

"That was wathah sillay and quite unnecessawy, Jack Blake!" he said reprovingly. "Howevah, it doesn't mattah!"

"Doesn't it?" gasped Herries. "Then you won't mind if I wipe my knife on your bags!"

He wiped his knife on Gussy's bags, leaving a smear of jam there. Not to be outdone, Digby wiped his egg spoon on Gussy's jacket-sleeve. Blake was just about to wipe his plate on the back of Gussy's ill-used jacket when Gussy leaped up wrathfully.

"You silly idiots!" he gasped. "It is vewy plain to me that you wottahs are twyin' to pull my leg—"

"Go hon!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's nothin' to laugh at, you feahful wottahs—"

"I should think it wasn't!" said Blake, becoming suddenly grave. "Now, for goodness' sake, don't get excited again, Gussy!"

"I tell you I am not excited!" shouted Gussy wrathfully.

"You silly owl—"

"Of course not, old fellow," said Blake soothingly. "We shall have to humour him," whispered Blake in an aside to his chums which was loud enough for anyone in the passage to hear. "It's quite clear it's come at last. He's quite gone—"

"I have not quite gone at all, Jack Blake!" hooted Gussy. "You feahful—"

"We must get help," said Blake. "He must be restrained—"

"I uttably wefuse to be westwained—I mean, I do not wequiah westwainin', you fwightful ass!" shouted Arthur Augustus, crimson with wrath.

"Better fetch Railton!" said Herries, shaking his head.

"Chap who kicks his best topper about, and asks chaps to wipe their eggspoons on him—"

"I did nothing of the kind!" howled Gussy. "You—you—"

"Must be quite gone!" finished Herries, backing away in pretended alarm before the nearly hysterical Arthur Augustus. "Hold him!"

"I am not quite gone, Hewwies, you feahful—"

"Not quite, but nearly, old fellow—just potty!"

"I am not pottay, you fwightful idiots!" shrieked Arthur Augustus, as Blake, Herries, and Digby backed away from him, as if in terror. "Blake, put down those firetongs. Hewwies, dwop that pokah, you idiot! Digbay—Oh, Gweat Scott!"

Blake had armed himself with the firetongs, Herries a poker, and Digby a cricket-stump.

"He'll be chasing us with a table-knife in a minute!" gasped Blake. "Look out! Shout for help!"

"Rush him!" gasped Herries. "Rush him and down him before he has time to get violent!"

"That's it! Go it! Hit him with that poker, Herries, and I'll give him a sock with these!"

"Oh, bai Jo—Yawwooop!"

Arthur Augustus shrieked as Blake, Herries, and Digby, waving their weapons furiously, made a sudden rush at him. He had half-suspected that they were pulling his leg, but he really couldn't chance it and face that rush.

He turned and fled—right into the arms of Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, who looked on just then.

"What the thump—"

The Terrible Three almost shrieked as Gussy rushed into them blindly.

"Hold him!" shouted Blake, dropping the firetongs.

"Hold him! He's gone mad—dangerous!"

"My hat! Just what I feared!" gasped Tom Merry, returning Blake's wink. "Steady, Gussy, old fellow!"

"Welease me, you wotten asses!" shrieked Gussy.

He struggled furiously in the grasp of the Terrible Three, and then Blake, Herries, and Digby came to help, and together they carried the nearly hysterical Arthur Augustus back into the study and sat on him.

"Just what I feared," said Tom Merry sadly. "I looked in before, and found him kicking his best topper about. I knew it had come at last, of course!"

"Tom Mewwy, you feahful wascal—"

"Quiet, Gussy—quiet, old fellow!" said Blake. "Don't crowd into the room, chaps. Give him plenty of air!"

The rumpus had brought a lot of fellows from their studies, and there was a grinning crowd round the doorway.

"What's the matter?" asked Levison of the Fourth.

"Only Gussy breaking out again," said Lowther. "But it's more serious this time; he's violent. Anybody got a strait-waistcoat?"

"Lowthah, you wottah—"

"Fetch Railton, somebody!"

"Blake, you uttah wascal—"

"Ring for an ambulance!" called Digby. "If only we had a strait-waistcoat—"

"Here you are. This will do just as well!"

Cardew came rushing in with a large doormat in his hands.

"Ha, ha—I mean, quite so!" said Blake hastily. "Just the very thing, Cardew! Roll him up in it, and tie him round. He'll do then until the ambulance comes from the Wayland Mental Hospital!"

"Oh—oh ewikey! You feahful wascals!"

Arthur Augustus began to struggle with renewed energy, and a wild and whirling conflict followed.

But they managed to get the doormat round him at last, and Blake wound some cord round this and made it fast. Then Gussy was jerked to his feet. The "strait-waistcoat" came from his knees up to his chin, pinning his arms to his side. Above it his features showed, his face dusty and crimson, his noble eyes gleaming with great wrath.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the entertained onlookers.

"I'm surprised at you fellows," said Blake, in a shocked voice. "This is a serious matter, not a laughing matter

Indeed, his chums' little joke—outrageous as it was—only added to his recently acquired belief that he had been paying far too much attention to matters of dress and personal appearance. But for his known love of personal adornment, and his known horror of getting his toppers and clobber damaged, it wouldn't have happened at all. Blake & Co. wouldn't have thought—or pretended to think—that he had gone "potty" just because he had been caught hoofing his best topper about the study.

That much was clear to Arthur Augustus.

It stiffened his resolve to go ahead with his reform. Such rags never happened to other, more normal fellows.

To prevent such rags being repeated, to prevent himself being looked upon as an object of ridicule, Arthur Augustus determined that, at all costs, he would become more normal and reform his ways.

It would be hard—it would be difficult. Ink-spots would cause him to suffer acutely; baggy trousers would bring keen distress; a rumpled jacket would mean untold agonies. And to relinquish a topper would be the most horrid blow of all. Yet it had to be borne. In time he would get used to it, and would become a care-free, normal fellow, who cared nothing for inky collars, and one to whom the latest thing in neckties would bring no thrill of emotion.

His monocle he would retain, but even that should not be so highly polished as of yore!

Gussy doggedly refused to change his trousers, though they had picked up plenty of dust in Study No. 6. Nor did he trouble to wash or brush his hair again. He would not have changed his jacket but for the sticky jam on it, which was decidedly unpleasant. The jacket he changed into, however, was his very oldest.

THIS IS GRUNDY'S IDEAR OF SPELLING

In next week's grate storry of St. Jim's!

"GRUNDY'S SIMPLIFIED SPELLING!"

at all! You may go potty yourselves some day, and then—"

"Blake, you—you wetchted wuffian—"

"Yes, Gussy, old fellow!"

"You fwightful wottah! You know vewy well that I am not pottay!"

"Not—not potty?" repeated Blake, as if astonished at the denial. "Then why on earth did you kick your best topper about?"

"I have alweady explained that!" shrieked Gussy. "Welease me this instant, you feahful wascals!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, well, if you really assure us that you arcn't potty, old chap—"

"You—you—you—"

"And if you'll promise not to be violent, Gussy—"

"You—you—you—"

"We've only your word for it, you know," said Blake. "But as we want to finish tea, we'll give you the benefit of the doubt, Gussy. If you get violent again, of course we shall have to restrain you again!"

"You— Oh, you feahful asses!" splattered Arthur Augustus.

Blake cut the cord round the doormat. It fell away from D'Arcy as it unwound itself, and Blake stepped back hastily, evidently anticipating more violence. But Arthur Augustus had had enough of "restraint."

He started out to rush blindly at his laughing chums, and then, remembering Blake's threat, he gave that youth a look that ought to have shrivelled him up, but didn't, and stalked out of the study, shouldering the laughing spectators out of the way. A howl of laughter followed him as he strode down the passage, his aristocratic features crimson with terrific wrath, and his feelings too deep for words.

CHAPTER 6. Keeping It Up!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS was on his high horse that evening.

He refused to exchange a word with his faithless chums, and he treated them with frozen looks and lofty, icy disdain.

Considering everything, this was not surprising. What was surprising was the fact that the happenings over tea had not changed Gussy's resolution one jot.

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Arthur Augustus turned up in the Common-room that evening looking almost as shabby and disreputable as Baggy Trimble!

Naturally the sight created great astonishment. Arthur Augustus, in fact, looked like overdoing it. From being the best-dressed fellow in St. Jim's, he looked like degenerating into the worst.

Many fellows stared at him, and a great many more grinned at him. Gussy's reformation, in point of fact, was causing a great deal of amusement in the Form. Blake & Co. could not be expected to keep such a great screaming joke to themselves. Nor did they! So far, Gussy, of course, had only hinted at his change of views. But they could guess much more than he had told them.

In private the fellows yelled about it.

In the hall, later on, Gussy, slouching along with his hands in his pockets, was pulled up by Mr. Railton, who ticked him off severely in respect to his slovenly appearance. It was Gussy's first real "victory," and the incident delighted him.

In the dormitory that night Kildare gave him fifty lines for throwing his clothes on the floor instead of folding them neatly on a chair.

Gussy gloried in the fifty lines.

The next morning at breakfast, Mr. Lathom ticked him off for not brushing his hair. During lessons, Mr. Lathom—quite shocked in this sudden and surprising change in his model pupil—sent him out to brush his clothes, and to tidy himself up a little—adding another fifty lines to impress upon Gussy's mind the necessity of not being slovenly.

Arthur Augustus glorified in being a sloven, however.

Jack Blake felt that a word of warning was necessary.

"You're overdoing it, old chap!" he said, with a chuckle.

"Ovahdoin' what, Blake?" demanded Gussy, who had been gradually climbing down from his high horse. "I fail to see—"

"You look like a blessed tramp!" chuckled Herries. "Better chuck this game, or you'll get it in the neck all round, old chap!"

"Bai Jove! I do not wemembah tellin' you fellows of my decision in wegard to clobber!" said Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, it is quite twue that I have decided to reform my views wegardin' clobber, deah boys! I weally think you fellows would do well to follow my example. In my view you think far too much of your personal appeahwance, you know!"

(Continued at foot of next page.)



Roll up! Roll up! Roll up! This is a free contest, lads! Just send in your question and see if it will stump the Oracle! If it does, the Editor will reduce his salary!

WELL, chums, what do you all think of the new serial? Fine! And what'd you all think of the old Oracle? What's that? Judging by the van-loads of queries that arrive at the office every day I should say that you all think that I know everything, and a bit more besides.

Believe me, chums, if you saw the letters pouring into the sanctum every morning, and the office-boy pouring the tea over them in the afternoon, and old whiskers, that's me, poring over them in the stilly watches of the night, with the perspiration pouring out of every pore, you'd say "Poor chap! He never gets any sleep!" And I wouldn't if it weren't for the forty winks I manage to squeeze in after lunch in the office. You'll realise that it's no easy matter getting in a quiet spot of shut-eye with the old Editor prowling round.

He's taken to looking in of an afternoon now to see what's going on. "Ha, ha!" he said the other day. "Don't you let me catch you napping, my lad!" "No, sir," I said brightly, "you'll never do that, and neither will our esteemed readers." "So you say," said he, "so you say. You just trot along into the sanctum and we'll see about it." So in I went, fearing that at last the old Ed. had sorted out some really baffling brain-teasers for me to solve.

"First of all," said the Editor, picking up a letter, "we have an interesting question from a girl reader—Ethel Hope, of Hampstead. Ethel wants to know one or two things about the nightingale, what it looks like, what time it gets up in the morning, and so fifth? Can you supply the information, my friend?"

"Yes, sir," said I, springing smartly to attention and slipping my false teeth into position. "The nightingale is a bird with a very sweet song and a very

generally, but it is found in Ireland, Scotland, or Wales. In the winter months it will be found in Arabia, Persia, and the Gold Coast, and it comes to this country about the middle of April."

"The next poser also deals with a question of Natural History," said the Editor, taking another epistle from the pile. "William Shanks, a Hove reader, wants to know whether otters are hunted for their fur?"

"The otter that is valued for its coat of fur is the sea-otter, which is a larger species than the otter that is hunted in England. The sea-otter has its haunts in the North Pacific, and is pretty well exterminated owing to the value put on their skins."

"Explain what a bolas is?"

"The bolas is a weapon used by South American Indians, and consists of balls of stone attached to the end of a rope made from hide or hemp. The stones are on the end of two or three thongs, and they are thrown in such a way that when they strike an object they wind the rope round it. This needs a lot of practice, believe me. The South American Indians use them for catching ostriches. When I was a youngster I used to try my hand with the bolas in the back garden of an evening. All I caught was a cold."

"A Nottingham GEMITE wishes to be told the difference between dyspepsia and eupepsia. Come along now."

"Don't flurry me, sir," I pleaded. "It's too funny the questions some people will ask, isn't it? Dyspepsia is another word for indigestion. Eupepsia is another word for good digestion."

"Another girl reader sends an inquiry about chintz. She wants to know what chintz is made of, and how it gets its name?"

"Chintz comes from the Hindu word chint, which means spotted, and the

inconspicuous plumage. Both the male and female nightingale are of a reddish-brown above and dull greyish-white beneath, with tails somewhat red in colour. It is commonly supposed to sing only at night, but actually it sings during all hours, day as well as night, right lustily. There are plenty of nightingales in the country districts round London, and in the South of England is never heard in

name was originally given to a painted calico produced in India. The chintz sold to-day is a highly glazed, printed calico, and is made in a variety of colours."

"The next letter asks us to explain whether celery is eatable when grown wild?"

"Wild celery is found growing in ditches and marshy places in England, especially near the sea, but it is not eatable, as it has a coarse, rank taste and a peculiar smell. The celery we buy in the greengrocer's is obtained by cultivation and blanching. And talking of salary, sir—"

The old Ed. hurriedly picked up another query.

"Here's a puzzler for you, G. Hawkins, of Fowey, wants to know what an obedient plant is?"

"That is the name for a herb that grows in North America. It is about four feet in height, with pointed leaves and clusters of red or white flowers. It gets its name from the fact that the flowers will remain in whatever position they are placed."

"Well," said the Editor, "I've never seen a flower get up and walk away; there's nothing funny about that. Tell me how nutmegs are grown?"

"Nutmeg is obtained from a tree that grows in the Molucca Islands. These trees are sixty feet high, and yield the seeds from which nutmeg is obtained for about sixty years."

"Can you explain why Scotsmen call a halfpenny a bawbee?"

"The word is said to be derived from Sillebawby, that being the name of the master of the Mint when the coins were first issued in 1541."

"Fred Smith asks what a bombardier is?"

"That, sir, is the lowest grade of non-commissioned officer in the Artillery of the British Army. A bombardier ranks about the same as a lance-corporal in the infantry."

"How high does bamboo grow?"

"Bamboo grows very rapidly, and in Ceylon, which is its native country, it will spring up sixteen inches in a single day, and reach the height of one hundred and twenty feet."

"That's amazing," said the Editor. "Sixteen inches in one day! Why, your whiskers don't grow as fast as that!"

He was about to pick up yet another letter when a loud and reverberating bang outside the door made us both jump. I looked out to see what was happening. It was the office-boy.

"Dear, dear," said the Editor, "is the poor lad hurt?"

"No, sir," I said; "he fell on his head. Good-bye, sir, till to-morrow."

afraid of a bit of mud, or who twoubled much about their clobbah. I shall dispose of all my superfluous clobbah now, deah boys!"

"Good idea!" said Lowther, winking at the others. "Why not hold a sale, old chap—sell off all your sixth, seventh, and eighth best suits, and all your fancy waistcoats and ties that weren't in fashion last week. You could give the proceeds to the cricket funds, you know. We're wanting funds for new nets, old chap."

"Bai Jove! That is wathah a bwight ideah, Lowthah! I will think it ovah, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus did think it over. By dinner-time he was almost decided, and a chat with Monty Lowther quite decided him. Lowther seemed remarkably keen on adding to the cricket funds. Possibly, being the biggest practical joker in the Shell, he had other reasons for persuading Gussy to adopt the suggestion!

At all events, Arthur Augustus did adopt it. He gave Lowther full powers to carry the thing through, and a notice appeared on the notice-board in the Common-room.

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GUSSY, THE SLOVEN!

(Continued from previous page.)

"Oh, my hat!"

"It is wathah a despicable and effeminate twait," said Gussy, shaking his head seriously. "You, Tom Mewwy, take much too much twouble ovah your curls, you know!"

"Fathead!" said Tom, blushing. "I—I have to brush them no end to keep 'em down, ass!"

"Digby, heah, is wathah a dandy, you know!" said Gussy, giving that youth a severe frown. "Howevah, that is Dig's own affiah. For myself I am determined to do away with all unnecessary clobbah. Spendin' too much time and money on clobbah is nothin' but vanity, you know. Aftah all, it is wathah unmanly and effeminate to think of nothin' but dress."

"Yes, we always told you that, old man!" said Tom Merry solemnly. "We knew it would bring you to what you are!"

"Weally, Mewwy—howevah, I am glad I have now come to see things in the wight light," said Gussy. "Aftah all, the Battle of Watahloo was not won by fellows who were

"NOTICE!"

"This afternoon, at 4.30 prompt, a sale will be held of all superfluous clothing belonging to the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Esquire, of the Fourth, the proceeds to go to the Junior Cricket Funds!"

"THE SALE COMPRISES

"All those numerous BEAUTIFUL SUITS, LOVELY TOPPERS, MAGNIFICENT NECKTIES, GORGEOUS SOCKS, SPLENDID SPATS, GLORIOUS GLOVES, and other valuable articles that have adorned the aristocratic form of the aforesaid member of the NOBILITY, and which are therefore HIGHLY CONNECTED and desirable. Gentlemen wishing to extend their WARDROBE have now the chance of a lifetime. If required, the HONOURABLE ARTHUR AUGUSTUS will autograph each separate article sold. ROLL UP! NO RESERVE! All goods knocked down to highest bidder!"

"Auctioneer: Mr. M. LOWTHER.

"Doorkeeper and chucker-out: G. A. GRUNDY.

"N.B.—No tick. No cheques accepted. Spot cash only. Gentlemen without financial means are respectfully requested to STAY AWAY."

The notice caused a sensation, but only Arthur Augustus himself objected to certain phrases in the advertisement.

"You are makin' wathah a joke of the mattah, Lowthah!" he protested. "I do not considah that at all businesslike, deah boy!"

"But I do, and the matter is in my hands now," said Lowther firmly. "It is usual for clients to leave all business details to the auctioneer. Of course, you won't turn up at the sale, Gussy! That wouldn't do at all!"

"Bai Jove! Why not, Lowthah? I was certainly goin' to turn up!"

"Better not, old chap!"

"Much better not!" grinned Blake. "Think of your feelings, old fellow—the horrid wrench of parting from your beautiful socks and things; to see them grabbed by sacrilegious hands—pawed by bargain-hunters! Better not!"

"Much better not!" agreed Tom Merry, shaking his head. "Don't do it, Gussy! Besides, think of the temptation to revert to your old wicked ways! The sight of all your beautiful clobber going may break down all your resolutions, and make you backslide into barbaric luxury and extravagance again!"

"Then what would happen to the Battle of Waterloo?" said Lowther. "Think of that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! You fellows are makin' the mattah appeah widic!" said Gussy, frowning. "You are an uttah ass, Lowthah! Howevah, if you fellows weally think I'd bettah stay away—"

"We do!"

"We does!"

"Vewy well!" agreed Arthur Augustus, though there was rather an uneasy look in his eye. "I will stay away, and will leave the affaiah entirely in your hands, Lowthah!"

"Good! I'll do my very best, Gussy! And what isn't sold could be sent to the secondhand dealers in Rylcombe—what? You agree to that, of course?"

"Vewy well, deah boy! As a mattah of fact, I was thinkin' seriously of doin' that, you know, as my wardwobe was gettin' wathah cwwoded. That will be quite all wight! I think I will go for a walk while the sale is in pwogress."

"Splendid! Cheerio, old fellow!"

CHAPTER 7.**A Rough Sale!**

"B AI JOVE! Now I wondah—"

Arthur Augustus paused in his walk, and began to wonder.

As a matter of fact, Arthur Augustus was far from being easy in his mind. His resolution to do away with all unnecessary articles of attire, to reduce his wardrobe and to live a simpler, less luxurious life so far as dress and personal adornment were concerned, was as strong as ever. He was as enthusiastic as ever over his new reforms, and he was still feeling the glow of satisfaction while walking across the quadrangle, looking more disreputable than ever Baggy Trimble did. Moreover, he felt the burning zeal and joy of a martyr who had given his all to a good cause.

He was revelling in his new freedom—the care-free existence of a fellow who didn't care twopence whether there was a knife-edge crease in his trousers or not.

The frowns on the faces of masters when they glanced at him brought a thrill of delight to the enthusiastic reformer. To show how little he cared for such things, Gussy had also adopted a slouching walk, which certainly "went well" with his general appearance.

None the less Arthur Augustus felt a trifle uneasy. It was in respect of the auction sale. Certainly Monty Lowther was the very best man for such a job. He had made many a "leaving sale" a great success. He had the "gift of the gab," and he was humorous and witty. But also—and Arthur Augustus had just thought of this—he was a terrible practical joker. Now he came to think of it, Arthur Augustus remembered the glimmer of mischief in the happy-go-lucky eye of Monty Lowther.

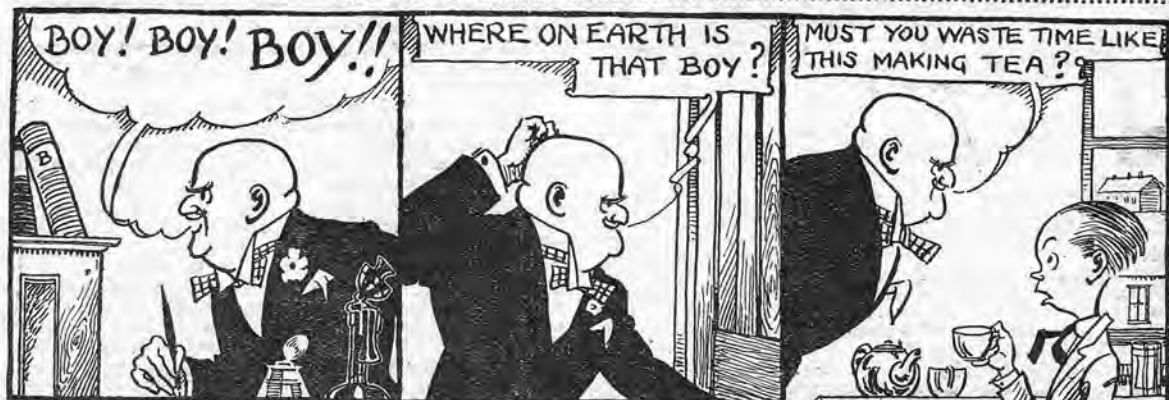
"Bai Jove! Now I wondah!" murmured Gussy, pausing in his amble along Rylcombe Lane. "I weally do not like to be suspicious of a fellow, but that feahful ass Lowthah is always up to some jape or other. I weally think I had bettah attend the sale, aftah all!"

For some moments Gussy considered the matter, and then, his mind quite made up, he ambled back to St. Jim's, hastening his steps as he went.

He arrived outside the sale-room at last.

From within sounded roars of laughter. As he gently opened the door Arthur Augustus heard Lowther's business-like voice:

"Come, come, gentlemen! This is an auction sale and not a free soup kitchen. What offers for this beautiful waistcoat—once worn by a member of our nobility—an aristocratic waistcoat, once highly connected with the noble son of a peer of this Realm. What's that? Fourpence? Any advance on fourpence, gentlemen, for this handsome waistcoat, hall-marked and jewelled in every seam?"

Potts, The Office Boy

The old man can't give him the Bird!

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus entered the sale-room.

"No advance on fourpence?" bawled Lowther. "Come, come, gentlemen! The colours of this waistcoat are an exact reproduction of the colours of Joseph's coat, only more so—many more so, in fact! Going at fourpence! Right! Gone! It's yours, Tompkins!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Rap, rap, rap!

The waistcoat that rivalled Joseph's coat in colours was knocked down to the nervous Clarence York Tompkins for fourpence, spot cash.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus shoved his way in. The room was packed with Fourth and Shell fellows and Third Form fags. Monty Lowther stood at the table with his official hammer. Behind and around him were piled a great assortment of male attire—suits, waistcoats, collars, ties, shoes, neckties, and all sorts and kinds of "clobber," sporting and otherwise. Several fellows—quite a number, in fact—were already loaded up with articles. Obviously Lowther had been busy and somewhat successful regarding the disposal of things. But if he was disposing of two-guinea waistcoats for fourpence each, Arthur Augustus felt he was not being very successful for all that.

Rap, rap, rap!

Monty Lowther threw a jacket on the table.

"The next lot, gentlemen, is a jacket, and I might inform you that this jacket, until yesterday, was spotless and beyond reproach," he said impressively. "It was, in fact, our noble schoolfellow's very best jacket, and, but for an accident yesterday, would have remained his very best. Unfortunately an accident happened, and it became slightly tainted with strawberry jam, which jam can easily, I may point out, be removed with turpentine. What offers for this beautiful jacket?"

"Gweat Scott!"

Arthur Augustus recognised his best jacket—or the jacket he had worn the previous day.

"Sixpence!" bawled Mellish.

"Any advance on sixpence?" cried Lowther, holding up the jacket to view. "Come, come, gentlemen! Only yesterday this jacket was on view in a shop window in Rylcombe—with the owner inside it—and it was marked 1/11!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Order, order! Any advance—"

"Sevenpence!" said Crooke of the Shell.

"Bai Jove!"

The jacket was eventually knocked down to Gerald Crooke for sevenpence, there being no higher bids. As the jacket had cost four guineas, this was not very satisfactory from Gussy's point of view. In fact, Gussy was astounded and indignant at it being in the sale at all, despite the jam on it.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Gussy. "Weally, Lowthah, you know—"

"Hallo, has old Gussy wedged in, after all? Out with him, master doorkeeper!"

"Weally, you feahful ass—"

"Fellows are not supposed to attend their leaving sales!" said Lowther crisply. "It isn't the thing, Gussy!"

"But this isn't a leavin' sale?" hooted Gussy.

"Yes, it is; your giddy clobber's leaving you, isn't it?" said Monty.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You feahful ass—"

"Order, order! Throw that gentleman out, master doorkeeper, please! The next lot, gentlemen, is—"

"Look heah, you—"

"Order! What offers for this magnificent topper?" bawled Monty Lowther, holding up a silk hat. "It once adorned the noble crown of a distinguished scion of a long line of Norman ancestors. Came over with William the Conqueror—the ancestors, I mean, not the hat. A most handsome headgear, having been kept in perfect shape by being pressed on a block of wood—"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come, come, gentlemen! I am far from wishing to stress the fact that the brokers have taken possession of Eastwood House, the ancestral home of my noble and illustrious client, and that cash is urgently required to pay the week's washing, but I really must request more substantial support—"

"Lowthah, you feahful fbbah—" shrieked Gussy. "The bwokahs are not—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, I'll offer threepence—"

"Trimble offers a bid of threepence!" called Lowther. "Will some gentleman kindly turn Trimble upside down to see if he has threepence on him!"

"Oh, really, Lowther—"

"Hold on!" interrupted Crooke, who had been examining the jacket he had bought. "This is a swizz! There's egg all over this jacket as well as jam, Lowther!"

"Well, if you've got jam on it and you've got egg on it, what the thump more do you want on it?" snorted Lowther. "D'you want a jacket studded with diamonds and crusted with pearls for your blinking sevenpence?"

"Well, it's a filthy thing!" grumbled Crooke, winking at Scrope. "Just what a fellow might expect of Gussy's clobber, of course!"

"Bai Jove!"

"The fellow must be a perfect pig at table!" said Crooke, who owed Gussy more than one score, grinning at the expression on Gussy's face. "A perfect pig! Blessed if I could wear a filthy thing like this after that slovenly beast. Here—Yoooop!"

The humorous Crooke yelped and sat down with a bump as the knuckles of the insulted Gussy clamped on his nose.

"Order, order! Grundy, you're sacked! Order, order!"

Rap, rap—plop!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a howl of laughter as Lowther's third rap—Lowther's attention being fixed on the struggling figures of Gussy and Crooke—struck the silk hat, the hammer going clean through the crown as it rested on the table.

"Oh, crumbs! Order, order!" shrieked the auctioneer. "Gussy, you born idiot—"

In great wrath the interrupted auctioneer grabbed the busted topper and flung it at Gussy and Crooke as they rolled on the floor, locked in a deadly embrace.

Unfortunately it missed them and struck Herries on the nose. Herries roared and pitched the hat furiously back

A Soft Answer!



He's utterly cuckoo already!

again, this time missing Lowther and hitting Gore, who caught it neatly and kicked it high in the air.

That did it!

The next moment there was a howl of glee and a wild rush for the descending topper. The table went over and a yell came from Lowther as he and his chair descended with a crash.

Over the yelling Lowther and round the table started a fierce and enthusiastic scrap for possession of the topper. Other fellows joined in, and the piles of clothing and fancy goods for the great sale were upset, and then the real fun started.

The topper that had caused the trouble had vanished, but there were plenty more of Gussy's toppers there. The toppers were soon flying about from boot to boot and from fist to fist.

Naturally, from toppers the craze spread to jackets, waistcoats, and other articles of attire. In a matter of a few brief seconds the air was full of flying pairs of trousers, jackets, waistcoats, rolled up socks, and neckties.

An ordinary common or garden bargain sale was not in it.

Amidst howls of mingled laughter, rage, pain, and woe, the wild and whirling scrimmage went on. Arthur Augustus, realising what was going on, released the yelling Crooke, who promptly collared his purchases—and what ever else he could get hold of—and vanished from the danger zone, as did other heroes like Trimble and Mellish.

Arthur Augustus rushed into the fray, shrieking with horror.

"Stop! Stop, you fearful wuffians! Oh, Gwreat Scott!" It was more than Gussy could bear. The sight of his precious clobber being kicked, flung about, and trampled on in that wholesale manner banished all his resolutions. Horrified and enraged, he hit about him right and left.

Yells of laughter changed to yells of pain, and Gussy was just making his presence really felt when something struck him in the face with a smack.

It was a sock soaked in ink. Some bright youth had discovered that a wet sock made a more effective missile than a dry one. Gussy stopped it in full flight, and he stopped it with his face.

"Yawooooop! Gurgug!"

The sock fairly wrapped itself round Gussy's enraged features like a long-lost brother.

When Gussy sat up and tore it away he was a sight indeed, and he could scarcely see through his inky eyes.

"Gwoooogh!" he gasped dizzily. "Ow, ow, ow! Oh cwikey!"

He staggered to his feet and tottered towards the door, stumbling and bumping into struggling forms as he did so. But he reached the door and blundered out somehow. His part in the general riot was ended. All he sought now was a bath-room and plenty of hot water, and then a change of clothing.

He found the bath-room at last, and he found plenty of hot water. But when he came to look for the change of clothing—Alas!

"Not a bad jacket!" grinned Gerald Crooke, as he examined his bargain in the privacy of his own study. "It was worth eightpence."

"And a punch on the nose!" chuckled Scrope.

Crooke's grin faded a trifle.

"Never mind that! I'll settle that cad D'Arcy for that, don't you worry!" he snorted.

"Well, you asked for it, old chap!"

"What if I did! Anyway, I can jolly soon clean this jacket up, and it fits me well!" said Crooke. "Buying secondhand clobber's a bit off the rails, but other fellows were doing it. Besides, that ass D'Arcy only wears a jacket about a dozen times. I fancy—Hallo, there's something in the pocket!"

From the inside pocket of the jacket Crooke brought to view a rather crumpled, bulky envelope, marked with a big cross from side to side and end to end in blue pencil.

"Phew! A registered letter!" breathed Scrope. "Unopened, too! My hat!"

Crooke's eyes opened wide, and then they gleamed as he sighted the handwriting.

"Great pip!" he gasped. "This—this is addressed to a blessed firm of sporting outfitters in Wayland, and—and it's in Kildare's handwriting. Phew! That—that awful idiot!"

"What's it mean?" said Scrope, in alarm. "What on earth was D'Arcy doing with that in his pocket?"

"I fancy I can tell you that," said Crooke, a grin breaking out on his ungenerous face. "On Wednesday afternoon Kildare collared me indoors, and asked me to take this blessed thing to the post office at Rylcombe. I told him I was staying in because I had a bad headache, and the old idiot swallowed it like a lamb, and went off to look for someone else to do his dashed fagging!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,177.

"Oh! But—"

"Can't you see what's happened?" grinned Crooke gleefully. "Old Kildare collared Gussy, and made him take the blessed thing. Gussy shoved it in this pocket—Lowther said this was the jacket he wore on Wednesday, remember!—and—well, you know what a forgetful duffer D'Arcy is. He's—ha, ha, ha!—forgotten all about it since!"

"Phew! Better take it along to Kildare! Looks to me as if there's notes in it, Crooky!"

"Of course there is!" grinned Crooke. "About twenty quid, I should say! But catch me giving the dashed thing up to Kildare!"

"Crooke! You awful idiot—"

"I don't mean to keep 'em, you silly owl! My idea is to give that ass D'Arcy an awful fright! He's bound to remember, or Kildare's bound to remind him about it. Well—"



"But, you ass—"

"It's a wonder it hasn't been missed already!" grinned Crooke. "Anyway, my idea is to keep it back until—well, we can post it now, for that matter, when we trot into the village! They'll get it this evening, but I bet they won't send the receipt for a day or two. By that time Kildare will have asked about it, and there'll be a fearful do! See the wheeze?"

"Better not, you idiot!"

"Rats! Not a word, mind! We know nothing about it!" chuckled Crooke, and he placed the envelope carefully in his own jacket pocket. The registering of the packet would cost a few pence, but he felt it would be more than worth it as he tenderly stroked his battered nose!

CHAPTER 8. Too Awful!

"**T**OO bad!"
"Poor old Gussy!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Though they agreed that it was "too bad," Tom Merry & Co. seemed to derive plenty of entertainment from it.

The great battle of the sale-room was over. Kildare, Darrell, and Baker, of the Sixth, had brought it to a sudden and painful end with the aid of their ashplants.

What had happened to the great "bargains" was a problem, perhaps. What had happened to the small amount of money taken was another problem. Possibly Baggy Trimble of the Fourth, who was seen in the tuckshop for a long time after the sale, could have told had he chosen!

"Gussy's own fault!" remarked Lowther, shaking his head. "If he hadn't broken his word and bargained in like that all would have gone off swimmingly. I'd already taken seven-and-elevenpence and a bent French penny!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Where that's gone to, goodness only knows," said Lowther, "though I fancy I spotted old Trimble scrounging round the floor just after the table went over. Still, it can't be helped now. And we've got to cure Gussy some-



The topper missed D'Arcy and Crooke, who were rolling on the floor, and struck Herries on the nose!

how! Can't have him deteriorating like he is doing! Why, he's worse than Trimble!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You know what Linton always tells us," resumed Monty, shaking his head. "Deterioration of character always starts with deterioration in regard to personal appearance! One thing leads to another! We've got to stop Gussy's downward rush to the bow-wows!"

"Ha, ha! Yes, rather!"

"Wonder where he is?" remarked Digby, with a chuckle.

"Searching for his clobber, I fancy!" smiled Lowther. "Anyway, get ready for fireworks when—Hullo, here he is! Come on, Gussy, old fellow! It—it is you, isn't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There seemed some little question about that! For Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the former swell of the Fourth at St. Jim's, but now the sloven of the Fourth, looked a most fearful sight.

His face had been cleaned somewhat, but it still bore smears of ink round eyes and ears. His collar was far more inky than any fag's, and more rumpled. His jacket was a shocking sight, torn, crumpled, and dusty. His trousers were likewise dusty, crumpled, and torn—re-

sembling Charlie Chaplin's celebrated "bags" rather than the elegant trousers of Arthur Augustus of old.

No monocle glimmered in Gussy's eye. His precious eyeglass had "gone west," apparently during the battle in the sale-room.

The juniors fairly blinked at the horrid vision of the once elegant glass of fashion and mould of form at St. Jim's.

"It—it is Gussy!" gasped Tom Merry, staring very hard. "Yes, it's Gussy right enough! Shocking!"

"Scandalous!"

"He's a disgrace to the House!"

"Bai Jove! You—you—you—" Arthur Augustus spluttered.

"Is anything the matter?" inquired Lowther.

"Mattah!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "I should think somethin' was the mattah, Lowthah, you feahful, fwightful wascal! Where is my clobber, you wuffian?"

"Your—your clobber, old chap?"

"Yaas, you feahful wottah!"

"I thought you were a fellow above clobber, Gussy—a chap who despised dress and vanity of that kind! The Battle of Waterloo—"

"I wefuse to listen to such wubbish, Lowthah!" roared Arthur Augustus, who was obviously in a terrible rage. "I wequiah you to answah my question at once. Where is my clobber? My clobber?"

"But—but—" Lowther seemed bewildered. "But you know that well enough, Gussy! You asked me to dispose of your superfluous clobber, didn't you? Well, I've obeyed instructions!"

"You kae wewy well—" shouted Gussy.

"Of course I know, old chap! You were at the sale. It was unfortunate it turned out as it did," said Lowther mildly. "I'd already sold seven-and-elevenpence worth—at least, I'd taken that amount!"

"Oh, you—you—"

"What happened afterwards was entirely your fault!" said Lowther severely. "You barged in and upset the whole show! What happened to the cash taken and the clobber, goodness knows! I collected what I could and shoved them with the rest, though. Perhaps you'll hear from old Finestone, the second-hand clothes dealer, in the morning—perhaps?"

"What—what evah do you mean, Lowthah?" almost shrieked Arthur Augustus, in great horror. "You—you actually mean that you have sent the wemainder of my clobber to the second-hand clothes dealah, you feahful idiot?"

"Well, my hat!" gasped Lowther. "You agreed to that, didn't you? You agreed that all that remained unsold at the auction should be sent to the village, to be disposed of there. You know you agreed to that! These fellows will prove it!"

"Oh, quite!"

"Absolutely!"

"Oh, Gweat Scott! But—but—" Gussy fairly spluttered. "But you knew wewy well what I meant, you fwightful ass! I meant you to use your discretion and to pick out all superfluous and not wewy badly worn clobber! Gweat Scott! Am—am I to undahstand," he ended, with a shriek, "that you have disposed of all my best clothes and best neckties and best shoes and best toppahs, Lowthah?"

"My dear old fellow—"

"Answah me!" howled Gussy, in agonised accents. "I have just spent ovah half an hour searchin' for my clobber, the suits, and othah things I wished to wetain. Ewvery article of clothin' has vanished fwom the dorm; ewvery article of clothin' has vanished fwom my trunks in the Fourth box-woom! I cannot find a single necktie or collar, even, anywhere—not a single hanky, even, you wascal!"

"I don't suppose you can, old man!" argued Lowther. "You told me to dispose of all left after the sale. You said nothing about my using discretion at all! You can't blame me now, Gussy! Dash it all, be reasonable, man!"

"Oh, you—you—you—" Arthur Augustus nearly swooned.

It was really too dreadful, too awful! Here he was, a complete wreck, a disgraceful sight. And all his other clothing had gone. All he had left to him were the clothes he stood up in.

Never in his youthful life had Arthur Augustus had such a terrible, overpowering shock.

He hadn't even a silk hat left. He hadn't even a clean collar. His supply of eyeglasses, even, had vanished. In that terrible moment of revelation Arthur Augustus realised what he had lost. His beautiful suits, his elegant socks, his supply of lovely neckties, the envy of all; all had gone—lost to him by Lowther's criminal blundering!

"Oh! Oh ewikey!" he gasped, at last, faintly. "Oh, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,177."

Gweat Scott! Do—do you wealise, Lowthab, that I have only the clothes I stand up in?"

"Well, isn't that enough for a fellow who cares nothing for such things?" asked Lowther warmly. "What's the good of having principles if you can't stand by them in practice? More clothing would be superfluous, in your case. The chaps who won the Battle of Waterloo didn't drag a wardrobe full of clobber about with 'em, did they? I ask you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is nothin' to cackle at, you heartless wuffians!" shouted Arthur Augustus, in a sudden rage. "Blow Watahloo! Blow that old idiot, Bland, and all his wretched works! Blow Lathom, and blow Kildare!"

"Thanks, kid! And where d'you propose to blow me to, D'Arcy?"

"Oh! Oh, bai Jove!" Gussy jumped.

In the doorway stood Eric Kildare, captain of St. Jim's. He laughed at the expression on the face of Arthur Augustus. Kildare was not the sort of fellow to take advantage of anything overheard.

"Better put a brake on your wagging chin, kid!" he advised pleasantly. "I just looked in— Great pip! Have you been through a mangle, D'Arcy?"

"Weally, Kildare!"

"You untidy rapsallion!" snorted Kildare. "I suppose you were in that rumpus this afternoon, eh? Go and change at once, you slovenly young idiot! Hold on, though—I'm forgetting what I came about, my lad. What about that letter I gave you to post on Wednesday?"

"What—what— Oh, Gweat Scott!"

All of a sudden Gussy remembered.

"You—you mean that—that—that— Oh, Gweat Scott!"

"I mean that package I gave you to register at the post office," said Kildare, staring at him. "I've just had occasion to ring up Timmins, of Wayland about another matter, and I happened to mention having sent the twenty-four quid by post. They were astonished—said they hadn't received the money yet. When on earth did you post it, D'Arcy?"

CHAPTER 9.

Gussy, the Sloven!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS stood as if turned to stone. His chums and Kildare stared at the extraordinary expression on his grubby features.

Never had Gussy been so startled and so taken aback by a question.

"Oh, bai Jove!" he gasped. "Oh, Gweat Scott!"

Since the moment Kildare had thrust that letter into his jacket pocket he had forgotten all about it; not once had it entered his thoughts again. His meeting with Colonel Bland, the question of catching the train, and then losing the train; afterwards that horrid, ghastly experience in the shop window, and the other events of that unfortunate afternoon—was it any wonder he had forgotten?

It wasn't!

But he had forgotten, and the question was, where was the package containing the twenty-four pounds?

Obviously it was a question Kildare would want answering.

"Oh, bai Jove!" groaned Gussy.

Gussy felt as if the whole world were conspiring against him; almost as if it was falling about his ears, in fact.

"Well?" demanded Kildare. "When did you post it, D'Arcy?"

"Oh! Oh dear! I—I didn't post it, Kildare!"

"Wha-at? Then—"

"I forgot all about it, Kildare!" faltered Gussy unhappily. "I—I had wathah! an unpleasant experience in the village that aftahnoon, and I completely forgot!"

"You—you careless young ass! Then it's in your pocket still? If it is, hand it over at once, you young fool!" said Kildare.

"I—I wegwet that I cannot, Kildare!"

"You—you cannot! What the dickens—"

Kildare looked in quite a startled way at Gussy now.

"It—it is most unfortunate!" stammered the hapless Gussy. "You—you see, I have parted with that jacket now!"

"Oh, great pip!"

"M-mum-my hat!"

Tom Merry, Blake, and the rest were beginning to understand a little now.

"You—you've parted with the jacket?" yelled Kildare. "You mean, you've parted with your jacket that had the twenty-four quid in the pocket?"

"Yaas, deah boy! Oh deah! Oh cwikey! How fwight-fully awkward!"

"Well, you—you—"

"Howevah, it will be quite all wight, I think, Kildare!" gasped Arthur Augustus, brightening up a trifle. "Cwooke has it—"

"The twenty-four quid?" shouted Kildare.

"Nunno! That is—yaas, he must have, deah boy! You see, he bought the jacket for sevenpence!"

"He—he bought the j-jacket for sevenpence! The—the jacket containing twenty-four quid?" articulated Kildare.

"Yaas! I wemembah distinctly that it was Cwooke, you know! He insulted me in wegard to the jam and egg on it, and I punched his cheeky head!" explained Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, it will be all wight—"

"It'll be a thundering serious matter for you if it isn't all right, you young idiot!" snapped Kildare. "What the thump d'you mean about selling the dashed jacket for sevenpence? Are you potty?"

Arthur Augustus, somewhat blushing, explained about the "auction."

"So—so that was it!" breathed Kildare. "That was what that rumpus was about, and why the place was strewn with rubbish—"

"Wubbish! Weally, Kildare!"

"Dry up, you young idiot!" hooted Kildare. "Of all born idiots, you take the bun! Still—"

"I say, hold on, Kildare!" gasped Lowther, who was looking quite upset. "It was more my fault than old Gussy's, when all's said and done! I should have looked through the pockets before I shoved it up for sale. I did the other things, but must have missed just that one."

"Well, if Crooke has it, well and good!" rapped out Kildare sternly. "If he hasn't—well, there's a heap of trouble in store for someone! Come along! We'll see Crooke at once!"

They went along to see Crooke. That youth was at home, and he looked a trifle apprehensive for the moment as he sighted Kildare. But he soon pulled himself together.

"Hallo! Anything up?" he asked. "Want me, Kildare?"

"Yes, I do, my lad."

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"I say, if it's about not turning up at footer practice yesterday, I had a rotten toothache—"

"Never mind that!" snapped Kildare. "You bought a jacket belonging to D'Arcy at an auction, I believe?"

"Why, yes, so I did!" said Crooke, affecting an air of careless surprise. "Mucked up with egg and jam it was, too! I jolly well—"

"Never mind that—cut that out!" snorted Kildare. "I want to know if you found anything in the pockets, Crooke?"

"Blessed if I've looked in the pockets!" said Crooke, staring. "Why, are there smokes or something—"

"Shut up!" roared Kildare angrily. "Where is the jacket? If you haven't looked in the pockets bring the dashed thing here now!"

"Look here, I paid eightpence for the jacket!" said Crooke, adopting a sulky expression. "If there's anything in the pockets it belongs to me now!"

"Does it?" said Kildare, with terrific grimace. "I think not! Bring that packet here at once!"

"Look here, hang it all, fair's fair—"

"Bring it here!" roared Kildare.

Crooke snorted and brought the jacket. He had cleaned the egg and jam stains from it already, and it looked as elegant as ever it did. Crooke had, in fact, got a very good bargain when he gave eightpence for that beautiful jacket—apart from what was in the pocket when he bought it.

But it was not in the pocket now! Kildare took the jacket from Crooke's reluctant hand and went through the pockets one by one, with his usual thoroughness.

Gussy's face grew more and more horrified as he proceeded.

"Not here!" said Kildare grimly. "You're sure you found nothing in the pockets, Crooke?"

"Of course not!" said the young rascal, raising his eyebrows. "What should I have found—smokes? If so—"

"Shut up, and don't talk like a young fool!" roared Kildare. "Look here, I might tell you, Crooke, that there should be twenty-four pound notes in an envelope in that inside pocket!"

"What?" yelled Crooke.

Kildare nodded.

He was satisfied that Crooke knew nothing about it!

Crooke was a trifle too crafty for a straightforward fellow like Eric Kildare!

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

"Well, you've seen and heard, D'Arcy!" said Kildare, eyeing poor Gussy gravely. "Can you suggest what has happened to it? Are you quite sure this was the jacket?"

"Oh deah! Quite suah, Kildare! How feahfully howwid!"

"Did you sell any other jackets, you footling idiot?"

"I stwongly object to bein' called a young— Yoooop!"

Gussy roared as Kildare grabbed him by the ear.

"You young fool!" hooted the skipper. "Can't you understand that this is dashed serious, D'Arcy? The money will have to be refunded by someone if it isn't found, and that someone will be you! Did you part with any more silly jackets, blow you?"

"Oh, yaas! At least—"

"Then off you go! You'll find every fellow who had one, and you'll report to me as soon as you have done! That money's got to be found this evening. If it isn't—you're for it! The matter will have to go before the Head. Understand?"

"Oh cwikey! Yaas!"

"Right! See to it!"

And Kildare marched out.

Tom Merry & Co. went out after him. They had heard Crooke's denials, and they knew that if Crooke had lied to Kildare then he would certainly never hesitate to lie to them. It would be a waste of time to tackle him.

"Well," breathed Tom Merry as they got outside, "this—this beats cock-fighting! Gussy, old man—"

"You—you uttah wottahs!" gasped Arthur Augustus, giving his chums a deadly glare. "Now see what you have done! This is all your fault, Lowthah, you feahful idiot! You had no wight whatever to put up that jacket, which was my vewy best jacket, for auction."

"Oh crumbs! I—I'm awfully sorry, Gussy!" said Lowther, quite penitent now. "Look here, we've been—"

"I wufuse to speak anothah word to any of you!" said Arthur Augustus, his voice fairly trembling with emotion.

"Henceforth, fwom now onwards, I no longah wegard you as fwends of mine!"

"But, listen—just a minute, Gussy—"

"I uttahly wufuse to listen, Tom Mewwy!"

"Gussy, old man, we want to explain—"

"Wats!"

And Arthur Augustus, in a state of mind that could be truly described as frantic, hurried away and left his chums standing there.

CHAPTER 10.

Unfortunate!

UP and down and round about rushed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, inquiring frantically about that luckless envelope.

He was not the only one. Kildare himself, in a very wrathful and alarmed state, also rushed about inquiring. Tom Merry & Co., individually and collectively, as it were, also rushed about on the same errand.

But it was no good. Nobody had seen an envelope containing twenty-four quid.

Naturally, such inquiring caused a sensation in the Lower School.

The whole House had roared over Gussy's auction sale—and especially at the cause of it. But all humour seemed to vanish from the affair when it was known about Kildare's money.

Where was it? Who had it? That it had been in the pocket of one of Gussy's jackets was quite certain. Then where was it now?

It made matters very awkward indeed for the few fellows who had purchased one of the great bargains—one of Gussy's jackets—as Gerald Crooke especially pointed out with some indignation. It made things look very suspicious indeed for all concerned, all who had been in the room where the sale had been held. And there certainly looked like being serious trouble about it.

Arthur Augustus was the first to give up the search—at St. Jim's at all events. In his view nobody at St. Jim's had it. It must have fallen out of his pocket in the scrap with the Grammarians. That was it! And the moment Gussy thought about it he made up his mind to see Gordon Gay & Co. that very night.

He made up his mind to do something else also—a matter almost as serious!

It was utterly impossible for him to go about as he was. Somehow he must get a fresh rig-out before morning. That much was absolutely imperative. He had no money, but he had no doubt that Mr. Rigg, the village outfitter, would supply him with a ready-made suit that would do—much better than the ragged, dusty suit he had on at all events. Moreover, he had to get a new collar and necktie before classes in the morning.

Gussy lost no time in starting out for the village. It was nearly call-over already, but that could not be helped.

As he trotted through the gates Taggles called out to him:

"Master D'Arcy, jest you 'old on! It's nearly call-over, and what I sez is this 'ere—you can't go off gallawantin' about in that disputable state. My heye! Why, you looks a regular tramp! Stop!"

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus did not stop—not for the gate-porter, at all events! But about a hundred yards farther on he did stop as a deep, military voice cried:

"Halt! Good gad! Boy—stop! Halt!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

It was Gussy's luck again. Turning, Arthur Augustus sighted Colonel Bland just emerging from his gateway with Mrs. Bland.

Colonel Bland waved his stick at him. Mrs. Bland gazed at him with obvious disgust.

Arthur Augustus almost wilted. In smart, elegant clobber and a beautiful silk hat Arthur Augustus could hold his own with anybody. He had a certain irresistible dignity about him on such occasions.

But now—there was no dignity about Gussy. His clothes were shocking and he felt utterly lost without a topper.

The cap he wore was a cap he had found at the bottom of the study cupboard, and it had been used as a duster and to mop up ink. It was, in fact, a most disreputable cap.

In such circumstances, Arthur Augustus could not summon up dignity. He fairly slouched—he hunched his shoulders and slouched, feeling what he looked—a tramp!

The colonel and his lady blinked at him.

"G-good gad!" stuttered the old gentleman. "Then—then you were quite right, dear. It—it is a St. Jim's fellow! G-good gad! Disgraceful!"

"Scandalous!" snapped Mrs. Bland, staring over her lorgnette at the unhappy Arthur Augustus. "Perfectly disgraceful! I shall certainly speak to Mrs. Holmes, Charles!"

"And I shall mention the matter to Dr. Holmes. Huh! Disgracing the old school, begad! Allowing boys to go about like young ruffians!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, sir—"

"Your name, boy?" barked the old warrior.

"D—D'Arcy, sir!"

"Your House?"

"School House, sir!"

"Form?"

"Fourth, sir!" gasped Gussy. "But, weally, sir—"

"Silence! Most disreputable, begad! Return to school at once!"

"Weally, sir——"

"Go! March!"

It was almost a bellow. Arthur Augustus groaned and marched. He hurried on ahead of the ambling old couple. To disobey a governor of St. Jim's to his face was not to be thought of. But strategy was, and in his present state Arthur Augustus was desperate.

The moment he got round the nearest corner he slipped through a gap in the hedge, and waited until the colonel and his wife had passed. Then he emerged and fairly flew along the lane towards Rylcombe.

So far so good! Unfortunately, his strategy was to prove unavailing. The very fates seemed to be in league against him. Just outside the village Arthur Augustus was nearly run down by a car as he rounded a corner at top speed. The junior almost ran into it.

The car pulled up with a jarring of brakes.

"Oh, bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

It was a narrow escape. Arthur Augustus jumped aside to allow the car to go on. But it did not go on. Instead, an amazed and angry voice called:

"Boy! D'Arcy! Bless my soul! It is a Fourth Form boy, Railton!"

It was the Head!

With the Head was Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House.

Arthur Augustus nearly fainted. He was conscious enough before of his disreputable appearance; he was more conscious of it now. He almost cringed before the icy stares of the Head and Mr. Railton.

"G-good gracious!" articulated Dr. Holmes, his brow like a thundercloud. "It is D'Arcy, a boy of your House, Mr. Railton! Boy, how dare you appear in public in that disgraceful state?"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"I have had occasion to speak to you at least three times during the last two days in regard to your slovenly appearance, D'Arcy!" exclaimed Dr. Holmes, with terrific sternness. "But this—is too much! You are a disgrace to your school, boy!"

"And it is already past call-over, D'Arcy!" interposed Mr. Railton sternly. "Where are you going to at this hour?"

"The—the village, sir!" gasped Gussy.

"What ever for, boy?"

"Some new—new clobber, sir!" groaned Gussy.

"New—new what?" exploded Dr. Holmes. "What——"

"Bless my soul!" interposed Mr. Railton. "The—the foolish boy means clothes, I think, sir."

"Clothes? Utterly absurd! Monstrous!" snorted the Head. "D'Arcy, return to school at once! You will report to me after dinner, at eight-thirty, in my study, when I will hear your explanation of this disgraceful escapade."

"Weally, sir——"

"Enough! If you are not presentable when you report to me I shall deal with you with the utmost severity!"

"Oh, bai Jove! Oh, yaas, sir!"

The car drove on towards St. Jim's. As a matter of fact, Dr. Holmes was expecting Colonel Bland and his wife to dinner that evening, and he was in rather a hurry.

Arthur Augustus turned and wearily retraced his footsteps. To disobey the Head of St. Jim's was not even to be dreamed of in any circumstances whatever. Moreover, he would have to report to Railton when he got in. That quite scotched any idea of visiting the village or Gordon Gay & Co. that evening.

It was truly fearful luck!

Arthur Augustus groaned and groaned as he wended his homeward way. He thought of Colonel Bland's criticisms and advice, and he shook with honest indignation.

"The—the feahful old idiot!" he mumbled. "On Wednesday the old wottah was slangin' me for payin' attention to dweess and personal appeahwance, and now he's slangin' me for doin' the opposite. Blow him, and—and dash the Battle of Watahloo! Clobber had nothin' to do with the mattah at all—watah not!"

The glory of reform was certainly departing from Arthur Augustus. Indeed, he wondered how he could have been misled by such an old donkey as Colonel Bland into going against his principles in regard to dress and such matters. He had made a tragic mistake, and this was the tragic result. He was reduced to the wardrobe of a tramp. Nothing but disaster had followed his new scheme of living.

"Oh, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus suddenly halted in his musings and fairly groaned in utter dismay. Coming towards him, with smiles on their faces, were two Spalding Hall girls.

Arthur Augustus looked wildly round, but there was no way of escape. He had been seen, and from the smiles

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he was sure he had been recognised in his disguise of a tramp!

At all costs he must give an explanation of his disgraceful appearance. He recognised the girls as friends of his—Lady Peggy Brooke and Doris Levison!

He stopped and raised his shabby, inky cap.

"Pway one moment, deah gals!" he began.

The smiles faded on the faces of the girls, though had Gussy been a trifle keener he would have noted the twinkle in their eyes. Blake had told the great joke of Gussy's reform to Lady Peggy only that morning, and she was out now to keep the joke up.

"Who—who are you, my man?" she exclaimed haughtily, looking poor Gussy up and down in pretended disgust.

"How dare you accost us and address us in that manner!"

"Oh, b-bai Jove!"

"Go away at once, or I shall call a policeman!" said Lady Peggy warmly. "I have nothing to give beggars, my man!"

"B-b-beggars!" stammered Gussy. "Oh, Gweat Scott! Weally, deah gal, you——"

"Go away at once, or I shall scream!" snorted her ladyship. "How dare you—— Oh crumbs!"

The mischievous Lady Peggy was interrupted by an astonished, scandalised female voice just then.

"Good gracious! Girls—Peggy, Doris—who is that person you are speaking to? Come with me at once!"

"Oh dear! Miss Finch!"

It was Miss Finch, the headmistress of Spalding Hall School. She was rather a short-sighted lady, but not too short-sighted to note Gussy's shabby, dishevelled appearance.

The girls hurried away from Arthur Augustus. That luckless youth heard Miss Finch scolding them severely.

"I am surprised at you—shocked! How dare you stand and speak to rough village boys! What! A tramp? Then that is much worse. I shall acquaint the constable——"

Arthur Augustus heard no more, but he had already heard too much. He fairly tottered towards St. Jim's, horrified and dismayed. Was he such a disreputable object as that? But he soon forgot that unpleasant episode as he thought of what lay before him. Where he was to get clobber from in order to be presentable in his interview with the Head he did not know. And how was he to go through breakfast, chapel, and lessons the following morning in such a disreputable state? And then there was Kildare's twenty-four pounds! He was responsible for that, and doubtless the matter would be laid before Dr. Holmes that evening. In suitable attire Gussy felt he might have faced the dreadful ordeal before him. But as a careless, happy-go-lucky, care-free youth, who thought nothing of dress and personal appearance, Gussy felt that he couldn't!

And Arthur Augustus groaned and groaned in deep bitterness of spirit.

CHAPTER 11.

"Quite All Wight!"

"H ERE he comes!"

"Here's the giddy sloven!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a laugh as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy slunk into the hallway of St. Jim's. His shoulders were hunched, his hands hung dejectedly. His face wore an expression of despair. Altogether, he looked a most woe-begone object.

Quite a crowd were in the hallway. Many were grinning, but many were looking rather serious. In their view, the matter of the twenty-four quid, at least, was a serious matter. Among them were Tom Merry & Co.

"Gussy, old man——" began Tom Merry.

"Gussy, old fellow——" said Blake.

Arthur Augustus groaned. He was far too dejected and dispirited to remember even his recent differences with his chums.

"Well, deah boys?"

"Have—have you found it, Gussy—the money, we mean?" demanded Blake anxiously. "Kildare's raving—he's been hunting for you everywhere."

Gussy shook his head miserably.

"No, I have not, Blake!" he groaned. "I have had a dweadful walk. I did not even weach the village. I met two of the Spaldin' Hall gals and they took me for a twamp, and——"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And I met that feahful old ass, Colonel Bland, and he gave me a feahful slatin' in wegard to my appeahwance, and he is goin' to weport me to the Head."

"Oh, great pip!"

"And then," said Gussy tragically, "I wan wight into the Head and Waitton!"

"Oh, ye gods! D-did they see you like that?"

"Yaas! It was feahful, you know! The Head was in a tewwible wax, and I have to weport to him aftah his dinna, you know! He is goin'!"—Gussy almost choked—"to deal with me seveahly unless I am pweesentable by then! And how—how can I be pweesentable when all my clobbah is gone?" asked Gussy tragically.

"That—that's all right, Gussy!" gasped Lowther hastily. "We were going to explain only you wouldn't stop and—"

He was interrupted by the sudden appearance of Kildare. "So you've condescended to return, D'Arcy!" snapped Kildare, his hand dropping on Gussy's shoulder. "You young idiot! Why did you go out of gates? You knew well enough how serious—"

"Weally, Kildare, I went for more than one weason!" said Gussy warmly. "Pway welease me, you are wumplin' my jack— Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "I think your thundering jacket's rumpled enough, you young fool!" shorted Kildare. "And I fancy the Head will rumple it more soon, my lad! Come along with me to Railton. I suppose you haven't found that confounded money?"

"Oh deah! No—" "Then—" Kildare was beginning, when Darrell came into the hallway.

"Oh, here you are, old chap!" he said. "Wanted on the phone! Somebody from Wayland!"

"Right!" said Kildare, releasing Gussy's collar. "You wait here for me, kid!"

He hurried away to the phone in the prefects' room. The juniors looked at each other, their faces grave.

"You're for it now, Gussy!" groaned Blake. "Oh, what an idiot you were to forget that envelope! We've searched everywhere and tackled dozens of fellows, but—"

"Can't you remember anything at all about it, Gussy?" demanded Tom Merry in grave concern. "It's thumping serious, Gussy!"

"He's been to the village to spend the twenty-four quid on new clobber, I bet!" said Crooke. "Isn't that it, D'Arcy?"

The next moment Crooke was seated on the floor hugging his nose.

He staggered to his feet, scowling at the grinning faces

around him. But he did not attempt to return the blow. And just then Kildare came hurrying in again. Kildare's face was rather grim, and there was a peculiar expression on it. He caught sight of Crooke.

"Oh, there you are, Crooke!" he remarked calmly. "I was just wanting you, my lad!"

"M-mum-me!" gasped Crooke, changing colour.

"Yes, you, Crooke! I've just been on the phone to Timmins' of Wayland. They tell me that the twenty-four quid has arrived there, after all—came by the evening post, after they'd spoken to me on the phone. The manager thought he'd better let me know at once!"

"D-dad-did he?" gasped Crooke. "But—but what has that got to do with me, Kildare? That's D'Arcy's affair—"

"Not at all!" smiled Kildare—a smile that made Crooke shiver. "You see, I thought it queer and got on the phone right away to the post office at Rylcombe. The girl there knows practically every fellow at St. Jim's by sight, of course, Crooke!"

"Oh!" groaned Crooke.

"She remembered the envelope at once, and stated that it had been handed in by Master Crooke!" said Kildare, with ominous quietness.

"It—it's a lie—a mistake!" faltered Crooke. "I swear I never—"

"Come along and swear it to Railton, then, Crooke!" snapped Kildare.

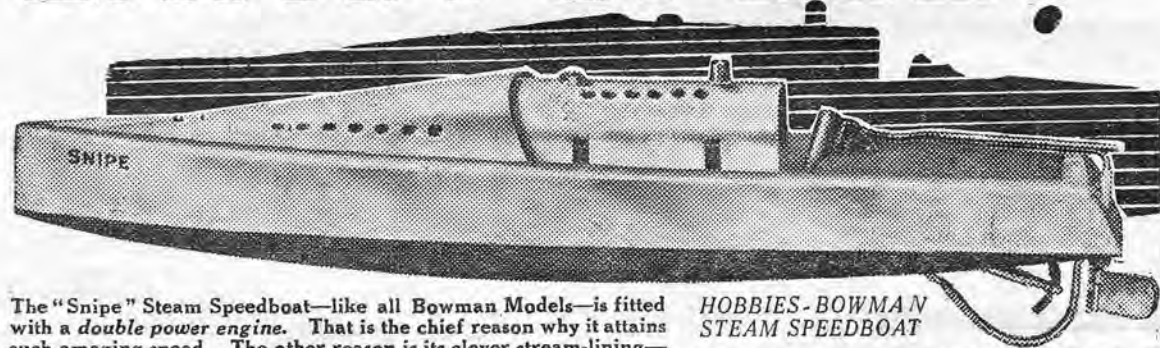
And Kildare hooked his fingers in Crooke's collar and hauled that misguided joker away. Two minutes later, as Tom Merry & Co. were escorting Arthur Augustus past Kildare's study door, they were startled to hear a sudden outbreak of howls, intermingled with a strange sound like the beating of a carpet.

It was Gerald Crooke paying for his joke.

"Bai Jove! Kildare's fairly goin' it, you know!" remarked Arthur Augustus, shaking his head. "What a feahful welief, you fellows! I weally was fwightfully wowwied about it. Howevah, that is not so sewious as this mattah of my clobbah," he added, suddenly becoming woe-begone again. "What evah am I to do, you fellows? I feah, I gweatly feah I shall have to ask one of you

(Continued on page 28.)

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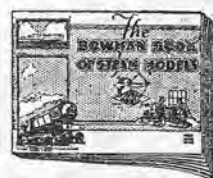
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ROARING TALE OF THE WILD WEST!

Buck of the Broken K.

BY

PERCY A. CLARKE.

No. 2.

TWISTED TRAILS!



A gun spat fire and a bullet tore into Buck's right arm!

IT was the fall of the year, after the yearlings had been newly branded, and there wasn't a whole heap to be done on the Broken K Ranch. Buck Moran asked Colonel Worth for two weeks' vacation, to ride north to Brownville to take a look-see how his old daddy was wearing.

"Well, Buck," says the colonel, "I'll allow you've done two men's work for getting on some time. Jest draw y'r pay and bonuses and fork that knock-kneed cayuse o' yours, and I'll sure be expecting you the next time I set eyes on your ugly mug. You'll find your bunk still empty in the bunkhouse."

"That's O.K. with me, colonel!" grinned Buck. "Guess I'll be moving."

He rode away that same day, and he stayed away. He reached Brownville with his cayuse in a lather, after three days' ride over the mesa. He stayed with his old folk for more than a week, then he set out for the return journey to the Broken K outfit.

"Here's to a peaceful ride home, Buck!" said his dad.

"It'll be just that," said Buck. "Nothing don't ever happen to me, and I don't know as I craves for too much excitement. So-long, folks!"

Nothing did happen to him for quite a long time, barring 'skeeters, flies, and thirst. But towards the end of the second day he pulled up outside the saloon at Klingers Springs. It was pretty warm, but there weren't many folks about. Buck hitched his mustang to the rail, stomped inside, and called for something wherewith to wash his tonsils.

He was the only man in that saloon, although that wasn't so very amazing, because men had to work some time during the day, and the men who didn't work were asleep during the heat of noon. The bartender put a bottle on the counter, took Buck's money, and walked away behind a pile of tins to get on with his interrupted snooze.

Buck was lolling there, enjoying himself, and wiping the perspiration from his forehead, when a man walked in. He wasn't a cowboy. He was dressed all in black—a black Stetson, a black swallow-tail coat, black cord riding-breeches and black gaiters. He was a sure enough card wizard, and he knew his way about that saloon, because he went right across without speaking a word and disappeared into an adjoining room.

Even the bartender never so much as raised his head, from which Buck gathered that the cardsharp made that saloon his headquarters. But it wasn't long before another

man turned up, and this time it was a cow waddy—an ordinary-looking fellow with a sullen face and a scar on his forehead that twisted up one of his eyebrows.

The bartender was snoring heavily. Buck just lolled, and, outside, in the fierce noonday heat, Smoke, the mustang, dozed at the hitching rail, his tail swishing as the flies tormented him. The newcomer walked softly across the saloon and into the adjoining room where the cardsharp had gone. Buck heard an exclamation of surprise, then the door closed.

Mildly Buck wondered what sort of place this Klingers Springs was, but he never worried much beyond that.

Having rested and washed the dust from his throat, he hitched up his belt and turned towards the door—when it happened!

Crack, crack! Twice a gun spoke in that inner room. A man cried out in agony.

There was the thud of a falling body. Then the sleepy saloon of Klingers Springs became thoroughly alive. Overhead men were waking up; men were coming pounding down the stairs. The bartender awoke with a start and upset a lot of empty bottles.

And Buck sprang to the door of that inner room. One hand held his six-shooter. He wrenched the door open.

He saw the black-coated man doubled up on the floor, his face ghastly white and a tiny trickle of red on the floorboards. A wad of dollar bills lay under the table. The cowboy was just disappearing through the open window.

Buck let fly with his gun. Twice he fired, but whether he hit his man he never knew. In a second the scoundrel had gone. Buck knelt by the cardsharp and turned him over. He was not dead—yet! But there was a nasty wound in his head that might—

"Put 'em up, stranger!" rasped a voice.

Buck started up and saw men jammed in the doorway. In the front of that hostile, snarling gang was the sheriff, his badge of office glittering on his shirt, his six-shooter in his hand.

It was plumb unfortunate. In a flash Buck realised he was in a tight corner. Two shots had been fired, and he had fired his gun twice. He was caught, gun in hand, bending over the victim, and he was a stranger to Klingers Springs.

He whipped into action immediately. As he rose to his feet his gun spat fire. The sheriff let fly at him. The guns roared simultaneously. The sheriff's bullet sang past Buck's cheek. Buck's bullet was well directed. It hit the sheriff's gun and knocked it from his hand.

WANTED FOR MURDER!

Buck and Smoke are in a tight fix this week!

Then Buck spun round and leapt clean through the open window. Guns roared and cracked behind him. Bullets sang maliciously round his head. But he was out of that room. He bent almost double and ran round the saloon, keeping close to the boarded walls. He flashed past a window, round a corner, along the side, round on to the boarded sidewalk of the one and only street of Klingers Springs, then with a bound he was in the saddle of his mustang. His gun cracked and the bullet severed the rope that held the horse to the hitching-rail, and after that Buck was travelling!

Gosh! How he travelled! Men came tumbling from the saloon to send a hail of lead after him. The sheriff was yelling for a posse. But Buck was travelling out over the mesa, and his mustang put its ears back and its tail up and gave of its best, and it took a good horse to keep pace with Smoke, Buck Moran's leggy mustang.

"Yeah, that's the style, Smoke, you old critter!" panted Buck. "Trust you to know when you've got to hit the wind in the eye. Guess this countryside hereabouts is a sight too unhealthy for this cowboy. Keep moving, Smoke!"

Buck looked back and saw a cloud of dust on the skyline in the direction of Klingers Springs.

"Posse out after me," he said. "Let this be a lesson to you, Smoke, old son. Always mind your own business. And if I'd done that same I wouldn't be running away with nothing against me except what them waddies suspicion I've done, which I haven't."

"Howsomever, Smoke, you ugly old cayuse, we have got to keep moving because we can't prove we never gunned that card wizard; and them boys what is chasing us might swing me up to the nearest tree and ax for me visiting-card afterwards, when me neck's clean pulled out o' me shirt-collar. Waal, next time us'll mind our own business!"

It was sure lucky for Buck Moran that he forked one of the finest horses in Texas.

Smoke was nothing to look at. In fact, he was worse than that. Some ignorant people laughed outright when they saw him. He was inclined to be gaunt and bony, and some folks said he was leggy. Not that Buck cared a hoot what other people thought. He knew, from experience, that in speed and endurance Smoke had no equal in all Texas, while for intelligence he was the finest bit of horse-flesh ever. He carried more brains between his ears than many human beings.

But it wasn't intelligence Buck asked of Smoke in that mad flight from Klingers Springs. It was speed and endurance, and Smoke never failed him. The miles over the mesa were eaten up, but they could not lose that cloud of dust behind them. If the posse were not gaining on Buck Moran they were sticking to his trail.

"We've got to do something about it, Smoke," said Buck. "Them foothills look like they might come in handy. Hit her up, old pal!"

Buck left the beaten trail and sped over the mesa to the hilly country of the foothills, where great hillocks with wooded slopes offered a reasonable chance of concealment. Buck wasn't worrying his brains a lot just around then. His only concern was to escape the posse, and he set to work to do the job thoroughly.

He plunged into that thick country and rode round hillocks, and through wooded slopes, babbling brook and rode Smoke along it for at least a hundred yards. The horse welcomed the cooling water swirling round its hoofs, although Buck wasn't riding along the bed of the brook for that purpose. He was obliterating the trail, and that water ran so fast that no man could see the imprints of horses' hoofs in the rocky bed of the torrent.

Buck left the water farther up and rode again into wild, wooded, hilly country. He had left the direct route to the Broken K outfit, but that couldn't be helped. He had to lose that man-hunting posse, and he didn't rest until he had put a good many foothills between himself and the mesa.

He found a secluded glade, and there he rested himself and his horse. But while the horse could eat grass there was nothing for Buck to eat, and he began to get uneasy about it.

"Hoss," he said, "you're plumb lucky! If I don't eat soon I'll cave in!"

Smoke took no notice of him. He was too busy with the fresh grass. Buck walked round the glen and climbed the tallest tree in that wood, but he could neither see nor hear anything of the posse that hunted him.

Then, to the south, he saw a hut half hidden in trees. He saw smoke issuing lazily from the chimney, and smoke meant fire; a fire meant food.

"I'll chance it," said Buck.

He walked across the valley, and Smoke, the mustang, quietly followed him. He used no caution in approaching that hut. His guns were in their holsters and his big hands hung loosely at his sides. With Smoke following he went right up to the door and rapped with his knuckles.

"Anyone at home?" he called.

There was no answer. Twice he knocked and called out, but he heard not a sound. He pushed the door open with his foot. The rough table was laid for a meal, and the smell of food made Buck's mouth water.

"Sure," he muttered, "I kin pay f'r what I have!"

He walked into the hut, approached the table. But before he actually reached it a slight movement behind him made him spin round, and his hand dropped to the butt of his six-shooter.

It was a second too late. A gun spat fire and a bullet tore into his right arm, burning like a red-hot iron. Buck staggered back against the table. He saw a man who had hidden behind the door—a cowboy, with a scar on his forehead that twisted up one of his eyebrows.

"Skunk!" snarled Buck. "Us have met afore, I guess! And now—"

He had lost one gun and his right arm hung limply from his shoulder. He got at his other gun with his left, but the crook was quick. He fired again, and Buck dodged. Even then the bullet slashed his forehead, and he dropped, dazed, half senseless.

"Yeah!" sneered the crook. "Us have met afore. You know too much, cowboy. Ef I'd ha' known it was you coming this a-way I'd ha' dropped you afore you set foot inside here. Of all the luck! The only guy who saw me in the saloon, and the darned idiot has to come a-visitin' me! Waal, I guess he can't leave here no more!"

Buck was huddled up in a heap on the floorboards. The crook thought he was at least fatally wounded, if not dead. He went to the door.

Buck pulled himself together. It cost him an effort, but



Buck started up and saw in the doorway a hostile, snarling gang headed by the sheriff!

he was pretty tough. He found his gun, and with his left he let fly.

The crook ducked and dodged; but Buck's bullets were all round him. Unfortunately, Buck couldn't see properly because of the blood that ran into his eyes from the wound on his forehead. He knocked the gun from the crook's hand. He drilled his Stetson full of holes and shot off the lobe of one ear. But he never did that crook any real damage.

All the same for that, the tough knew it was too hot for him in that hut. He shut the door with a slam and ran for it. Painfully Buck hauled himself on to his feet. He staggered to the door and flung it open in time to see the crook mounting Smoke. Buck wanted to yell. The dirty crook was stealing his horse! Buck wanted to shoot, but his vision was blurred. He clung to the doorpost to steady himself.

The crook dug his spurs into Smoke's flanks, and the mustang bounded away. He sent one last departing shot at Buck, and it showered splinters from the doorpost over the wounded cowpuncher's head. Then Buck slid down to the ground, senseless.

When he came to his senses the sun had set and it was dark. He managed to get on his feet and into the hut, and finding his matches he struck one and took stock of the place. There was an oil-lamp on the shelf, and he lit it; then he attended to his wounds.

He found that his arm was not so badly hit as he feared. No bones were splintered. Now that the first shock of the wound had gone he could move the limb, although the muscles hurt him when he did so. He washed the wound and bound it up as best he could.

His head wound had stunned him, but it was not really serious. That, too, he washed and bound up, after which he helped himself to food and water. By the time he had appeased his appetite the moon was showing brilliantly over the tree-tops.

Buck Moran was in a dangerous mood. Admitted he had rushed smack into bad trouble because he had not minded his own business, that was no excuse for a dirty crook to steal his horse. No man could anger Buck quicker than by manhandling that loggy mustang. Besides, a horse-thief in Texas is reckoned almost worse than a murderer.

"I'll get the scallywag if I have to walk all over the damned county on me hands an' knees!" growled Buck.

He loaded his guns and placed them ready to his hands in the open holsters. Then he set out from the hut, not troubling to leave money to pay for his food. He reckoned that grub stake was his due.

He knew which way the crook had gone, and once away from the trodden ground around the hut it was easy to find the track of Smoke's hoofs. He soon found, too, why the crook had wanted a horse, for he came on the body of a roan mare that had broken its leg in a hole and had been shot by the crook.

The trail Buck followed was leading him back to Klingers Springs, but he didn't let that worry him. He meant to get that crook and regain his own horse if it was possible for any man to do it!

He wasn't feeling any too good, but he was urged on by the memory of what the crook had done to him and the loss of the best horse that ever whinnied in Texas County. That low-down skunk might have murdered the card wizard. Buck wasn't troubling himself a lot about that. What mattered more than that was the way the crook had hidden behind the door of the hut, shot him down from behind without giving him a dog's chance of a fight, and then stolen the mustang. A treacherous skunk, that crook was, and Buck Moran was the guy to nail him if he were given a clear break.

He made his way through the wooded country of the foothills, following the trail of Smoke's hoofs, to the open mesa. But a shout went up as soon as he left the concealing trees, and bullets buzzed all round him like angry wasps. The posse was still out hunting for him, and he had walked slap into their arms.

Buck retreated, gun in hand, back into the coppice he had just left. He didn't want to kill these men just because they were mistaken, yet what could he do? He fired close enough to them to make them cautious. He hoped to give them the slip in the deep shadows, but it was a losing battle he fought. The odds were twenty to one against him, and he knew it.

Besides, he was wounded and weak from loss of blood. He perched himself in a cluster of rocks that he found in the centre of the copse, and every time he saw the tip of a hat he sent a bullet to bore a hole in it. As far as he could he tried not to hit a man. He was no killer, was Buck Moran.

But he couldn't hope to win out that way. The sheriff of Klingers Springs was wily. This wasn't his first man-hunt by a long sight. He had his men all round that

copse and gradually drawing in closer and closer to the quarry.

Buck blazed away at the shadows, hoping against hope that he would get out of the mess. Then, from the boughs of a tall tree a rifle cracked—a long-range Winchester. The bullet hit the barrel of Buck's gun and knocked it from his hand. A stentorian voice hailed him:

"Drop yore guns, cowboy! We've done got you sighted! It's kill or capture, whichever you like!"

Buck snarled like a wild beast at bay; but he dropped his guns and held his hands above his head. He was in a tight fix, but while there was life there was hope, even if it wasn't a lot of hope.

Cautiously the posse closed in, guns held ready. Buck made no move. He let them surround him and pick up his guns.

"Sheriff," he said curtly, "you've got this all wrong. I never killed a man yet except two three greaser bandits down south, and that was in fair fight and self-defence."

"You don't say?" sneered the sheriff. "Listen, stranger! In these parts, when there's a killing, and a hombre runs from town and fights the posse, we sorter reckon he's guilty. And we strings up sech guys in these parts, stranger."

"You hang me and you hang an innocent man!" snapped Buck. "And are you sure I fought your posse? Jumping rattlers! I shot to hold you off! I could ha' drilled a dozen of yore men if I'd ha' liked."

"Apple sauce!" scoffed the sheriff. "You're wounded, and—"

"None o' yore bullets touched me!" said Buck. "Jest take a look, sheriff, and you'll see these yere wounds is washed and bound with strips torn from a tablecloth, and I don't see no tablecloths growing in this yere copse!"

"What are you getting at?" asked the sheriff. "You bolted from town after Jim Archer was shot down—"

"Yeah," agreed Buck. "So would you if you'd ha' been me. I was the only guy in that saloon, and the bartender was snoring. In comes the feller in black—"

"Jim Archer?"

"Yeah. He goes in the back room. Then another feller arrives. He's a cow waddy, with a scar on his forehead that twists up one eyebrow—"

"What!" cried the sheriff. "Meaning Bill Sims?"

"I don't know his moniker, and I'm not caring," said Buck. "You listen, and I'll give you the low-down on this. The guy with the scar goes in that room. I hears two shots and a yelp and a man dropping. I rushes in and sees the cowpuncher disappearing through the window. I fires twice, and then you turns up. You nacherally hankers after arresting me. I see I can't prove a thing about me innocence, so I clears out, and having the best hoss in this country I leave your posse behind and fool you."

"In which case," says the sheriff, "why are you here and where's the hoss?"

Buck told him how he had arrived at the hut and all that had happened there.

"And now," he said, "I aim to go back and settle up with this Bill Sims and get me hoss back."

"No, you don't!" snarled the sheriff. "We won't string you up since there's a spice o' doubt, but you is arrested and you stays arrested. The posse will go back to town and talk to Bill Sims."

"Say, sheriff!" cried Buck. "When this Bill Sims sees the sheriff and twenty men coming his way d'you think he'll stop to talk? Besides, how d'you know he's gone to Klingers Springs?"

"The trail leads that a-way," said the sheriff. "But this is my plan, stranger. You stay here with the posse to look after you, while me and my deputy sheriff rides back to town to take Bill by surprise."

"Nothing doing!" snapped Buck. "I want to be on the spot when Bill Sims starts talking, supposing you catch him, which I doubt. That crooked guy would fill you full o' hokum and lies!"

Buck spoke with a deal of feeling. The posse had crowded round to listen. Buck had dropped his arms, and no one worried because he had no guns, anyway.

"What I says goes in these parts!" retorted the sheriff.

Buck knew that he was in a tighter fix than ever. He doubted the ability of the sheriff to get the truth from such a treacherous skunk as this Bill Sims. Besides, he wanted his mustang back, unhurt. And he made his plans in a flash. He stepped yet closer to the sheriff and talked hard and fast.

"You're not giving me a chance!" he complained. "Sims won't talk, and he's got my hoss. I'm the only guy who can prove Sims lies. I'm the only guy who can prove he's riding my hoss, and I aims to do it. I'll ride to town and do that same, and you kin follow and look on!"

"Say, hombre!" cried the sheriff. "How kin you do that same? You're under arrest, you are, and—"

"Like Lucifer I am!" snarled Buck.

He grabbed a gun from the sheriff's holster and jammed it against the man's shirt.

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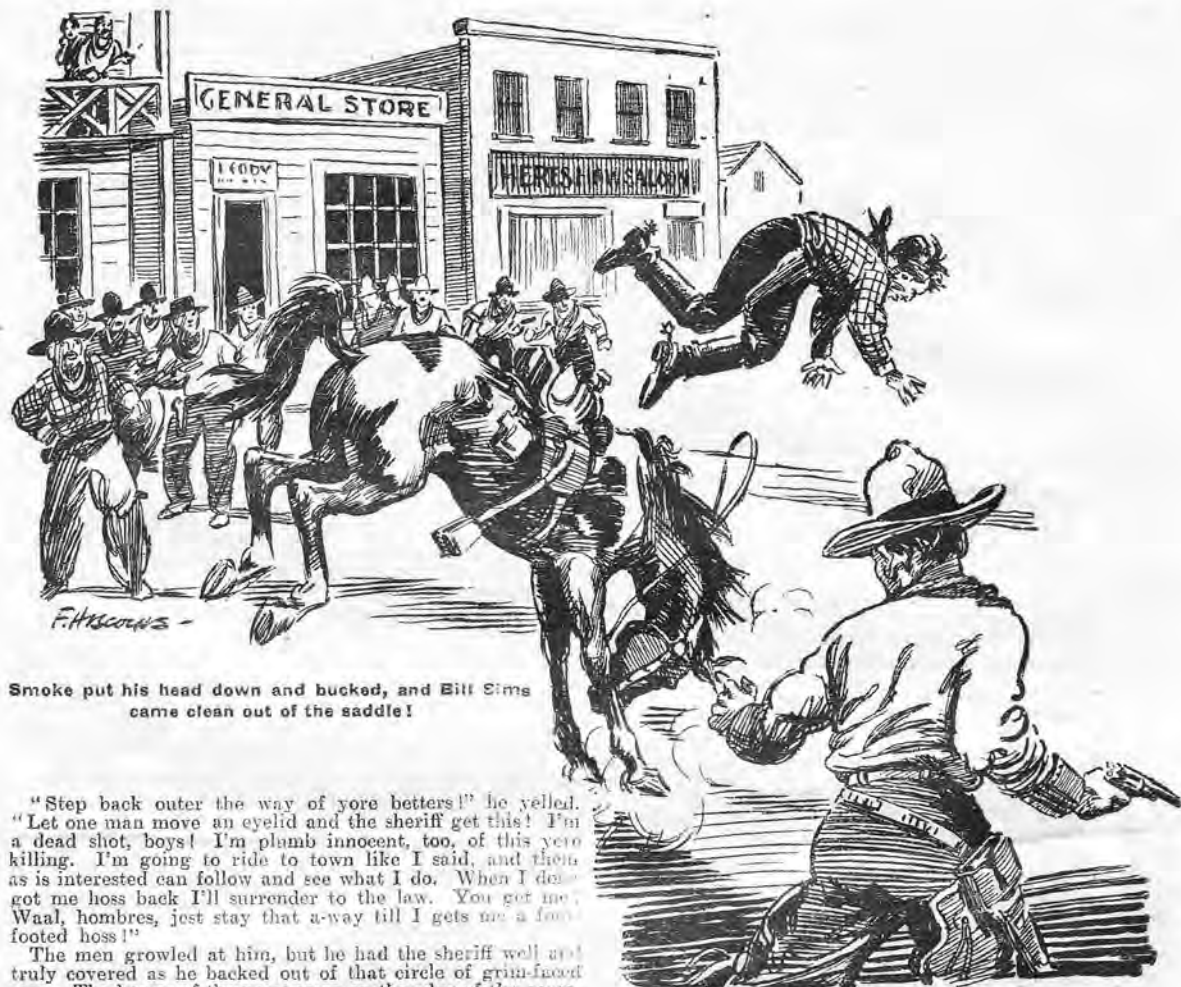
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Smoke put his head down and bucked, and Bill Sims came clean out of the saddle!

"Step back outer the way of yore betters!" he yelled. "Let one man move an eyelid and the sheriff get this! I'm a dead shot, boys! I'm plumb innocent, too, of this yore killing. I'm going to ride to town like I said, and then as is interested can follow and see what I do. When I done got me hoss back I'll surrender to the law. You got me, Waal, hombres, jest stay that a-way till I gets me a footed hoss!"

The men growled at him, but he had the sheriff well and truly covered as he backed out of that circle of grim-faced men. The horses of the posse were on the edge of the copse. Buck grabbed the best-looking animal. He vaulted in the saddle, turned her, and was gone.

He crouched low over the horse's mane, expecting to hear the bullets whistle round his head; but the posse did not shoot. They were mounting and following.

Buck had headed direct for Klingers Springs, and that fact practically told the posse that he had been speaking the truth. Besides, Buck played a lone hand against twenty armed men who could have shot him down. They were giving him the chance he wanted to clear himself.

Buck rode madly over the mesa in the moonlight. There was no doubt about it. He had picked the best horse and he left the posse far behind. There never was a man who could get as much out of a horse as Buck Moran of the Broken K. He never flogged that animal, and his spurs never touched her flanks, yet she gave of her very best with Buck doing all he could to make himself lighter in the saddle. They had the wind with them, and they seemed to race it.

Buck had his reasons. Like the sheriff, he knew that Bill Sims would be found in Klingers Springs for at least two reasons, maybe three. Firstly, he would want to know whether Jim Archer was alive or dead, and whether a stranger had been lynched for the killing. He would have to find all that out before he knew whether it was safe to stay among those parts.

Secondly, if he disappeared without rhyme or reason, and that stranger had not been apprehended for the killing, he would be covering himself with suspicion needlessly, because the stranger would be shouldering the blame while he made an exile of himself.

Thirdly—and this was a guess—Buck had blundered into that room so soon after the shots were fired that the killer had not got away with Jim Archer's wads of dollar bills, and Bill Sims just naturally wondered if they were still lying on the floor under the table or not.

In any case, if Bill Sims was not in Klingers Springs he had headed in that direction; therefore, Buck Moran went there, too, urging that horse along the trail at breakneck speed.

He came thundering into town and up to the saloon front. He dropped from the horse and tethered it to the rail. He glanced along the line of animals already there, and sure enough Smoke was at the far end!

Buck took no notice of his mustang. He stomped across the boardwalk, whipped out the sheriff's gun he had brought with him, thrust open the door with his foot, and entered, gun levelled.

"Put 'em up, you rat!" he snarled.

The saloon was crowded with men; but the bluff succeeded. At the far end of the room Bill Sims started to his feet. He was present, his face was ghastly pale, and the scar on his forehead showed up like a livid weal.

But the crowd of men hid his hands from Buck's view. His gun spat fire, and the hanging flare-lamp was shattered. The lights went out, and men dropped to escape the flying, humming bullets of hate and vengeance. Buck was shooting at the spot where Bill Sims had been. Bill Sims, down behind an overturned table, was shooting back. Then he bolted through a back door.

Buck went out again into the street, crossed over, and crouched in a doorway. His guess was right. Bill Sims came running round the corner of the saloon for his stolen horse; but before he could get within six yards of the mustang Buck let him have it. He poured lead at the treacherous skunk as hard as he could pump it, and the crook jumped back behind the saloon.

He knew where Buck was, and he was a dead shot. That much was evident. The doorpost where Buck crouched was splintered badly, and always at the height of Buck's head. Care and dodging saved the life of the Broken K waddy.

On the other hand, Sims wasn't having it all his own way. Buck had only one gun, and it was getting uncomfortably hot. His bullets kept the crook at the corner of the saloon, where he dared not risk a sally across the open space to reach the mustang.

Buck was using his brains. It looked like a waste of lead, because Bill Sims could have turned and fled behind the saloon, only he'd have had to do it without a horse. Buck

had had plenty of chances to regain his lost horse, yet he had purposely left it there at the hitching rail.

As a matter of fact, Buck was waiting for the sheriff's posse to arrive and witness the final scene. Buck had it all worked out. He knew what he was about, and he knew his horse. He heard the thunder of the posse entering the town. Sims heard it, too. He held Buck in his corner with a storm of lead.

Sims was desperate. In fighting this way he was giving himself away to all the town, and he knew it. He just had to escape, and he came from his corner, a six-gun in each hand, spitting sudden death in lurid streaks of flame, his body weaving, his eyes focused on the doorway where Buck crouched, while all the time he sidled towards the hitching rail.

Buck poked his head round and let him have six bullets. Twice he hit Sims, but not badly enough to drop him. Then his last bullet nicked a hole in the crook's shirt-sleeve. Buck looked like being beaten after all. But he still had his brains!

Sims blazed away with his guns, and Buck came toppling from the doorway to lie on his face in the roadway. It looked like he was done for. He wanted it to look like that because the posse were coming pell-mell up the one and only street of Klingers Springs.

Bill Sims leapt for the mustang. One slash of his knife, and the tether parted. He vaulted into the saddle and pulled the mustang's head round. The horse cavorted a bit, and then Buck Moran came to life.

"Whoop-ee, Smoke, you ole critter!" he bawled. "Let him have it, boy!"

Smoke put his ears back. For two or three yards he bounded, then he came down on all four feet with a bump, and up went his back as he leapt like a buck rabbit. Down

he came and round. His head went down between his forefeet and his hind legs came up. In a second he was bucking again, like a mad thing, whirling about till it made the sheriff's posse giddy to look at him.

Bill Sims hung on like grim death, but it couldn't last. "Attabo!" screamed Moran. "Shift him out of it, Smoke!"

The horse seemed to be made of wire springs. His four feet came together on the hard ground, and up he bucked. Bill Sims came out of the saddle as if launched from a catapult. He landed on the boardwalk with a bump enough to break every bone in his body.

But he was tough. He scrambled to his feet, and there was the mustang standing there looking at him, as meek as any fawning deer. Bill Sims saw the posse still coming. He had to get away. The mustang had thrown him once. It wouldn't play that trick twice! Bill Sims had spurs that tamed. And since the mustang was the nearest horse he meant to have it.

He sprang, one hand outstretched to grab the bridle. But Smoke reared at him, lashing out wildly with his forefeet. Bill Sims was too close. One of those flail-like hoofs thudded on his breast and knocked him yards away. Even then Smoke was not satisfied. Teeth bared, he advanced, but Buck Moran yelled at him.

"You murderous critter, Smoke! Come here!" And the horse turned to trot to where Buck lay.

But Bill Sims had several ribs smashed and could not rise. He groaned when the sheriff's posse picked him up.

"Waal, Bill," said the sheriff, "how come yore own horse to savage you?"

"Nix on that!" mumbled Sims. "It weren't my hoss, and you know it! That stranger got me all set!"

"And about Jim Archer now?" asked the sheriff.

"I know when I'm whacked," said Bill Sims. "I gunned him. He was going to lend me a few dollars along o' me being on the rocks. But when I saw his wad o' notes I got greedy and tried to grab the lot. Then that stranger bumped in before he was wanted, and I missed what I wanted. You know the rest. Put me on a bed and get a doc to me."

They carried him into the saloon and upstairs to a bedroom. The saloon proprietor was a busy man round about them.

"But Jim Archer isn't dead," he said. "After you'd gone, sheriff, he was sensible enough to tell me it was Bill who dropped him. Guess Jim'll be toting around again in a few weeks."

"Waal, can you beat it?" cried Buck. "All this sheenanigan for nothing!"

"Stranger," said the sheriff, "ef us hombres sort o' scared you any we axes you to forget it. We was only doing our duty like decent citizens, though I will say you was nearer to having yore neck stretched considerable than I hope you'll ever be again in this life!"

"Still, we sure admires the way you done acted and cleared yoreself, and ef you wants to sell that hoss here's a guy who'll pay big money for thet animile."

"Nothing doing, sheriff!" grinned Buck. "I don't bear no ill-will. This little party will sure teach me to keep my nose out o' other folks' business. As for the hoss, he ain't for sale this week, next week, nor the next week after Domesday. That cayuse stays my property for now and always, even ef I have to tear me hair out by the roots to feed him!"

"I don't blame you none!" said the sheriff. "It ain't much of a horse to look at, but it's a humdinger for brains."

"And that's a mouthful, bo," said Buck. "Guess I'll sleep a bit, and hit the grit for home in the morning. Happy dreams, you hombres!"

About twenty-four hours later, or thereabouts, Buck arrived back at the Broken K outfit, with a bandage round his head and his right arm hitched up for comfort's sake in his shirt. Colonel Worth looked him up and down.

"What's doing now, Buck?" he asked. "Met trouble coming along?"

"Nothing to speak of, colonel," said Buck. "Jest couldn't mind my own business, thet's all. Soon be fit again."

"The sooner the better!" retorted the colonel. "I'm having trouble with the horses, and I suspicion dirty work in the corral. I want you to keep your eyes skinned down there."

"Yeah, is that so?" said Buck. "Call it done, colonel. Give me time to set the hole in me head to rights and get me shooting-arm healthy again, and we'll clear up any mystery you've got. Leastways, me and Smoke will. Sabe?"

THE END.

(Buck and Smoke have come through again, but it was a close call this time! There'll be another grand yarn of these two pals in next week's GEM!)



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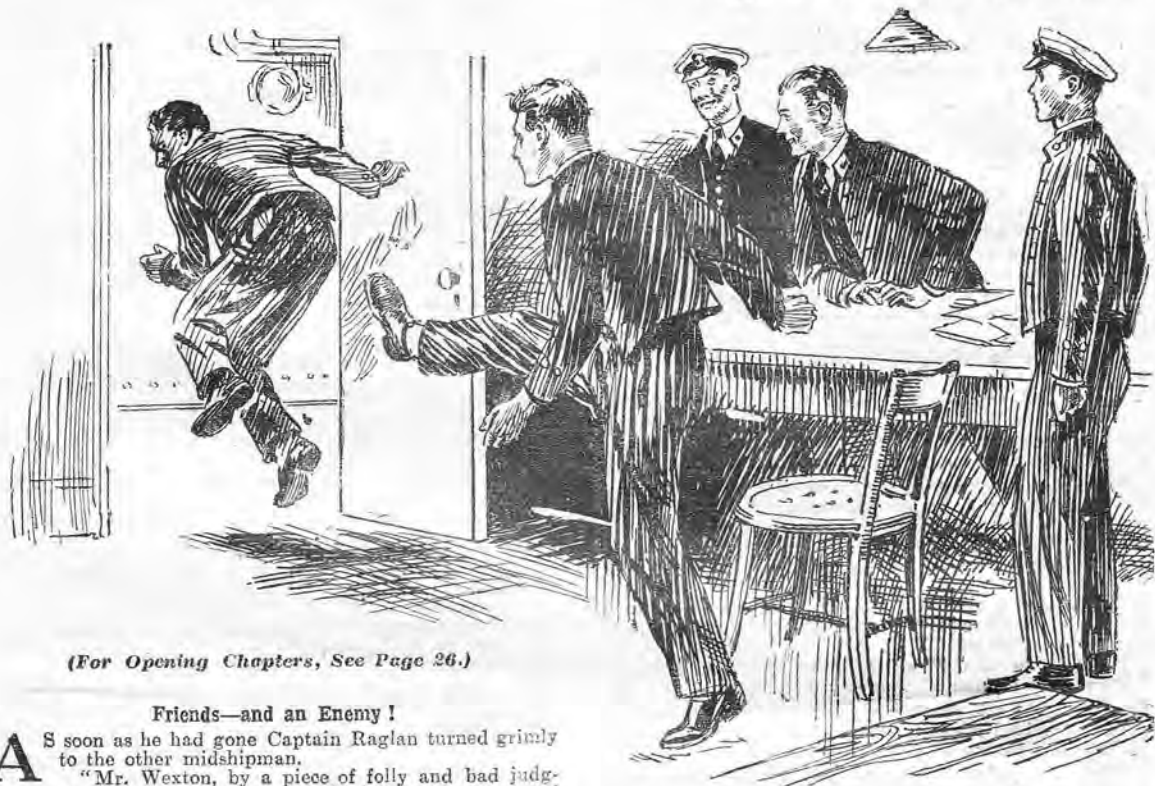
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THE FIGHTING MIDDY!

By David Goodwin.



(For Opening Chapters, See Page 26.)

Friends—and an Enemy!

AS soon as he had gone Captain Raglan turned grimly to the other midshipman.

"Mr. Wexton, by a piece of folly and bad judgment you have lost the ship's first cutter and endangered the lives of sixteen men. I witnessed the affair myself from the upper deck. It was not a mere accident for which you can be held blameless; it was a gross blunder, which could easily have been avoided, and was largely due to your own ill-temper at finding yourself beaten by the third cutter."

Wexton, very pale, bit his lip.

"You failed to keep a proper look-out, and when the danger appeared you lost your nerve and your common sense. You have been two years in the Service," said Captain Raglan sternly, "and should know that better things are required of a naval officer, even at your age. Have you any defence?"

"It was not my fault, sir," muttered Wexton; "the torpedo-boat came right on top—"

"The torpedo-boat was not in the least to blame!" said Captain Raglan sharply.

"The fault was entirely your own, as you well know. It is fortunate that none of the men lost their lives in the collision. I do not expect the boats of the Victorious to be handled in such a manner. Your leave is stopped as long as the Victorious is on the South Coast. Report to Mr. Moreton, and then go to your quarters."

Wexton saluted and left the cabin. As soon as he was away from that dreaded sanctum his dark face showed the temper that was consuming him. As he strode along the deck, Ned—who saw the middy had had a severe wiggling, and felt uncommonly sorry for him—came alongside.

"I say, I hope the skipper didn't pitch into you?" said Ned sympathetically. "You've had some rotten bad luck to-day—"

"You swab!" said Wexton, turning on him savagely. "You did it on purpose! You got me into this mess! You luffed me right on to the torpedo-boat—and you know it!"

Ned stared at him in blank astonishment.

"Luffed you on to her? How on earth could I? I was

to windward of you and twenty yards in front. What do you mean, Wexton?"

"You know jolly well!" snarled the midshipman. "You forced me to turn across her, and I owe this to you! All leave stopped, by gum! You and your precious rescue of a man who was in no more danger than I am!" he sneered. "You only did it to show off and advertise yourself!" Wexton's eyes blazed with anger. "Yes, you've got me wiggled by the owner; make the most of that. I'll be even with you yet, you pup!"

He stalked off, fuming. Wexton was not particular what accusations he brought against a rival. He had known better than to say such a thing to the captain, knowing it would do him more harm than good to talk such nonsense. But he flung the charge in Ned's teeth and strode away in a rage.

"Phew!" said Ned to himself, staring after Wexton. "That's the limit! Luffed him on to the torpedo-boat! Is the chap off his head? He seems determined to have a row with me at any price. No good arguing with a fellow like that."

A young seaman, with a pale face and a black eye, came up to Ned shyly.

"Brinkman! Is that you?" said Ned heartily, recognising the man for whom he had gone overboard. "Glad to see you on your legs again. Hope you aren't hurt?"

"Nothin' to speak of, sir. An—an' I want to say, sir, that I owes you my life; and there ain't anything I wouldn't do to serve you, sir!" said the seaman fervently. "An' if it ain't disrespectful, you're the bravest young officer on the ship, sir; an' I only wish I—"

"Here, go astern, Brinkman!" said Ned, laughing. "Your engines are getting away with you. Belay all that talk. I didn't do anything but get a wet jacket; and they'd have soon pulled you out, anyhow."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,177.

NED HARDY FOR EVER!

Rousing Reception in the Gun-Room.

"Ah, it's all very well, sir! But I was straight on the road to Davy when you got me. An' they tell me I nigh drowned you, too. I'm that ashamed, sir; but I'd a crack on the head, an' didn't know what I was doin'. But if ever I get the chance—"

"Oh, that's all right, Brinkman! I say, you don't know if the two men who went overboard out of my cutter have had a drink, do you? If you'll find them and bring them below to the flat I'll get the gun-room steward to serve out three. Cut along! Well, what is it?"

"I—I s'pose you couldn't say a word to get me put in your cutter, could you, sir?" said Brinkman, twisting his cap nervously.

"I will if I can," said Ned, rather surprised. "But I don't know how they'll take it from me. It's the least I can do after giving you that black eye."

"Black eye!" murmured Brinkman, after Ned had gone. "I'd 'a' taken a broken neck from that young 'un an' never grumbled! I wish we'd more like him. Well, p'r'aps I'll be able to do him a turn some day."

Ned, rather embarrassed by the sailor's thanks, went down to the flat to see after the three men, and finally turned up in the school-room, where he found Wexton had returned, and a noisy altercation was raging as Ned came in.

"I tell you he luffed me right on to her!" Wexton cried angrily.

"Don't talk rot, Wexton!" said Acland, with contempt.

"It was the dirtiest trick I ever saw! An' he's sucking up to the owner; and he only went overboard to make a show an' get his name in the papers. I tell you—"

"Look here, get out of this, will you?" said Keppel, the senior middy; and, gripping Wexton by the shoulders, he gave him a kick that propelled him out into the alley-way. "We want no lies from you about Hardy. He's done a thing we're all proud of, and you'd better shut your mouth!"

"Give him a gun-room licking if he says any more!" exclaimed several voices. Only one of the whole company followed Wexton out.

"I tell you what!" cried Jinks, shouldering forward. "We've had enough of this sort of thing, and we aren't going to stand any more of it! Here's Hardy!"

The assembled middies gave Ned a rousing welcome, and his back was thumped till it was sore.

"You're one of us, and no mistake, Hardy!" said Keppel, holding out his hand. "How much of the giddy Solent did you swallow?"

"Did Brinkman hug you round the neck?"

"I'm beginning to wish I'd let him drown, if I'm never to hear the end of it!" said Ned desperately.

"All right, we won't taunt you with your disgrace, old chap. You'll be able to live it down," chuckled Acland. "But, I say, you cut out Wexton like a nailer! Where did you learn to sail a boat like that?"

"The dad used to take me yachting in the holidays. I've got a little rater he gave me, too. But the cutter's crew helped me win a lot; they backed me up like anything!"

"You bet they did, my son! And they'll back you up through blue blazes and back again after this," said Keppel. "Have a Marsala with me? Acland, go and get 'em."

It was not the glass of thin brown wine that filled Ned's whole frame with a delightful glow; it was the knowledge that his comrades were with him like one man. It was plain enough to see. All the other suspicion and standoffishness were gone at one stroke. The shadow of Ralph's court-martial no longer seemed to hang over the boy. Except for Wexton and his friend Mayne, there was not a middy in the gun-room now who was not glad to greet Ned as a chum.

When dinner-time came, too, and the boys went in to mess, Ned felt there was a kindlier glance in the eyes of the sub-lieutenants. Grimshaw alone was ill-pleased, but he saw that it was no time to show it. It was not that anybody made a fuss of Ned or his little exploit. They do not do that in the Fleet. He got more chaff

than praise, but his comrades let him see that he had won his footing among them, and he had done something to the credit of the ship.

Ned turned in that night, after a merry evening, happier than he had ever been in his life.

Next morning he awoke to the full swing of the ship's routine, and such a thing as a run-down cutter might never have existed. Ned began to feel himself a part of the mighty fighting-machine—he was the 820th soul aboard her—and to feel as keen a pride in her as her captain could have done. When the morning watch was over, however, he sought out Jinks.

"When does this precious steam-kettle of ours get a move on?" he said. "I'd like to feel her under way and going full lick."

"Would you? I should go an' tell the owner to pull her anchors out of the mud, and be quick about it," said his chum.

"No, but don't rot. When do we leave?"

"We're here under orders, and it'll be another day and a half before we go, I think. There'll be steam tactics then, and a giddy old war-dance down Channel, I can tell you. The Victorious ain't a penny steamboat, and doesn't get her anchors up for afternoon runs. There are the letters. One for you."

A Letter from Ralph!

IT was a new sensation for Ned to get an envelope addressed, "Mr. Hardy, H.M.S. Victorious," but the contents of the letter were a surprise.

"It's from Ralph," he said to himself. "He knows I'm here, then."

Ned went away to a quiet corner before he opened the letter and read it eagerly.

It was dated from an hotel at Chatham, and ran thus:

"Dear Old Boy,—I hear that by some extraordinary chance they've sent you to the Victorious. What it means I can't think, but there must be something queer behind it. I only hope they're not giving you a bad time aboard, but as things are I'm more than half afraid they will. I hate to think of what's happened."

"It seems to me you're a tougher time in front of you than ever I had. Keep a stiff upper lip, Ned, and show them there's pride in the Hardys yet. You're a plucky kid and will make plenty of friends in spite of it all. Only don't forget that you'll certainly have enemies as well, and perhaps very bitter ones."

"He's right there," thought Ned. "Ralph knows what he's talking about—dear old chap!"

"I didn't write merely to jaw you, however," (continued Ralph's letter). "Before long you'll get some news from me in earnest, but, in the meantime, I want you to do something for me, if it can be managed, on board."

"You remember Smiler, my bulldog. The governor won't have him at home, as he doesn't care to have anything that reminds him of me; I'm an outcast now, you see. Well, I've got Smiler here at Chatham, but with the work I have to do now I can't take the dog about with me. I have to go on the quiet."

"What I want you to do is to take Smiler for me on board the Victorious, and keep him."

Ned whistled to himself.

"Of course, you'll consider him as your own. As I can't have him with me, I'd hate to think of him in any hands but yours. Do see if you can arrange it, old boy. They may probably not let a junior snottie keep a dog, but you might get him taken as the pet of the gun-room in general. Try your senior sub, whoever he is now, and if he's a decent fellow he'll not object. You'd better not say the dog is mine, of course."

"Can you do it for me? There's no living soul I can ask a favour of now but you. If you agree, wire me as soon as possible, and I'll send Smiler off."

HOW THE STORY STARTED.

MIDSHIPMAN NED HARDY, son of a line of sea captains, is appointed to the Victorious, the same ship from which his brother Ralph has been cashiered in connection with a robbery. Ned believes his brother innocent, but his father turns Ralph from the house. Aboard the Victorious, Ned finds a friend in Jinks and an enemy in Sub-lieutenant Grimshaw. Before very long, Ned is put in charge of the third cutter, and detailed to take two guests of the captain ashore. On the return journey, Wexton, in charge of the first cutter, tries to race Ned, but is run down by a destroyer. Ned saves a bluejackets' life, and is duly complimented by the captain in front of Wexton.

(Now read on.)

"You'll hear from me again soon on another matter. Best of luck, old boy."

"Yours to the finish,
"Ralph."

An Old Enemy!

"WHAT a brick Ralph is!" said Ned. "I'd give my head to have old Smiler aboard here! He'd do credit to the Victorians!"

He looked doubtful, however, as he glanced through the letter again.

"Wonder if they'll let me have him? 'Ask the senior sub,' Ralph says. That'd be no earthly, of course. He can't know Grimshaw is chief of the gun-room." Ned thought it over for a moment or two. "Jinks might work it for me."

Ned sought his chum out and put the case to him. Jinks was keen as mustard on it.

"It'd be a rare old game!" he said. "Is the pup yours?"

"Well, he belongs to the family. He's a pal of mine. We've always been partners, Smiler and me."

"What's he like?"

"Finest bulldog you ever saw! A tough old slobbery-faced demon, with fangs as long as your fingers, and ugly as sin. He's got the pluck of twenty. I'd tackle a lion if I'd Smiler with me."

"Is he savage? Think he'll slaughter anybody on board?"

"He's as good-tempered as a lamb, except with one or two people to whom he takes a dislike. And he's as much fun as a clown."

"We must have him," said Jinks decisively. "I'll show you how to work it."

"Will they let me keep him?" Ned knew the Navy was famous for pets. "Are there any animals aboard?"

"There's the owner's mastiff, and the men have got a billygoat on the lower deck and one or two parrots. Snotties can't very well get permission, though; in the gun-room the subs boss the show. No use asking Grimshaw; I know he hates dogs—and, besides, you're the last chap he'd grant a favour. I tell you what. Ask Hart. You'll have to put it as if the dog is to belong to the whole gun-room. Hart can be his nominal owner."

Ned went straight to the third sub-lieutenant and made his request. Hart listened doubtfully and grinned.

"I'm used to the nerve of snotties," he said, "but I never met one with such a forty-horse-power cheek as yours. D'you think I'm here to be your dog-keeper?"

"Oh, but he'd belong to the gun-room, sir!" pleaded Ned. "And, of course, I'd feed him and look after him for you, and everything."

"You're sure you don't insist on my cleaning out his kennel, or bathing him?" said Hart. "What is he like to look at?"

It so happened that Ned had an old snapshot of Smiler taken during the holidays, and he showed it to the sub-lieutenant. Hart was impressed. It was rather a grievance with him that the gun-room had no pet of its own.

"Oh, well, all right!" said Hart. "You can send for him if you like. Only it depends on his behaviour whether he stops or not, you know."

Ned poured out a flood of thanks and rushed off to Jinks with the news.

"I told you Hart would rise to it," said his chum. "You'd better hurry and get the dog sent before we sail."

Ned scribbled a telegram directing his brother to send the bulldog to Southsea, and got one of the liberty-men who was going ashore to send it off.

About eight bells in the forenoon watch next day a wire came aboard for Ned, announcing:

"Smiler arrives Southsea 2.30 train."

Ned showed Jinks the wire, and that youth promptly decided they must both apply for leave to go and fetch him. Luckily, this permission did not have to be obtained from Grimshaw. It was the first-lieutenant who granted leave to the middies—or refused it—and as Ned was on his good books, Number One allowed the two friends to go, with strict orders to be aboard by four o'clock.

They left in the picket-boat, which was going to Southsea, Ned rejoicing in his first shore-leave. There was an hour to spare before the train arrived, and the middies went to a good restaurant, and, as Jinks put it, "did themselves top-hole."

Then they went to the station and met the train, arriving just as it came in.

"Got a little dog here?" inquired Ned of one of the porters, as he reached the van.

Before he got a reply there was a commotion in the



The dog came hurtling on to the platform towing the guard, and sending a porter flying as he leapt at Ned.

brake, and a huge brindled bulldog came flying out on to the platform, towing the guard behind him by a leather lead.

"Here he is!" cried Ned.

The dog rushed at him, upsetting a porter, and nearly knocked Ned down with delight at seeing him.

"He's one of the right sort!" said Jinks. "No wonder you call him Smiler!" he added, as the dog gave a grin that seemed to open his head like a gladstone bag.

He made friends with Jinks at once.

"You and I are going to be raggies, old man," said Jinks, patting him. "I say, Hardy, what a beauty he is!"

"Let's get him some grub and a drink," said Ned.

He tipped the guard, who seemed rather glad to get rid of Smiler, and they went back to the restaurant, where Ned regaled his four-footed chum with a pound of raw beef and some water. While the dog was stowing these provisions Ned glanced up and saw a pair of eyes fixed on him that awoke a sudden flash of recollection.

They belonged to a man who was just then slipping quietly out of the restaurant, but who cast a quick, searching glance back at the two boys as he went.

(It looks as though there's further trouble ahead for Ned, doesn't it, chums? There is, too, as you'll discover when you read next week's thrilling instalment of this powerful yarn of the Royal Navy.)

GUSSY, THE SLOVEN!

(Continued from page 19.)

fellows to lend me a pair of trousers, a jacket, and a collar, and a tie, and—"

"My dear man—"

"I hate bowwowin', as you know," said Gussy, in great distress, "but, weally, I have no other alternative! I am in a most dreadful posish—"

"Ha ha, ha!" roared Lowther.

"You feafuhl ass! It is nothin' to be wibald about, Lowthah—"

"Ha, ha! It—it's all right. We'll lend you some clobber; won't we, you chaps?" choked Monty. "This way, old fellow! If you hadn't rushed off before, we'd have saved you all that trouble! This way!"

"What—what—bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus was astonished when his laughing chums drew him into the disused box-room at the end of the Shell passage. He was still more astonished when Lowther opened several trunks and exposed a large collection of beautiful suits, beautiful shoes, beautiful waistcoats, beautiful neckties—in fact, quite an extensive wardrobe of beautiful gent's clothing and suchlike.

Gussy nearly fainted as he sighted them.

"G-g-good gwacious!" he gurgled. "Lowthah, you—you feafuhl spoofah, this is all my clobber! You have not disposed of it at all!"

"Certainly I did!" smiled Lowther. "I disposed of them in here, as you see, old chap!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Tom Merry & Co.

"Oh, bai Jove! Oh, Gweat Scott! How—how perfectly wippin'! But, weally—"

"Just a little lesson, old chap, to prevent you being rash!" chuckled Lowther. "You see, we understood you were temporarily potty—"

"Weally, Lowthah, you wottah—"

"And fearing you might, in your enthusiastic zeal to become a second Tolstoy, get rid of your clothes and then be sorry for it afterwards, when you'd come to your senses again," resumed Lowther, chuckling, "we decided to dispose of the stuff ourselves, so we hid it here!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Tom Merry & Co.

"The clobber that got mucked up in the auction was only old stuff—rubbish!" grinned Lowther. "We carefully sorted that out—the only decent thing in the lot was that jacket Crokee got! See?"

"Oh, bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus nearly fainted in the sudden revulsion of feeling. All his beautiful clobber was here—safe after all. It seemed simply too gorgeously

lovely to be true! A smile of beatific happiness came over the noble, grubby features of Gussy, the Sloven.

"Bai Jove! I—I—I am vewy, vewy gwateful, deah boys!" he stammered. "And—and I must confess," he added confidentially, "that I have been wathah a misguided ass, you know! I have allowed my principles to be lost sight of, owin' to silly asses cwticisin' me, you know. However, I must weally wush away and dwess in time to weport to the Head. I can now face him like a Bwitoh, you know!"

"Ha, ha! And you're chucking this game—this reform—in' stunt, Gussy?"

"Of course, deah boy! I have been labouwin' under a delusion—I have been wathah an ass to listen to silly asses and allow my bettah judgment to ve ovahpowahed! I am fed up with bein' what that feafuhl old idiot Bland advised me to be. Blow Bland!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But what about Waterloo?" demanded Lowther, shaking his head. "Are you forgetting that the Battle of Trafalgar was not won in the playing fields of Waterloo by fellows who wear spats—"

"Wats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gussy's great "reform" was over!

At eight-thirty Arthur Augustus repaired to the Head's study, quite cheerful and sedate. He looked a perfect picture from his neatly parted hair to his ~~neatly~~ shoes. Solomon in all his glory couldn't have looked such a dazzling sight.

The Head and Mr. Railton smiled at him.

As a matter of fact, the great joke had reached Kildare, who had passed it on—unofficially—to Railton, who had passed it on—also unofficially—to the Head, and the two scholastic gentlemen had laughed heartily over Gussy's "reform"—as did Colonel Bland and his wife when they heard the story at dinner.

To Gussy's great astonishment the Head merely gave him fifty lines for cutting call-over, and dismissed him—Gussy being quite puzzled at a splutter of laughter which followed him out.

The great reform was over. That evening Gussy appeared in the Common-room in all his former glory—including his eyeglass! Gussy was himself again—once again the swell of the Fourth, the glass of fashion, and the mould of form at St. Jim's.

THE END.

(Another ripping long story of Tom Merry & Co. in next week's GEM, boys, entitled: "GRUNDY'S SIMPLIFIED SPELLING! Make sure of enjoying this splendid treat by ordering your copy in good time.")

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