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The GEM

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A MAGNIFICENT EXTRA-LONG YARN OF TOM MERRY & CO.—

COUSIN ETHEL'S



Skimpole fancies himself as a poet, and gets "goofy" over Cousin Ethel, but Tom Merry & Co. consider that he has neither rhyme—nor reason!

CHAPTER 1.

Tom Merry Inquires for Skimpole!

"H AVE you seen Skimpole?"

"Skimpole?"

"Yes."

"No. Who wants Skimpole?"

"I do," growled Tom Merry. "I shouldn't be looking for him if I didn't want him. Have you seen him?"

"No, I haven't," said Gore. "What do you—"

But Tom Merry had walked on. Tom Merry was looking worried and somewhat wrathful. Gore was the fifth person he had asked about Skimpole, but no one seemed to have seen Skimpole since classes were dismissed that sunny July day.

Skimpole was usually to be found easily enough; in fact, too easily, as a rule. Skimpole was the brainy member of the Shell, and a dreaded bore. No one at St. Jim's was anxious to meet him at any time, but on this particular occasion, when Tom Merry was inquiring for him right and left, he seemed to have vanished into thin air.

"Where can the ass have got to?" muttered Tom Merry. "Blessed if I'll look for him much longer! Hallo, Blake!"

Jack Blake of the Fourth Form was coming down the passage in white flannels, with his bat under his arm. He stopped as Tom Merry spoke.

"Hallo, kid!"

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"Have you seen Skimpole?"

"Skimpole! Who wants Skimpole?" asked Blake, unconsciously repeating Gore's question.

"I do."

"What on earth do you want Skimpole for?"

"I want to speak to the beast. Have you seen him?"

"Yes."

"Where is he?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"You said you had seen him!"

"So I did, but it was this morning as he was going into the Shell class-room."

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Tom Merry. "I can't stand it in this hot weather. Do you know where the ass is?"

"No, I don't!"

"I've been looking for him all through the House," growled Tom Merry. "He can't be found anywhere."

"Then I should say you were in luck!" grinned Blake.

"Skimpole is generally harder to get away from than to get hold of."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, I'm not looking for him for the pleasure of his conversation," he remarked. "It's a matter of business. I've promised him half a column in this week's number of the 'Weekly,' and it goes down to the printer's this afternoon, and Skimpole hasn't sent in his copy."

"Leave him out, then," was Blake's practical suggestion.

—OF ST. JIM'S AND ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY'S COUSIN ETHEL!

CHAMPION!

By
**MARTIN
CLIFFORD.**



The youthful Editor of "Tom Merry's Weekly" shook his head.

"Well, I promised him; and, besides, I should have to fill up the space, and I'm not looking for any more literary work just now—weather's too hot."

"Oh, I don't mind coming to the rescue in a case like that," said Blake generously. "I have some conundrums on hand that I was going to send in. I can look them out, and you can shove them in instead of Skimpole's article, if you like."

"Thank you very much, Blake; but I'm afraid the readers would get their backs up—"

"Eh?"

"I mean," said Tom Merry hastily—"I mean, there isn't a demand for conundrums just now, and—"

"There's always a demand for the right sort of conundrums, or anything else," said Blake. "Give your readers good quality and they're satisfied, and my conundrums are quite up to the mark. If that's all you're worrying about, you can set your mind at rest. I'll fetch them—"

"Thanks awfully, Blake, but I promised Skimpole that half-column—"

"If I were editor of a paper I'm blessed if I would go hunting round after contributions," said Blake. "I'd make the beggars keep up to time."

"Well, you see—"

"Yes, I see that the staff of the 'Weekly' made a great mistake in making you Editor," said Blake. "I don't see what you want to let Skimpole's piffle into the paper at all for. It's bound to be some rot about Determinism, or something—"

"Well, I told him that I shall cut out all the words of more than three syllables," said Tom Merry. "I gave him a fair warning, and if he puts 'em in he's only got himself to blame."

Blake grinned.

"Well, the article will be funny, at all events, on those lines. Of course, you'd do better to leave Skimpole out, as a lesson to him in punctuality, and you could have my conundrums."

"I think I'd better give Skimmy a chance—"

"Then go and look for him, or go and eat coke, or go to Jericho!" said Blake. And he tucked his cricket bat under his arm and walked off.

Tom Merry resumed his quest. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Blake's chum in Study No. 6, was the next junior he met, and he stopped to inquire of him. D'Arcy was looking

out of the Hall window at the sunny quadrangle, apparently in a thoughtful mood. The swell of the School House was dressed with more than usual elegance.

Tom Merry gave him a smack on the shoulder to attract his attention, and Arthur Augustus turned round with a startled exclamation.

"Bai Jove!"

"I say, Gussy—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I wish you would not greet me in such an extremely wuff way!" said D'Arcy. "You have quite put me into a fluttah!"

"Have you seen Skimpole?"

"No, I have not seen Skimpole, and I wish you would be a little more careful. It wumples my jacket to have it thumped in that wuffianly mannah."

"Wherefore this splendour?" asked Tom Merry, looking over the elegant swell of the School House attentively.

"That's a new waistcoat?"

"Yaas, wathah! It's a wathah nobbay thing, don't you think so, deah boy?"

"Oh, stunning! And that tie—"

"It's the latest thing in ties. I have given them instructions in Bond Street to send me down the latest things in ties."

"Anything on?"

"Nothin' in particulah," said D'Arcy. "A chap likes to look respectable. I suppose you know my Cousin Ethel is stayin' with Mrs. Holmes here?"

"Oh, I see!"

"Cousin Ethel saw me dwessed up in a widiculous fashion last week," said D'Arcy. "You wemembah we had been playing Wed Indians. I don't know whethah I can quite forgive Blake for placing me in such a widiculous posish. I have been wathah careful in my dwess since then."

"Yes, I see you have!"

"Do you think I look pwetty well, Tom Mewwy?"

"That's according to what you're trying to look like," said Tom Merry. "If you're setting up as a tailor's dummy, you'll do rippingly!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"But I say, I'm looking for Skimpole. Do you know what's become of him? There's half a column in the 'Weekly' for him to fill, and it's got to do down to the printer in Rlycombe."

"Oh, if that's all the twouble, you have come to the wight quartah," said D'Arcy. "I have nothin' particular to do just now, and I should be vewy pleased to wite you an article on fashionable waistcoats—"

"Thank you, Gussy; but—"

"I would do up a weally wippen' article, intwestin' and instructive—"

"I've promised Skimpole the space, you see. Otherwise, of course, I should jump at your offer—I don't think!"

And Tom Merry walked on.

D'Arcy screwed his eyeglass into his eye and looked after him.

"Weally, that last weamark of Tom Mewwy's savahed of wudeness," he murmured. "I should be stwongly tempted to give him a feahful thwashiu' if the weathah was not so beastlay warm!"

Tom Merry walked out of the School House. Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, nodded genially to him as he came down the steps.

"Not at cricket, Merry?" he remarked.

"I'm doing up the copy for the mag," explained Tom Merry. "It's got to go down to the printer's this afternoon, or we shan't get it in time. The fellows rag a chap so when the number's late, and if a week's number is missed, I never hear the end of it."

Kildare laughed.

"Have you seen Skimpole?" asked Tom Merry. "I've got all the copy in, except his beastly article."

"Yes, I saw him in the Close about half an hour ago."

"Thank you, Kildare!"

Tom Merry hurried on, and nearly ran into Figgins & Co. of the New House—the rival House at St. Jim's.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn stopped, and stared at the hero of the Shell.

"Whither bound in such a hurry?" asked Figgins. "Is there a fire, or a feed, or is a prefect after you to make you put on a clean collar?"

"Have you seen Skimpole?"

"Skimpole? Yes. Who wants Skimpole?"

"I do. I want his copy for the 'Weekly.' It's got to go off this afternoon."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Figgins. "I'll do you an article on cricket."

"Don't trouble. The cricket article is written, and I've written it."

"I could do you a sonnet, if you like," said Fatty Wynn. "I've often thought I could write a really poetical sonnet on the subject of steak-and-kidney pies."

"You can keep your steak-and-kidney pie sonnets!"

"I'll do you a mathematical article, if you like," said Kerr. "It would give the paper a scientific tone."

"And the readers a headache."

"I've thought of the first line," said Fatty Wynn. "Oh, pie so brown in dish so white! What do you think of that, Tom Merry?"

"Rotten!" said Tom Merry, with editorial frankness.

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"Have you seen Skimpole?"

"Yes," said Figgins. "He was mooning along under the trees a while back with a book under his arm. He's gone into some nice quiet corner to have a good read on the subject of Determinism, or something equally thrilling."

Kerr shook his head.

"Wrong, Figgy. I saw the book he had. It was a volume of Tennyson's poetry."

"My only hat!" said Tom Merry. "Skimpole has taken up Determinism, and then he started as an amateur detective. Is he going in for poetry next?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Figgins. "Skimpole as a poet would be great. Is it a poem he is writing you for the mag, Merry?"

"No. I understand that it was an article on Determinism," said Tom Merry. "I'd rather have a poem, or something, but I didn't like to keep on refusing Skimpole. He's a decent sort of ass. Where did you see him last?"

"He went mooning along past the chapel, so I dare say you'll find him there," said Figgins.

"Thanks, Figgy!"

And the editor of "Tom Merry's Weekly" hurried on into the beech-shaded spot behind the chapel, and there he found Skimpole, the brainy man of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 2.

Something New From Skimpole!

SKIMPOLE was sitting on one of the old benches by the chapel rails, under the shade of a big beech-tree. He had been reading, but his book lay open on his knees, and Skimpole was staring straight before him.

Tom Merry followed the direction of his glance, but there

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was nothing in direct view but an ivy-clad wall. He walked up to the Determinist of St. Jim's. It was clear that Skimpole was in a deep reverie, and did not observe his approach.

"Skimpole!"

The freak of the Shell made no reply, and did not even turn his head. Tom Merry put a hand upon his shoulder and shook him.

Skimpole started as if out of a dream.

"In the spring a livelier iris changes on the burnished dove," he murmured.

Tom Merry stared.

"Eh—what's that?"

"In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love," murmured Skimpole.

Tom Merry glanced at the book Skimpole had been reading.

It was a volume of Tennyson, and it was open at "Locksley Hall." Skimpole was evidently dreaming, or mooning, as Figgins elegantly termed it, over those beautiful lines.

Tom Merry shook him again.

"Hallo, Skimpole!"

"Hallo!" said Skimpole. "Who's that? Tom Merry!"

"What are you shaking me for?"

"To wake you up."

"I wasn't asleep."

"What are you mooning about for, then?"

Skimpole blinked indignantly at the hero of the Shell. He evidently did not like to hear his poetic reveries described as mooning.

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"I'm looking at you, ass! What are you mooning about?"

"I was sunk in a poetic reverie when your approach so rudely disturbed me," said Skimpole.

"Oh, were you?" grunted Tom. "What about the copy for 'Tom Merry's Weekly'?"

"The what?"

"The copy for the 'Weekly'!" bawled Tom Merry.

"Dear me! I had quite forgotten it!"

Tom Merry simply glared.

"You had forgotten that I promised you half a column in the 'Weekly'!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, indeed!" said Skimpole.

"You've been worrying me for weeks to let you shove a rotten article into the paper, and I've given way at last, and now you keep me waiting for the copy, and coolly tell me you've forgotten all about it," said Tom Merry.

"Yes. Let me see. What was the article to be about?" said Skimpole, rubbing his bony, bumpy forehead.

"Determinism, I suppose."

"Ah, yes, Determinism! Do you know, Tom Merry, I'm beginning to think that I have devoted too much time to that subject."

"I could have told you that long ago. With your intellect you ought to be doing the two-times-three-are-two," said Tom Merry.

"Really, Merry—"

"I'm sorry I took the trouble of looking you out. I've had all sorts of offers for that half-column."

"Oh, don't be offended, Merry! It was very kind of you to give me some space in the 'Weekly,' and I am much obliged."

"Well," said Tom Merry, somewhat mollified, "where's your copy?"

"Upon the whole, Merry, I do not think I shall write an article on Determinism after all. The arrangement about your taking out all the words of more than three syllables would be bound to muck up the article, anyway."

"You can't have it on any other terms," said the editor of "Tom Merry's Weekly," tersely.

"I suppose you would be just as pleased if I did something else instead?"

"Oh, yes! More pleased, as a matter of fact."

"Suppose I write a poem?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"We're crowded out with poetry," he said. "There's that poetic serial of Blake's dragging its weary length through number after number. Blake and Digby have both sent in poetry this time, and Fatty Wynn wants to put in an ode to a steak pie, or something of the sort, and I've declined it."

"I could do a really ripping poem," said Skimpole. "I feel in a most poetic mood. I have been reading a lot of poetry lately."

"And has it got into your head?" said Tom Merry unsympathetically.

"Really, Merry, I wish you would be serious. Have you

never in the spring-time, for instance, felt a sort of vague feeling—a sort of something or other—”

“Can’t say that I have.”

“A yearning,” said Skimpole—“a yearning, and a sort of—a sort of something, you know—”

“A sort of what?”

“A yearning,” said Skimpole. “A yearning to fly away on the wings of a dove, so to speak, from the petty cares of this humdrum world—a longing for the unknown and the illimitable.”

Tom Merry looked at him curiously.

“Have you been feeling like that?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“At night, or in the daytime?”

“Both,” said Skimpole. “At night, when the mantle of

no further converse with you,” said Skimpole. “You are gross—exceedingly gross! You do not understand the soarings and outpourings of a poetical soul—” He broke off suddenly, and took out his notebook. “Soarings rhymes with outpourings, now I think of it, and I may as well put it down.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“And shall I sing the soul’s outpourings,
The wild, untrammelled fancies soarings.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“I can expect nothing but laughter from a fellow who thinks of nothing but cricket on a dreamy, poetical afternoon like this,” said Skimpole. “On such a day my whole



Arthur Augustus broke into a run and went out of the gateway at St. Jim's at a good speed. Crash! "Whoop!" There was a yell, and Arthur Augustus reeled back as he collided with his chum Jack Blake, who was running in. "Bai Jove!" he gasped.

darkness has enwrapped the earth, and the birds and beasts have retired to their nests—”

“Beasts don't live in nests.”

“I am speaking in a poetical sense. At night, when bird and beast are hushed in repose, and only the night winds wake the faint echoes of the forest—”

“What forest?”

“Any forest. At such times I have felt this indescribable feeling! I am describing to you—”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“I really fail to see why you should receive the outpourings of a heart with ribald laughter, Tom Merry.”

“Well, it struck me as comical that you should describe the indescribable,” said Tom Merry. “But I suppose that is poetic licence. You say you felt like this at night?”

“Yes; gazing on the myriad stars spangling the deep vault of the firmament—”

“What had you been eating for supper?”

“Really, Tom Merry—”

“It must have been indigestion,” said Tom Merry gravely. “I can't imagine anything else that could make a fellow feel like that. Perhaps you ought to see a doctor?”

“If you are going to turn the matter into jest I shall have

being is attuned to Nature. My soul rises above its sordid earthly surroundings, far above the grind of class-rooms and dull Latin exercises, and soars in the empyrean—”

“In the what?”

“The empyrean. My soul soars in the empyrean, and my mind wanders—”

“Ha, ha, ha! I've noticed that!”

“And shall I gaze upon her face,
This lovely maid of noble race?”

“Eh?”

“Or will the beauteous maid remain,
The vision of a poet's brain?”

“Did you make up that stuff?”

“Yes, I have written hundreds of lines like that,” said Skimpole. “I am idealising the ideal—”

“You are whatting the what?”

“Idealising the ideal. If those words are above your comprehension, I am sorry. It is a continual trouble to me

to bring my soaring mind down to the level of the dull intellects among which I live. And shall I see the beautiful maid? Oh, why, why is that joy delayed?"

"What beautiful maid are you speaking of?"

"The realisation of the ideal."

"The what?"

"Oh, pray go!" said Skimpole, with a wave of the hand. "You can never understand the mysterious workings of a poet's soul—the romantic outpourings of a poet's heart. How should you?"

"Am I to have your copy of the 'Weekly,' or am I not?"

"Certainly! I will look over my poetry, and put together a few hundred lines—"

"A dozen will be quite enough."

"It would be impossible to express the fervid soarings and outpourings of my breast in the space of a dozen lines."

"Then you will have to express the soarings without the outpourings, or else the outpourings without the soarings," said Tom Merry. "Anyway, you will have to shove it all into a dozen lines. And if I don't have the stuff within an hour it can't go in. I'd rather put in Blake's conundrums than have the number late."

And Tom Merry walked off.

"Ha!" murmured Skimpole. "They can never understand me. It is impossible. Why was I born superior in intellect to all my contemporaries? It is not a comfort to me. What is this feeling that comes over me—this vague vision of floating beauty, like clouds in a summer sky, that wraps my mind and entrails my vision in dreamy contemplation of the ineffable? Is it merely the spirit of the poet that moves me? Am I in love? Ah, I am perhaps in love with the ideal! What I feel—Good! Feel rhymes with ideal. I must make a note of that!"

CHAPTER 3.

Skimpole's Ideal!

"FOUND the ass?"

Monty Lowther asked that question, as Tom Merry came into the School House. Lowther and Manners had finished their work upon the number of the "Weekly," and came down from the study to look for their chum.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Yes."

"Is his article ready?"

"No; he's not going to write one."

Manners and Lowther stared.

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Monty Lowther. "He has been bothering us almost ever since the paper started to put in one of his rotten Deterministic articles."

"And now—" said Manners.

"Now, he's got new ideas in his head!" chuckled Tom Merry. "He's taken up poetry. We never know what to expect from Skimmy, but I confess I should never have dreamed of Skimpole as a poet."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's mooning about a great deal, as D'Arcy did, when he was in love," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Perhaps he is in love," suggested Monty Lowther.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I shouldn't be surprised. He was gassing a lot of piffle about the ideal and something or other. He says he feels a sort of indescribable something comes over him when he's looking at the stars, or something of the sort."

"That's a sure sign," said Lowther eagerly, "he must be in love. My only hat! I can see some fun in this!"

"Yes, rather!" agreed Manners. "We must know who it is, too. My aunt! Fancy Skimpole in love! I can imagine him making tender speeches in words of five or six syllables."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You know how a chap gets when he's in love," said Lowther sagely. "He doesn't care particularly what girl it is, so long as he has someone to idealise, someone to listen to him patiently while he talks about himself and his feelings, and all that. That's just Skimpole's mark. He was always a funny merchant; but if he's in love he'll be a gold mine to us for fun."

"Hallo! What's all that cackling about?" asked Blake, coming in, red and warm, from the cricket field. "Anything on?"

"Yes; Skimpole's in love."

"Eh—what?"

"Well, it looks like it," said Tom Merry.

Blake roared.

"Bai Jove, Blake, deah boy! What's the joke, you know?" drawled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, coming up with Digby and Herries.

"Skimpole's in love."

"Bai Jove! Ha, ha, ha! I wegard that as wathah funnah, you know."

"What's the joke?" asked a dozen voices, as the laughter of the group of juniors attracted fellows from all sides.

"Skimpole's in love."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here he comes!" exclaimed Mellish of the Fourth, who was looking out of the door into the sunny quadrangle.

There was a rush of the juniors to the door to see the object of their interest.

Skimpole was coming towards the School House, with a book under his arm and a far-away look upon his face.

"My hat!" gasped Gore. "Get back, and let him come in, and we'll chip him and make him tell us all about it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors crowded back.

Skimpole came up to the School House steps, all unconscious of the reception waiting for him just inside.

He walked into the Hall and stopped in surprise at the sight of the crowd of juniors.

"Hallo!" said Gore. "Who is it, Skimmy?"

"I do not think I quite understand you, Gore," said Skimpole, blinking through his spectacles. "Who is whom?"

"She!"

"Is it Mary, the housemaid?" asked Mellish.

"Or the girl in the draper's shop in Rylcombe?" chuckled Lowther. "If it is, you had better look out for D'Arcy—"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

Skimpole blinked in amazement at the grinning juniors.

"I really do not understand you!" he exclaimed.

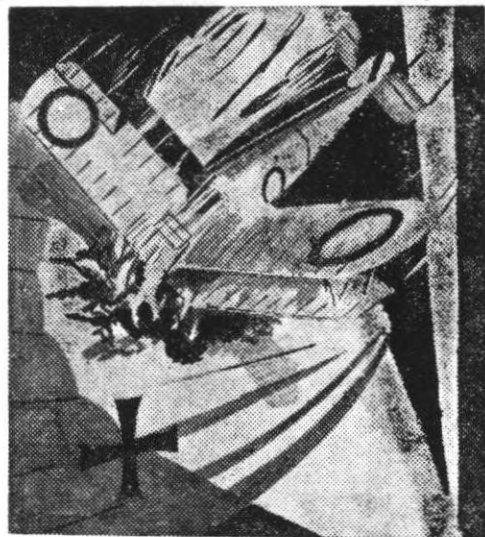
"What is her name?" asked Lowther.

"Whose?"

"Hers!"

"Really, Lowther, you are labouring under an error. There is no her—that is to say, there is no she—I mean no girl in the case."

"Rats!"



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"Really——"
 "Yes, rats!" said Gore. "We know all about it, Skimpole, and now we want to know who it is. Is your passion reciprocated? If so, I suppose it's a blind girl."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "You are quite mistaken," said Skimpole loftily. "I suppose a fellow can adore the ineffability of the inexplicable without being in love."

"The what—of the what?"
 "Did you look those words out in the dictionary?"
 "I did not look those words out in the dictionary," said Skimpole. "If you do not know what they mean, I will explain them to you."

"Well, what do they mean?" asked Tom Merry.
 "Why, they mean—that is to say—the meaning is——"
 "Bosh!" said Lowther.

"No, Lowther, the meaning is not bosh. But I cannot expect your common intellect to understand the thoughts that pass through a brain like mine, and so it really would be useless to explain."

Skimpole passed on, followed by a yell of laughter. In spite of the freak of the Shell's explanation, the juniors were fully convinced that Skimpole was in love, and they were all eager to discover whom the subject of his affections might be.

Skimpole went into his study and closed the door.
 "How their rude mirth breaks in upon the repose of a truly poetic mind," he murmured. "Where shall I find peace and repose? Good! 'Find' rhymes with 'mind'—I must make a note of that! Peace and repose where shall I find, this noise doth vex the poet's mind!"

Skimpole looked out of the window. He could see the cricket field from the study window, but the sight of that did not appeal to him. He gazed at the sky, and then at the thick foliage of the old elms.

"In the spring, a livelier iris changes on the burnished dove," he murmured. "In the spring, a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love."

Skimpole heaved a deep sigh.
 An ideal was an ideal; but, after all, there was something rather cold and lifeless about merely an ideal. Skimpole sighed again. A graceful figure was crossing the quadrangle towards the Head's house, from the direction of the gates.

Skimpole gave a start.
 He had seen that graceful, girlish form before, and he knew that it was Cousin Ethel—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's cousin, who was staying with Mrs. Holmes. But now Skimpole more particularly noted Cousin Ethel. He was too short-sighted to be well acquainted with her features, but he knew that she was considered very pretty. Had he found the realisation of the ideal at last?

Skimpole sighed again.
 The girl, all unconscious of the commotion excited in the junior's breast, passed on out of sight, and Skimpole gazed after her for about a quarter of an hour after she had disappeared. Gore came into the study and interrupted his reverie, or he might have stood there for hours. Gore shared that study with Skimpole.

"Hallo!" grinned Gore. "Still mooning?"
 "Eh?" said Skimpole, starting out of his daydreams.
 "What is she like?" chuckled Gore.
 "Like? She has golden hair," said Skimpole dreamily, "and I think her eyes are blue—but I am not sure."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Gore, you offend me with your ribald laughter."
 "You had the cheek to say you weren't in love, and now you say she has golden eyes and blue hair."
 "Golden hair and blue eyes."
 "Yes. And what's her name?"

"I am not likely to take so ribald a person as you, Gore, into my most sacred confidence," said Skimpole. "I refuse to impart to you any further information."

And Skimpole left the study, leaving Gore cackling like a lunatic.

CHAPTER 4.

D'Arcy Receives Some Kind Offers!

"D'ARCY!"
 It was Skimpole's voice at the door, but Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did not even look round.

The swell of the School House was standing before the tall glass which had been rigged up in Study No. 6 at his own expense carefully surveying his reflection through the gold-rimmed monocle that he was screwing into his right eye.

D'Arcy was looking really nice.
 He had clad himself in white flannels, and donned a Panama hat, and now seemed to be undecided about the exact tilt he should give to the brim.

"D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, deah boy?" said D'Arcy, without looking round.
 "Don't bothah me now."

"I say, D'Arcy——"
 "Pway don't intewwupt me, deah boy. I am solvin' a most important pwblem, and time is gettin' short."

"I wanted to speak——"
 "You generally do, Skimpole. I don't think I've evah seen you when you didn't want to speak, deah boy. But pway don't speak now. I am dwessin' for a wathah important occasion, and I weally cannot be intewwupted."

"But——"
 "I am not quite sure whethah to turn the bwim up or to have it down ovah my face," said D'Arcy reflectively. "I asked Blake, and weceived a wibald weply. He said the more I covahed up my taze the nichah it would be. Perwaps, howevah, I had bettah turn it down. It looks more finished."

"I say——"
 "What do you think yourself?" asked D'Arcy, turning round and facing Skimpole, looking a really very elegant and handsome figure. "What is your twue and candid opinion, Skimpole? Shall I turn the bwim up or down?"

"Really——"
 "I don't want you to flatah me, or to weply without thinkin'. Which, upon calm weflection, would you considah the best?"

"Really, I haven't thought about it——"
 "Then think about it now, deah boy."

"I was thinkin'——"
 "It's a most important mattah," said D'Arcy. "I am takin' my Cousin Ethel on the wivah this aftahnoon."

Skimpole stared.
 "You are taking Cousin Ethel on the river?"
 "Yaas, wathah!"

"Would you like me to steer for you, D'Arcy?"
 D'Arcy turned his monocle upon Skimpole with a freezing glare.

"Would I like you to steer for me?" he repeated. "Did I understand you to ask if I would like you to steer for me when I am takin' Cousin Ethel on the wivah?"

"Yes, certainly!"
 "Cousin Ethel will steer, deah boy, and I can assuah you I don't want any stwange dogs in the kennel, to use a wathah coarse expression I have picked up fwom Blake. No, Skimpole, thank you all the same, but I don't want you to steer for me."

"I should like to come."
 "I dare say you would. So would a good many othah wottahs, I dare say. When it gets out that I am goin' to take Cousin Ethel on the wivah, I expect I shall weceive a good many offahs fwom wawious watthahs."

"I can steer jolly well——"
 "Wats!"
 "And while floating down the calm of the river," said Skimpole, falling into his dreamy, poetic mood—"while floating on calm waters, where myriad stars spangle in blue vaults——"

"We are goin' out in the daylight, ass!"
 "I mean when the glorious sun is pouring its vivifying rays from the zenith."

"If you knew anythin' about astwonomy, Skimpole, you would know that the sun passes the zenith long before four o'clock in the aftahnoon."

"I was speaking poetically."
 "Wot! You haven't answahed my question yet, and I must be off soon. Do you think I look more wippin' with the bwim of the Panama hat turned up, or with the bwim turned down?"

"It looks all right either way, as far as I can see," said Skimpole. "I can't see that it matters much, anyway."

D'Arcy glared.
 "I wergad it as a most important mattah," he exclaimed. "But, of course, I can't expect an ass like you to undahstand mattahs of elegant dwess."

"Really, D'Arcy——"
 "Oh, don't bothah, deah boy! I think, upon the whole I will turn the bwim up. Yaas, wathah! The effect is weally good" murmured D'Arcy, surveying it in the glass. "I certainly think this get-up is a success." And he turned to the door.

"I say, if you'd like me to steer for you——" said Skimpole.

"I would not like you to steer for me, Skimpole."
 "But——"
 "Oh, pway twavel along, and don't wowwy!"

And Skimpole disconsolately travelled along.
 As he went down the passage, apparently revolving some matter in his mind from the thoughtful wrinkles on his

enormous forehead, Blake came upstairs, and met D'Arcy at the door of the study.

Jack Blake glanced at the elegant swell of the School House, and assumed an expression of great admiration.

"I say, that's ripping, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus looked pleased.

"Do you weally think so, Blake?"

"Yes, rather! The Panama hat suits your style of beauty, too. A fellow with your tall and elegant figure always looks ripping in a Panama."

"Oh, weally, Blake, you flattah me, though, of course, what you say is quite cowwect."

"You're going on the river, I hear, with Cousin Ethel?"

"That's wight."

"You'll find it a bit of a fag to row in this hot weather," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! But the pleasuah is worth the beastlay work, you know."

"Well, I don't like to think of you fagging yourself out," said Blake. "I don't mind if I come and row for you, D'Arcy."

"But I do," said D'Arcy grimly. "I am not takin' anybody along this time, thank you!"

"I thought I could save you the fag."

"Thank you vewy much, Blake, but I am quite pwepared for it."

"I shouldn't mind rowing a bit."

"Don't twouble."

"Look here, Gussy, I'd like to come."

"I dare say you would."

"You young rotter! You think you are going to keep Cousin Ethel all to yourself this afternoon, don't you?" growled Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'll row or steer, just as you like, Gussy."

"Wats!"

"You—you—you—"

"Oh, pway don't be wude, Blake! I should have to overlook it, as it is too hot to thwash you. I was goin' to consult you about this hat again. Do you weally think it looks bettah with the bwim turned up or down?"

"It doesn't look much, anyway, on a chivvy like yours," said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"The way you'd look best would be with it pinned across your face."

"I wefuse to listen to these wude wemarks," said D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity.

And he walked towards the stairs, leaving Blake chuckling.

Digby and Herries were on the stairs. They seemed to be waiting there for Arthur Augustus to come down, for they tackled him at once.

"By Jove, you do look ripping!" said Digby.

"Do I weally, Dig?"

"Yes, I should say so. Doesn't he, Herries?"

"Rather!" said Herries. "A regular scorcher. I say, Gussy—"

"Yaas, deah boy?"

"Would you like me to steer for you?"

"We were thinking we'd come and do the rowing, so that you could have a really good time," explained Digby.

D'Arcy chuckled.

"What are you chuckling about, you image?"

"Oh, nothin', deah boy; but I don't want any assistance, thank you! I am quite able to look aftah Cousin Ethel alone."

"But it will be a fag to you."

"I weally don't mind."

"You ought to take great care of your health, Gussy."

"My health is all wight, Dig. I must be off."

"You must be," growled Dig—"off your silly rocker!"

D'Arcy chuckled, and went out into the sunny quadrangle.

The Terrible Three were chatting in the shade of the elms, and they looked up at once at the sight of the resplendent swell of the School House.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Manners. "Wherefore this thushness?"

"My hat, doesn't he look gorgeous?" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "The sight of him is enough to make a housemaid's heart wobble."

"This is really complimentary of you, Gussy," said Tom Merry, "to dress yourself up like this just to come out and have a chat with us."

Lowther and Manners giggled. D'Arcy turned his monocle from one to the other of the Terrible Three.

"Weally, you are labouwin' undah a gweat mistake, Tom Mewwy," he replied. "I haven't dwessed myself like this to come and chat with you at all."

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"Then what's in the wind?"

"I am goin' to take Cousin Ethel on the wivah."

The Terrible Three looked keenly interested at once. Cousin Ethel was as popular with the chums of the Shell as in Study No. 6.

"Good!" exclaimed Tom Merry heartily. "And you want us to come with you? Very good!"

"Yes, rather!" said Lowther. "I don't mind taking an oar."

"I'll steer with pleasure," said Manners.

D'Arcy smiled.

"I don't think you'll steer my boat," he replied. "I have weceived enough offahs already. Thank you vewy much, but I don't want any help!"

"Look here," said Tom Merry, "you can't be allowed to take Cousin Ethel out and drown her, you know."

"Certainly not!" said Manners. "You know you're not safe on the water, Gussy."

"From a sense of duty alone, we shall have to come with you," Lowther remarked. "It's impossible for us to allow a lady to run such fearful risks."

"Wats!"

"Eh?"

"Wats!" repeated D'Arcy. "I wefuse to take any boundahs with me. That ass Skimpole, actually offered to come and steer, and Blake and Herries and Dig all want to come. I should want a Noah's Ark instead of a skiff to take ewevybody who wants to bore me this aftahnoon."

"Well, I can't blame you for not taking Skimpole, or those Fourth Form kids," said Lowther. "With us, it's different. We—"

"Oh, wats!" said D'Arcy. "I'm not takin' anybody. I should like to consult you fellows about one thing."

"Oh, go on!"

"Would you wecomend me to weah the bwim of this hat turned up or turned down?"

The Terrible Three looked at one another in disgust.

"You utter ass!" said Lowther. "Wear it how you like. Tie it round your face with a bit of string, and cover up your chivvy."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"If you'd like me to steer—"

"Wats!" And Arthur Augustus walked on loftily towards the Head's house, where he expected to find Cousin Ethel.

The Terrible Three looked after him.

"Young rotter!" said Monty Lowther. "I wish Ethel was my cousin instead of his. I'd show him!"

Arthur Augustus knocked at the Head's door. He was admitted, and he asked to see Miss Cleveland.

"Miss Cleveland is not at home, sir," said the maid-servant, with the faintest glimmering of a smile upon her face.

D'Arcy started. That had not occurred in his mind. He had been thinking only of the appearance he would make on the river.

"Not at home!" he ejaculated. "Are you sure?"

"Certainly, sir; she has gone on the river with Master Figgins."

D'Arcy's eyeglass dropped from his eye with the shock.

"She has gone on the wivah with Figgins?" he murmured dazedly.

"Yes, sir."

"Thank you," said D'Arcy. "Thank you vewy much!"

And he drifted out of the house, still looking dazed.

CHAPTER 5.

Figgins Has Bad Luck!

"DEAR me! It is Figgins and Miss Ethel!"

Skimpole was seated on the bank of the river, with a big book on his knees, when the splash of an oar made him look up.

The amateur poet had walked down the river for a good distance from St. Jim's, to be alone with his poetic thoughts. The spot was a very solitary one, and a couple of miles from the school by water, though there was a short cut through the woods across country. The Rhyl wound on a serpentine course through the fair countryside.

"Figgins!" repeated Skimpole, blinking through his spectacles. "I certainly understood D'Arcy to say that he was taking Cousin Ethel on the river this afternoon."

It was certainly Figgins.

The long limbed chief of the New House juniors was pulling the boat downstream with a pair of oars, looking very red and ruddy in his flannels, and Cousin Ethel sat on the cushions in the stern, steering, with a sunshade over her head. It was a pretty picture.

Figgins was working hard in the sun, but Figgins was athletic, and hard work was nothing to him. He was

evidently enjoying himself, and there was a pleased smile upon the face of Cousin Ethel.

Skimpole blinked at them from the bank.

"Dear me, how very sweet Miss Ethel looks! I think I could write a poem on the subject of golden eyes and blue hair—I mean, golden hair and blue eyes. I think I will request permission to enter the boat. It seems to be coming ashore. I am sure that Miss Ethel would be pleased with my conversation after the dullness of Figgins. He is a fellow with absolutely no ideas at all. He can only talk about cricket and athletics, and has never even heard of the higher philosophy."

The boat was bumping into the reeds.

"This is a jolly spot for landing," said Figgins. "Cool and shady under the trees, Cousin Ethel."

"Did you speak, Figgins?"

"It's exactly as you like," said Figgins. "We'll get ashore here. If he talks too much I'll brain him with the boathook!"

Skimpole laid down his book and rose to his feet. He raised his straw hat to Miss Cleveland.

"Here, lend a hand!" bawled Figgins. "Can't you help a chap to get a boat in?"

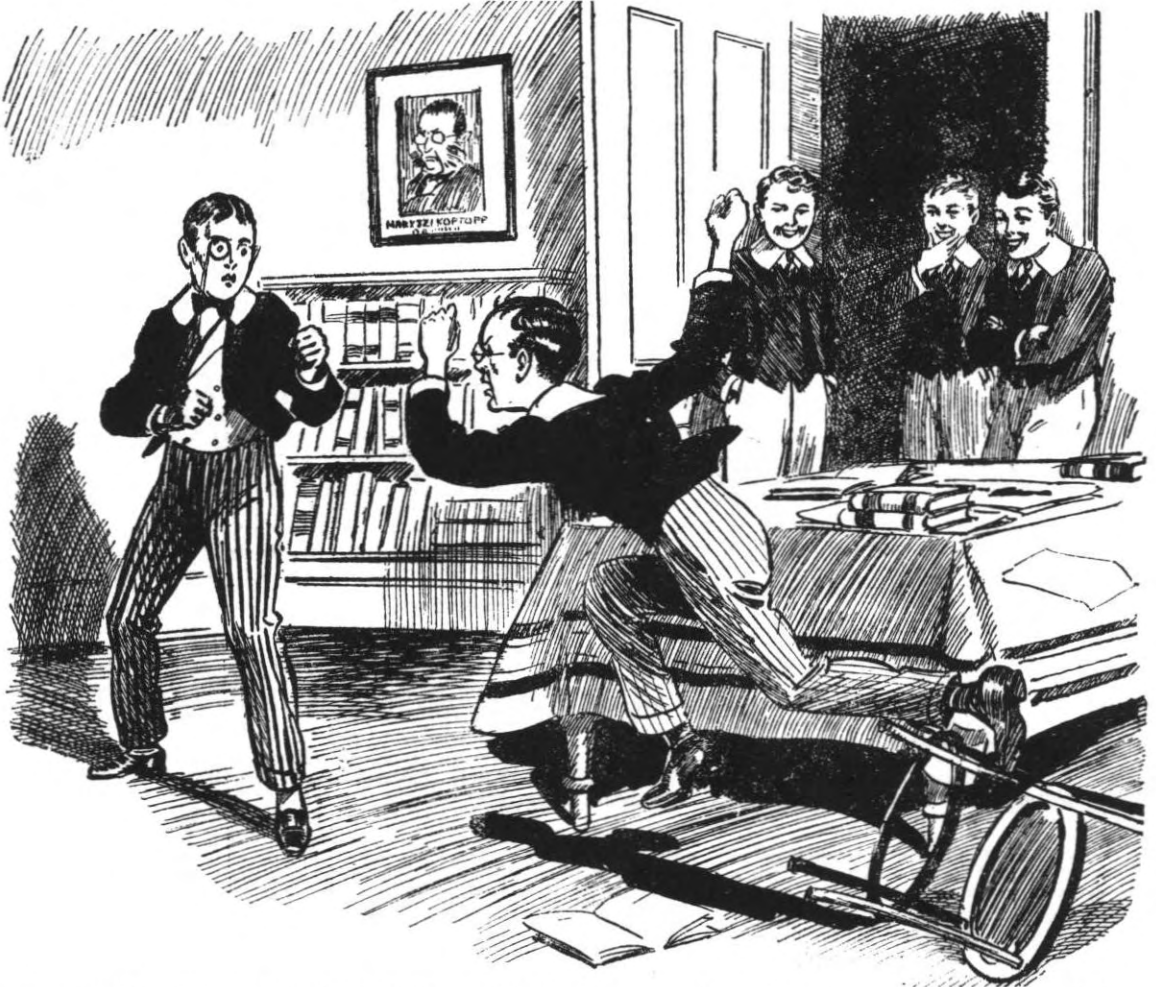
"Yes, certainly!" said Skimpole. "I shall be most pleased to lend a hand, Figgins. What can I do?"

"You can help, duffer, instead of blinking there like an owl!"

"I will do my best!"

"Oh rats!"

Skimpole grasped the bows of the skiff, and pulled her



"Goth! Vandal! Hun!" hooted Skimpole, and he jumped up and went for D'Arcy like a thunderbolt. "You silly duffah!" retorted D'Arcy, as he put up his fists. "I shall be obliged to give you a seven thwashin'!"

Cousin Ethel smiled brightly.

"It is very pleasant, Figgins. How lonely it seems!"

"Yes; it's a nice, solitary spot, and no danger of any of the noisy fellows from St. Jim's bumping in here."

"I think I can see someone on the bank," said Miss Cleveland, as Figgins reached for a straggling willow root with his boathook.

"Can you?" said Figgins. "By Jove, it's Skimpole! We'll go farther on."

"Not at all," said Miss Ethel. "I should love to land here."

"But that chap will collar us at once," said Figgins anxiously.

"Never mind!"

"He's a fearful bore! He talks Determinism and Schopenhauerism and all sorts of isms—"

Cousin Ethel laughed.

"I do not mind."

"But I do!" murmured Figgins.

on through the clinging reeds and trailing willows. The jerk he gave was a sudden one, and Figgins, who was standing up, lost his balance and sat down—over the side!

He sat in the water with a mighty splash—and disappeared.

Cousin Ethel started up, with an exclamation.

Skimpole rubbed his bumpy forehead.

"Dear me, Figgins appears to have fallen into the water!" he murmured. "I wonder why he fell in the water?"

Figgins came up in a second. His red and wrathful face appeared from the surface of the river, and he scrambled through the reeds to the shore.

"You—you utter idiot!" he panted.

Skimpole stared.

"Are you referring to me, Figgins?"

"Yes, you lunatic!"

"I fail to see the justice of blaming me for your own clumsiness," said Skimpole. "You fell into the water—"

"You jerked me over!"

"You asked me to help you!"

"You—you— Oh, if we were alone here I'd drown you!" muttered Figgins. "You ought to be drowned, or boiled, or something, in the interests of humanity."

He controlled himself with an effort, and turned towards Cousin Ethel with the sweetest smile he could contrive. The girl was looking very concerned.

"You must be soaked, Figgins!" she exclaimed.

Figgins grinned.

"Well, yes," he replied; "it's rather wet in the water, you know. It was all that duffer's fault, jerking me over. Let me help you ashore."

Miss Cleveland landed. Figgins wrung some of the water out of his clothes. His afternoon's excursion was "mucked up" with a vengeance. His nice white flannels were hanging round his long limbs in limp wetness.

"You will catch your death of cold, Figgins," said Cousin Ethel, with real concern.

"Oh, I'm all right!" said Figgins.

Miss Cleveland smiled.

"You cannot remain here like that, Figgins."

"But—"

"You would catch pneumonia or rheumatic fever."

"I don't mind."

"But I do, Figgins. You must return to the school at once and change your things."

"Oh, really—"

"There is a short cut through the woods," said Skimpole. "If Figgins runs all the way, he can get to St. Jim's in a quarter of an hour."

"I could do it in ten minutes, sprinting," said Figgins disdainfully.

"Then that would be much quicker than pulling back in the boat up-stream," said Miss Cleveland.

"But—"

"You must go, Figgins."

"But you—"

"I will wait here till you return and look after the boat,

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and then you can pull me back to the school—if you wish—"

"If I wish!" said Figgins reproachfully.

Cousin Ethel laughed.

"Well, I will wait for you. Skimpole will stay with me to keep me from being lonely, I am sure."

"I should esteem it an honour, and a pleasure," said Skimpole, blinking; "so much so, that I cannot really regard Figgins' clumsiness as an unfortunate occurrence. I should be very pleased to pull you back to St. Jim's in the boat, Miss Cleveland, if you wish."

"Not at all."

"For goodness' sake don't venture on the water with Skimpole!" said Figgins anxiously. "He's about as safe as a dangerous maniac in a boat."

"Really, Figgins—"

"I'll buzz off, as you think it best, Cousin Ethel. I'll be back under the half-hour."

"Very good!"

"Let me rig up the cushions under the trees first."

"Oh, no! I am afraid you will catch cold."

"I will look after Miss Ethel's comfort, Figgins," blinked Skimpole. "You may safely leave her in my charge."

"You—you—there isn't a word for you, Skimpole!"

"Do hurry, Figgins! I am so afraid for you!"

"I'll go at once, then."

"Yes, please do! And come back as soon as you can."

"You may rely on that," said Figgins.

"Hurry, then!"

And Figgins unwillingly plunged into the wood and disappeared. He sprinted towards the school along the shady footpath as he had seldom sprinted before.

CHAPTER 3.

Skimpole's Chance!

SKIMPOLE was beaming. The accident to Figgins had been brought about by his clumsiness; but if he had planned it, it could not have turned out more satisfactory for him.

He war with Miss Ethel, the charming girl upon whom he

had lately bestowed the treasures of his idealistic adoration. Fortune had indeed favoured him!

Figgins could not possibly be back under the half-hour, if by then.

There was plenty of time for Skimpole to make his way in Cousin Ethel's estimation.

Skimpole picked up his book.

"Are you interested in Schopenhauer, Miss Cleveland?" he asked.

Miss Cleveland made a grimace.

"Immensely," she replied. "But just at the present moment I am more interested in a shelter from the sun."

"This tree is most shady."

"It is very pleasant here, if I have the cushions from the boat."

"Oh, pray excuse me!" said the absent-minded Skimpole.

He brought the cushions from the boat and arranged them for Miss Cleveland. Then he took up the book again.

"My sunshade," said Cousin Ethel.

"Oh, yes; of course!"

The sunshade was opened and set up. Cousin Ethel sat on the cushions and leaned back against the mossy trunk of the tree. A very pretty picture she made when she sat there, and she probably knew it. Skimpole blinked through his spectacles with delight. He was near enough now to the object of his adoration to see that Cousin Ethel was indeed very pretty.

"I am reading this volume for the first time," said Skimpole. "I wish my German were a little better. I must study more, as Schopenhauer is difficult to read in the original with an inadequate knowledge of the language."

The girl smiled.

"I should imagine so."

"You are probably acquainted with this volume," said Skimpole. "Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung?"

"Is it a pretty story?" asked Cousin Ethel.

Skimpole nearly collapsed. He closed the book, laid it on the grass, and sat on it. It was pretty clear that Schopenhauer was quite useless as a topic for discussion with Cousin Ethel.

"N-n-no," said Skimpole. "And, really, upon a really glorious summer afternoon like this, more suitable subjects can be found than pessimistic philosophy."

"I should think so," assented Cousin Ethel.

"In the spring," said Skimpole, "a livelier iris changes on the burnished dove."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, and in the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love."

"Does it really?"

"The poet's soul soars out into the blue depths of the empyrean," said Skimpole. "It's there it seeks its mate—the realisation of the ideal. Have you ever had an ideal, Miss Ethel?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Have you ever encountered the realisation of the ideal? Through the vague cloudiness of the poetic vision, has there ever beamed upon you the—the—"

"No, I think not," said Cousin Ethel gravely.

"That moment has come to me," said Skimpole. "The vague ideal has taken actual shape, and my adoration is no longer confined to the airy ineffable—"

"The what?"

"The airy ineffable—"

"Dear me!"

"The airy ineffable. I have beheld a being far removed from common mortals—one raised far above common want and failings—one who seems to float like the—the fleecy clouds above the commonplace earth—"

"How interesting!" said Cousin Ethel. "Would you mind getting the tea-basket out of the boat, Skimpole?"

Skimpole fell from the skies, as it were, and blinked.

"The—the what, Miss Ethel?"

"The tea-basket."

"The tea-basket?"

"Yes; I am hungry."

"You—you are hungry?"

"Yes," said Cousin Ethel calmly. "Don't you ever get hungry, Skimpole?"

"Ye-e-e-es," murmured Skimpole.

"Well, you may have some of the cake."

"The cake?"

"Yes, there is a nice cake in the basket."

"The scent of daffodils the breath of the zephyr, are sufficient nourishment for the poet," murmured Skimpole.

"Are they really? Then I am glad I am not a poet," said Cousin Ethel. "Figgins has put a really nice cake in the basket. Mrs. Kenwigg made it herself for Figgins to take out this afternoon."

(Continued at foot of next page.)

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Skimpole mechanically brought the tea-basket and opened it. Upon reflection he realized that even the most fairy-like of live girls could not possibly live without eating, and it was quite natural for Miss Ethel to be hungry. Yet it was a shock to his ideal. He had never thought of Cousin Ethel in connection with eating at all.

"You may cut the cake," said Cousin Ethel.

"Ye-e-o-es, certainly!"

"How long do you think Figgins has been gone?"

"I—I really haven't noticed."

"About a quarter of an hour, I suppose?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Will you have a little of the cake?"

"The cake? Oh, yes, thank you!" said Skimpole.

The cake certainly was a very nice one, and it dawned upon him that he was hungry, when he came to think about it.

"Yes, I will certainly have some cake."

"Do you know how to open a bottle of lemonade?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Then open a bottle, please!"

"Certainly! I was saying that I had met the realisation of the ideal."

"Yes; but I am thirsty."

It was possible that Cousin Ethel only wanted to keep Skimpole occupied, so that he would not become too poetical, for she hardly nibbled her cake, and only sipped the lemonade. There was a footstep in the wood, and Cousin Ethel looked round, expecting to see Figgins; but it was not Figgins.

CHAPTER 7.

The Terrible Three Take a Hand!

PATTER, patter, patter!

Tom Merry heard the sound of running feet, and looked lazily up. The chums of the Shell had been at practice at the nets, and now they were lying on the grass in the shade of a tree in their flannels, the picture of lazy comfort.

It was the only way to spend a blazing July afternoon, Manners opined, and there were times when the most energetic of fellows felt that they must slack a little.

"Who on earth is that running in this sun?" murmured Lowther, without raising his head. "Somebody in want of something to do, I should think."

"It's Figgins," said Tom Merry.

"Figgins? The ass!"

"He's running as if for a wager," said Tom Merry, sitting up in the grass, and watching with interest the figure of the New House junior who had just come in at the gates, and was still on the run.

Lowther and Manners sat up, too. They stared at Figgins. It was certainly a singular time to choose for running, and they were interested. Figgins had to pass within a few paces of the tree to get to the New House, and he came dashing by like a deer.

"I say, hold on!" called out Tom Merry. "What's the trouble?"

Figgins panted.

"Can't stop!"

"What's the matter? The Grammar School cads after you?"

"No."

"What is it, then?"

"Can't stop!"

"Aren't you thirsty?" asked Lowther, holding up to view a glass of lemon-squash which had been standing by his elbow.

Figgins halted.

"Yes, by Jove, I am!" he exclaimed. "I'm as dry inside as a lime kiln. I've been running ten minutes on end."

"My hat! In this weather!"

"Well, they wouldn't alter the weather to suit me," said Figgins. "Hand over that squash, Lowther. You're a Briton."

"Here you are!"

"Thanks!"

Figgins took a deep, deep draught of the lemon-squash. It was a home-made one, and very pleasant and cool to drink.

"That's good!" gasped Figgins.

"Finish it," said Lowther, "and tell us what's the matter. Your flannels look soaked."

"They are soaked," said Figgins. "I've been in the water. I was tipped in by one of your School House chumps!"

"Eh?"

"It was Skimpole. He jerked the boat, and sent me into the water, and Cousin Ethel insisted upon my coming back and changing, in case I caught cold."

"Cousin Ethel?"

"Yes," said Figgins. "We've been on the river."

"I thought D'Arcy said she was going with him?"

"D'Arcy was talking out of his hat, as usual," said Figgins. "I took Cousin Ethel for a pull down the river, and I'm going to fetch her back when I've changed my things. Thanks for the squash, Lowther! Awfully obliged! I was dying for a drink! I must be off now!"

"Just a second!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Where did you leave Cousin Ethel?"

Figgins chuckled.

"Wouldn't you like to know?"

"Oh, if you're going to keep it a secret——"

"And I jolly well am!" said Figgins. "Catch me telling you bounders, and having you go there with some yarn to Cousin Ethel to get her away!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, I'm up to snuff!" said Figgins. "You won't take me in so easily. So-long! I'm in a hurry!"

And Figgins ran on, and disappeared into the New House.

Tom Merry looked at his chums. The three were sitting up in the grass without any thoughts of lying down again. There was no idea in any of their three minds about slacking now. There was a chance of a joke up against the New House dimly in three minds, and clearest in Tom Merry's.

"What do you think, kids?" murmured Tom Merry. "Figgins has stolen a march on us this time, and carried off Cousin Ethel. We thought she was with D'Arcy. That would be bad enough. But, after all, Gussy's a School House chap. But we can't be done like this by a New House bounder."

"Rather not!"

"Figgins has gone into the New House to change his things," said Tom Merry. "There's not another soul in the House. Kerr and Wynn have gone to Rylcombe, and everybody else is out in this glorious weather."

"That's so."

"If we followed Figgins in, I dare say we could make it possible to contrive that he didn't come out again in a hurry."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry rose to his feet.

"Seems to me a good idea," he remarked. "We're not going to be done by a New House bounder."

"Certainly not!" said Lowther.

"But I say," said Manners, "we might fix Figgins up. But how are we going to find out where Cousin Ethel is? He was too deep to tell us."

Tom Merry laughed.

"That's easy enough."

"How so?"

"You remember Figgins mentioned Skimpole. I know where Skimpole has gone. He told me he was going there. That makes it easy enough, I think."

"My hat, rather!"

"Let's go and interview the great Figgins in his baronial hall," said Lowther, jumping up. "No time to lose. He won't lose any."

"Quite right! Come along!"

The chums of the Shell hurried towards the New House. They entered it without encountering a soul. It was, as Tom Merry had expected, quite deserted on that sultry July afternoon. There was nothing to keep anyone indoors, and even the House dame's tabby cat was sunning itself on the porch.

The Terrible Three quietly ascended the stairs. They did not know exactly where Figgins was, but they expected to find him in the Fourth Form dormitory.

But Figgins had been swift. He had not been in the House very many minutes, but he had already changed into clean flannels, and was now in his study giving himself a final touch before the glass.

The chums of the Shell heard him moving there, and Tom Merry peeped in at the half-open door to make sure. There was Figgins, busy and quite unsuspecting. Tom Merry reached round to the inside of the door and jerked out the key. The noise caught Figgins' ear, and he looked round.

"Hallo, there! What——"

The door was jerked shut. Figgins made a jump towards it. Lowther and Manners held the handle, while Tom Merry inserted the key in the outside, and turned it. The next second Figgins was dragging madly at the door inside.

"Unlock this door!" he roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Open this door!"

"Rats!"

"I'll break your necks!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't be cads! I've got to get back to Cousin Ethel!"

"She'll be just as pleased if we go instead."

"You—you—you——"

Potts, the Office Boy!



"This is where we smile!" chuckled Monty Lowther.
 "Hear us smile! Ha, ha, ha!"
 "You School House beasts—"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Open this beastly door!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I'll get out of the window with a rope!"
 "No, you won't!" chuckled Tom Merry. "We happen to know that your giddy prefect, Monteith, has confiscated that rope!"

"You beasts!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I'll—I'll—I'll—"
 "Give us a message for Miss Cleveland, Figgy!"
 "I'll give you a thick ear when I get at you!" roared Figgins, thumping at the door furiously. "I'll wipe up the floor with you!"

"Not just yet, though, unless you can thump a hole in thick oak," laughed Tom Merry.
 "School House rotter!"

"New House ass! Are you going to give us a message to Miss Cleveland to the effect that you cannot come, and ask us to take her back instead?"

"No!" yelled Figgins.
 "In that case she will keep on waiting for you."
 "Open the door!"
 "Nothing doing!"
 "You can't keep her waiting!"
 "We don't intend to, Figgy. We're going up the river!"
 "You don't know where she is!"

"Oh, yes we do! We know where Skimpole is, you see!"

"Rotters!"
 "Rats! It will make things pleasanter if you give us a message saying you can't come. Then we can bring the boat back without any bother."

"I won't!"
 "Very well. We'll explain that you're detained, and she'll think you're a pig not to send an excuse when you knew we were going."

Figgins thumped fiercely on the door.
 "Just you wait till I get within hitting distance of your chivvy, Tom Merry!"

"All right, I'll wait! What about that message, though?"

"I won't give you one!"
 "Good! We're off! Good-bye!"

"Hold on a minute!"
 "Well, what is it?"

"Tell Cousin Ethel I'm sorry I'm detained by—by a set of rotten cads!"

"Ha, ha, ha! We can't give her a message like that!"
 "Tell her I'm sorry!"

"Certainly."

"Say, I'm detained by—by an unexpected occurrence, then, and—asked you to bring her home in the boat," said Figgins. "Oh, won't I make you sit up for this!"

"Perhaps! Good-bye!"
 "Beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The laughter of the Terrible Three died away. They were gone, leaving Figgins a good deal like a caged tiger in the locked study.

CHAPTER 8.

No Chance for Figgins!

TOM MERRY laughed gaily as the chums quitted the New House. The merry click of bat and ball was still sounding from the cricket field, but the Terrible Three had no eyes for that.

"We've done the New House this time," chuckled Monty Lowther. "I wonder what Kerr and Wynn will say when they come back and find the great Figgins raging in the study?"

"I wonder!" grinned Tom Merry.
 "Hallo, there's Gussy!" said Manners. "Wandering about like the ghost of Hamlet's father, and looking about as cheerful."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was, indeed, looking somewhat disconsolate. He had dressed himself with especial care to take Cousin Ethel on the river that afternoon, and he had never quite recovered from the shock of learning that she had gone boating up the Rhyl with Figgins of the New House.

D'Arcy couldn't understand it!
 Ethel might have known—probably did know—that he was going to call for her that beautiful July afternoon. Yet she had gone on the river with Figgins—a fact quite inexplicable to the swell of the School House.

"Hallo, Gussy!" said Tom Merry, greeting the elegant youth with a hearty slap on the shoulder. "Have you lost sixpence and found a threepenny-bit, or has an order gone forth that high collars shall be barred by Fourth Form kids, or what's the matter?"

D'Arcy wriggled and smoothed out a crease in his flannels.

"Pway don't be so beastly wuff, Tom Mewwy."
 "Wherefore this pensive brow?" asked Monty Lowther. "When all the world is smiling, why does our one and only Gus look so sad?"

"Oh, don't wot, Lowthah!"
 "But wherefore is this thushness that we behold?" exclaimed Manners. "I understood that you were going on the river."

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "But here you are—"

"I have had a beastly disappointment, dear boys. Ethel must have forgotten me!"

"Impossible!"

"Yaas, wathah, it does seem imposs:" assented D'Arcy thoughtfully. "But see how the beastly case stands, you know. Of course, I hadn't an actual appointment on the mattah, but I think she might have guessed that I was calling for her. Don't you think so?"

"Certainly," said Lowther. "Perhaps she did guess, and that was the reason she went out before you called."

D'Arcy gave the humorous Lowther a withering glare.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"So you haven't been on the river?" said Tom Merry.

"No. Cousin Ethel had gone out with that boundah Figgins before I called. It was wathah thoughtless, and I am sowwy for her sake, as she is, of course, depwived of the pleasant time she might have had."

"Hard cheese!" said Tom Merry sympathetically. "Still, I hope she will have a nice time on the river. We are going to do our best."

D'Arcy screwed his monocle into his eye and surveyed Tom Merry in amazement.

A GOOD LENGTH!



"What's that, Tom Mewwy? What have you boundahs et to do with it?"

"Oh, we're going to take Cousin Ethel on the river!"

"Eh?"

"Good-bye!"

"Hold on a minute, Tom Mewwy! Do I understand you cowweety?"

"I really don't know, Gussy. You must work that out in your head," said Tom Merry gravely.

"But Figgins has—"

"Exactly."

"Good-bye!"

"But—"

But the chums of the Shell hurried on.

D'Arcy stared after them in blank amazement. They passed out of the gates, leaving him still staring.

"I weally do not undahstand this," murmured Arthur Augustus. "Cousin Ethel has gone with Figgins, I know. Is it poss that they have got some wheeze for gettin' wid of Figgins? Bai Jove, I shouldn't wondah!"

It was a new idea, and D'Arcy thought it out. He strolled on to think it out, and a voice in the distance suddenly broke upon his meditations. He looked up with a start. The voice came from the window of Figgins' study in the New House, and to D'Arcy's amazement the face of Figgins was visible there. The chief of the New House juniors was leaning out of the window, shouting:

"D'Arcy! D'Arcy!"

"Hallo, deah boy!" called out Arthur Augustus.

"Will you do me a favor?"

"That depends," said Arthur Augustus. "Aftah the wascally way in which you cawwied off my cousin this afternoon, Figgins, I weally think it is like your cheek to ask me to do anythin' of the sort."

"Oh, don't be a cad, Gussy! It's not much."

"Well, what is it, deah boy?"

"Just run up into the House and unlock my door."

D'Arcy stared blankly up at Figgins.

"Unlock your door, Figgins!" he exclaimed.

"Yes. Hurry up!"

"But if the door of your study is locked, deah boy, why don't you unlock it yourself?" demanded D'Arcy. "And how should I get into the study anyway if the beastlay door is locked, you know?"

"Ass! It's locked on the outside, of course!"

"I wefuse to be addressed as an ass!"

"The door is locked on the outside."

"You have called me an ass, Figgins. Unless you withdraw that extremely obnoxious expression, I am afraid it will be imposs for me to hold any further conversation with you!"

"You young—"

"Eh?"

"I mean I'm sorry I allowed that obnoxious expression to escape me, D'Arcy. I withdraw that word ass."

"That is satisfactory, so far," said D'Arcy. "Unless I am tweated with pwopah wespect I wefuse to wemain heah."

"Will you come up and unlock the door, old chap?"

"I am not at all sure about it, Figgins. I must become bettah acquainted with the cires first. How did you come to be locked up in your beastlay study?"

"Tom Merry caught me napping."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, what are you cackling at, you silly image?"

"I wefuse to be called a sillay image!"

"I say, come and let me out, there's a good chap!"

"You have addressed me as a sillay image!"

"I withdraw it," said Figgins between his teeth, and mentally promising D'Arcy all sorts of things when the door was once unlocked. "Do come up and let me out, old chap."

"Why did Tom Mewwy lock you up?"

"I had a ducking, and had to come back and change," explained Figgins. "The beasts have locked me up, and have gone to bring back Cousin Ethel in the boat."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling dummy!"

"I must certainly wefuse to let out any person who shawactewises me as a cacklin' dummay!" said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity.

"I withdraw it," said the unhappy Figgins. "I withdraw anything, if you'll only come and open the door."

"Do you apologise for the use of the expression?"

"Yes, yes!"

"You are sowwy?"

"Yes!"

"Awfully, feahfully sowwy?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Vewy well, I will ovahlook the expression, then,
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Figgins. I am sowwy, howevah, that I shall not be able to let you out of the study."

"I say, Gussy!"

"In the cires, I think that study is about the most pwopah place for you," said D'Arcy. "You would only make twouble if I let you out. I am goin' to set my bwains to work to circumvent those boundahs!"

"I'll help you if you'll only come and help me out!" said Figgins eagerly.

D'Arcy shook his head.

"I am afraid that undah the cires it is not poss, deah boy! You are much safah where you are, considewin' evewythin'!"

And Arthur Augustus turned to walk away.

Figgins gave a yell:

"You young beast—"

"Weally, Figgins—"



"Cut Tom Merry some more cake, Skimpole, will you?"
"Certainly." Cousin Ethel kept the Freak of the Shell pretty
a tray until he upset the lemonade all over Tom

"If you don't come up and unlock the door I'll lick you to a jelly the next time I come across you!" roared the New House junior.

"Weally, Figgins, you are quite welcome to twy!" said D'Arcy. "If you should pwocced to violence I should have no alternative but to administah a feahful thwashin'!"

"Come and let me—"

"I am sowwy, but it is not poss," said D'Arcy, with a shake of the head. "I should wecommend you to do your pwepawation now, Figgins. It will save you time in the evening, you know. Good-bye, deah boy!"

And D'Arcy walked off, leaving Figgins raving.

But D'Arcy did not care.

The voice of the New House junior died away, and when D'Arcy glanced round for the last time Figgins was silently

and furiously shaking his fist from the window. And the swell of the School House chuckled.

Arthur Augustus quickened his pace as he went towards the gates. The thought had crossed his mind that he might get on the track of the Terrible Three, who could not have gone far yet. Then, even if he could not get the better of his rivals in any way, he could at least join the party on equal terms. They would not venture to have an explanation of what had really happened to detain Figgins, and that would be a trump card in D'Arcy's hand.

Arthur Augustus chuckled as he thought of it, and he broke into a run and went out of the ancient gateway of St. Jim's at a good speed—and then there was a yell, and he reeled back from an impact with a junior who was walking in.

"Bai Jove!"

D'Arcy gasped for breath as he reeled. The junior he



certainly, Miss Ethel." "And open the other bottle of lemonade." waiting on the Terrible Three. He used a board from the boat as a tray. That was the end of Skimpole as a waiter.

had collided, with, who happened to be his chum, Jack Blake, sat down in the dusty road with a grunt. He jumped up with vengeance in his face, but unclenched his fists as soon as he saw that it was Arthur Augustus who had knocked him down.

"You utter duffer!" said Blake. "What do you mean by bolting out of the gate like that, without looking where you were going?"

"I am extremely sowwy, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "I am in a feahful huiwy—"

"What is it?" asked Blake, dusting down his clothes. "What's on?"

D'Arcy gasped out an exclamation.

Blake's eyes twinkled. He gave Arthur Augustus an

approving slap on the shoulder that made him reel against the gate again.

"Good egg, Gussy! I'm on this!"

"You needn't dislocate my beastlay shouldah, and wumple my flannels, all the same!" gasped D'Arcy. "I weally wish you would not be so wuff!"

"Herries! Dig!!" cried Blake.

Herries and Digby were sitting on the wall across the lane, eating cherries. Jack Blake hurried across the lane to them as he called, followed by the breathless swell of the School House.

"Anything on?" asked Digby languidly. "Don't say you want us to help you in a wheeze this afternoon, Blake. It's too hot."

"Much too hot!"

"Can't be did! Have some of these cherries, Blake, old son? They're better than your best wheezes."

"Blow the cherries! I—"

"Have some, Gussy?"

"I should like some vewy much, deah boy, but I am afwaid of stainin' my fingahs—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old ass!"

"I object to bein' called an ass!"

"Look here, chaps," said Blake quickly, "no rotting now! It's up against Tom Merry and Figgins, and that ought to be enough for you."

"So it is," said Digby, slipping from the wall. "What's the jape? I'm on if it's anything good and worth the trouble."

Blake explained about the catching of Figgins.

The chums laughed till the tears ran down their cheeks.

"Gussy had sense enough not to let him out," said Blake.

"You wouldn't have expected it of Gussy, but he has streaks of sense sometimes."

"Oh, weally, Blake—"

"We're on in this scene," said Blake. "Do you know which way Tom Merry went, Gussy?"

"I did not see him aftah he left the gates—"

"Trust you to forget something!"

"But, weally, I—"

"Never mind. I know Figgins went down the river when he went out, so we shall find Cousin Ethel down the river. I dare say we can do it quicker by water than Tom Merry can by land."

"Pewwaps he went by boat—"

"Perhaps he didn't! I've just come up from the boat-house, and I should have seen him if he had been there. He's gone through the woods."

"Then let's buck up and get a boat out!" exclaimed Digby. "Four oars pulling downstream will soon get over the distance."

"Thwee oars, you mean, Dig. I think I had bettah steer, as I find wovwin' wathah fatiguin' in this weathah!"

"You'll take your turn at the oar, or be chucked overboard," said Blake. "Come on, and we'll have the boat out in a jiffy."

The chums of Study No. 6 hurried down to the river. Inside five minutes they had a boat in the water, and were pulling away with the current for all they were worth.

CHAPTER 9.

Blake Scores!

"TOM MERRY!"

It was Skimpole who uttered the exclamation, as he and Cousin Ethel looked up from the lunch-basket.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther came out of the wood and joined them under the tree by the shining river. Cousin Ethel gave the juniors a bright smile.

"I am glad to see you," she said. "Will you have some cake?"

"Thank you!" said Tom Merry. "We will. That cake looks nice."

"It is nice. Cut the cake for them, will you, Skimpole?"

"Ye-e-es, certainly," said Skimpole.

The amateur poet did not seem so pleased by the invasion as Cousin Ethel did. He cut the cake and handed it round, and the three chums sat down under the tree while he was so engaged, leaving Skimpole rather out of it.

"Have you seen Figgins?" asked Cousin Ethel. "I was expecting to see him when you came."

"He's detained at the school," said Tom Merry gravely. "He sent a message by us to you. He's sorry he couldn't get back."

"Very sorry!" said Lowther.

"Awfully sorry!" said Manners.

Cousin Ethel looked concerned.

"I hope he has not caught cold!" she exclaimed. "I was afraid he would, after getting wet through in the river."

"Oh, no!" said Tom Merry hastily. "He hasn't caught cold. He said it was an unexpected happening that detained him, but he thought you would excuse him if we came instead to take the boat back to the school. Figgins was awfully cut up at not being able to get back."

"He was making a fearful fuss about it, too," said Lowther.

There was a curious glimmer for a moment in the eyes of Cousin Ethel. Perhaps she suspected something. She did not pursue the topic, however.

"It was very kind of you to come," she said. "I don't know how we and the boat would have got back to the school otherwise."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Skimpole. "I should have rowed you back, of course, Miss Cleveland."

"Cousin Ethel isn't tired of life yet, Skimmy," said Lowther.

"Really, Lowther—"

"Cut Tom Merry some more cake, Skimpole, will you?"

"Certainly, Miss Ethel."

"And open the other bottle of lemonade."

"Certainly."

Whether Miss Cleveland wished to punish Skimpole for the ducking he had given Figgins, or for the boredom he had inflicted upon her for half an hour, it is hard to say, but certainly she kept him pretty busy waiting upon the Terrible Three. He used a board from the boat for a tray, until he upset the ginger pop over Tom Merry. That was the end of Skimpole as a waiter!

Figgins had well stocked the tea-basket, and the Terrible Three did full justice to the contents, and Skimpole had a nibble here and there.

The time passed by pleasantly enough, and the sun sank lower in the red west, warning the campers at last that it was near time for them to think of returning to St. Jim's.

Cousin Ethel looked at her little watch.

"Dear me, it is getting quite late!" she exclaimed.

Tom Merry rose to his feet.

"I suppose we had better be getting back," he remarked.

"Oh, yes, we must return now!"

"Where did Figgins put the boat?" asked Monty Lowther, looking round.

The tree under which they were picnicking was a little way back from the bank, and a belt of willows interposed and shut off the view of the spot where Figgins had moored his skiff.

Cousin Ethel nodded towards the willows.

"The boat is there."

Tom Merry ran down to the bank. He looked through the willows, and he looked up and down the water-side, but he could see no sign of the boat.

"Was it moored, Cousin Ethel?" he called out.

"Yes; Figgins tied the painter to the root of one of the willows."

"That's curious. It's not here now."

"Not there!"

"No. Do you know where it is, Skimpole?"

"It is there, Merry, moored to the willows."

"It isn't, I tell you."

"You must be mistaken," said Skimpole. "It was there when I got the things out of it. You must certainly be mistaken."

Tom Merry seized Skimpole by the back of the neck and ran him through the willows.

"There, ass!" he said. "Look for yourself!"

Skimpole blinked round.

"Dear me! The boat certainly seems to be gone!" he exclaimed. "Unless someone has come along and stolen it, it must have drifted away!"

"Nobody could have come along without us seeing their boat," said Manners.

"Unless they crept along close inshore, under cover of the willows," said Monty Lowther.

"By Jove, yes! Well, the boat's gone, whether it's drifted away or been taken. I can't see a sign of it—or of any other."

Tom Merry looked up and down the river. Cousin Ethel was looking concerned. Not one of the campers had heard a sound on the river, or seen anything to hint that prowlers were purloining the boat from its mooring-place behind the willows. But the boat was gone, and the party were faced with the prospect of a walk back to St. Jim's.

"Hallo, there's a boat!" exclaimed Lowther.

Across the glimmering river a boat pulled out from the thickets which grew down to the water on the opposite bank.

Tom Merry clicked his teeth hard together.

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There were four juniors in the boat. One, in a Panama hat and spotless flannels, was steering. The others were rowing. It did not need a second glance to show that the four were the chums of Study No. 6, in the School House at St. Jim's.

"Blake & Co.!"

The Terrible Three echoed the exclamation simultaneously.

"The—the rotters!" muttered Tom Merry. "We know, now, who's taken the boat away!"

"The wasters!"

"The beasts!"

These compliments were muttered so that Cousin Ethel should not hear them.

The girl looked relieved at the sight of the boat. She waved her hand to Blake, and D'Arcy waved his in return.

"Hallo!" called out Tom Merry.

"Hallo!" called back Blake.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "Fancy meetin' you heah, you know! This is wathah an unexpected pleasuah, Tom Mewwy!"

"Bring that boat over here, will you?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The boat glided towards the bank, but stopped with a dozen feet of shining water intervening between it and the willows, too far off for any attempt on the part of the Terrible Three to jump into it.

The Fourth-Formers raised their caps to Miss Cleveland.

"So glad to meet you!" said Blake. "Would you care for a lift back to St. Jim's, Cousin Ethel?"

Cousin Ethel laughed.

"Yes, I think I should."

"Good! Gussy, get out of that seat!"

"Some rotten duffer has taken our boat away," said Tom Merry, looking daggers at the juniors. "Did you happen to see it, Blake?"

"I haven't seen any rotten duffers that I remember, till just now, when you called to me," replied Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha! I wegard that as wathah funny!"

"Look here," began Manners hotly, "our boat has been taken!"

"Did you come here by boat?" asked Blake innocently.

"Well, no; it was Figgins' boat, really—"

"Where is Figgins, then? I don't see him with you."

"He's been detained, and we came here to bring the boat back for him."

"And now you look like being detained, too!" grinned Blake.

"Oh, you are going to take us in!"

"We've taken you in already!" murmured Digby.

And he jerked his thumb across the river, a gesture which the Terrible Three understood perfectly well. It meant that the purloined boat was hidden in the willows on the other side, and that they could swim for it when Cousin Ethel was gone.

Blake shook his head decidedly.

"No room for four fellows your size in this boat," he replied.

"Oh, it doesn't matter about Skimpole!" exclaimed Lowther. "He can walk back!"

"Really, Lowther!"

"So can you," said Blake, grinning. "We can't load our boat up with a lot of rubbish. There's comfy room for Miss Ethel. Bring the boat inshore, chaps!"

The boat came in. The Terrible Three looked very much inclined to make a rush for it. But the presence of Cousin Ethel restrained them. They could not enter into a scrimmage with the girl looking on. Besides, the Fourth-Formers had the oars ready to drive them back if they made the rush.

Blake jumped into the reeds.

"Let me help you in, Cousin Ethel."

Cousin Ethel glanced at Tom Merry.

"Oh, please go in the boat!" said Tom Merry, interpreting her dubious look at once. "We can walk back all right, but it would be a long walk for you."

"I think I had better accept Blake's offer, then."

"Oh, yes, please do!"

"Thank you very much, Blake!"

"Not at all!" said Blake. "The pleasure is ours."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake handed Cousin Ethel into the boat. The Fourth-Formers pushed off. The tea-basket and cushions were thrown in. D'Arcy arranged the latter for Cousin Ethel in the stern of the boat.

"This is wathah comfy, I think," he remarked. "There is another cushion there in the gwass, Tom Mewwy. Pway throw it to me!"

Monty Lowther picked up the cushion and threw it. It smote Arthur Augustus upon the chest, and he sat down upon the gunwale of the boat, making it rock violently.

"Sorry!" exclaimed Lowther.

Arthur Augustus saved himself with a great effort from going into the water. He stood up unsteadily and glared at Lowther.

"Lowthah, you clumsy ass—"

"Sit down!" said Blake, grinning.

"I wufese to sit down till I have told Lowthah what I think of him—"

"Sit down!"

Blake gave D'Arcy a gentle tap on the chest, and he sat down suddenly. The boat pushed out into the stream. The Terrible Three watched the Fourth-Formers pull away up the river. Cousin Ethel waved her hand, and the chums of the Shell stood, cap in hand, as the boat glided away. D'Arcy could be seen making excited gestures for some time, apparently still in a state of indignation.

"The rotters!" grunted Manners.

"The beasts!" said Lowther.

Tom Merry laughed.

"No good growling!" he exclaimed. "We did Figgins, and they've done us, and there's no getting out of it. One of us has got to swim for the boat. They've hidden it in the willows over there."

"It was really inconsiderate of them to put us to this trouble," said Skimpole, "and I regard it as especially selfish of them to leave me here. I wanted particularly to return with Miss Ethel."

Lowther stared at him.

"Why?" he demanded.

"Oh, I know!" chuckled Tom Merry. "In the spring a livelier iris changes on the burnished dove. In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love."

"It isn't spring now," said Manners. "Do you call July spring?"

"It's all the same to a poet."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You are very ribald on this subject," said Skimpole.

"You would perhaps be brought to a better frame of mind if I were to read to you some verses from my poem."

"Don't bother!"

"I have for the present given up my book, and am writing a long poem instead. There are some stanzas in the fifty-seventh canto that—"

"Let 'em stay there!"

"I should not mind reciting you the whole poem—"

"But we should," said Tom Merry promptly. "If you start on that you shan't come in the boat, I warn you."

"I shall certainly not waste my high and fervid thoughts upon such base and commonplace minds as yours," said the amateur poet loftily.

"Good! Mind you don't, that's all!"

Tom Merry swam for the boat. It was twenty minutes or so before the chums of the Shell were rowing back to St. Jim's in Figgins' skiff. Skimpole was steering, and he was also gazing at the sky. His lips moved sometimes, and it was evident that he was at work upon the fifty-eighth canto of his great poem.

CHAPTER 10.

The Sonnet!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY came along the passage upon which the Shell studies opened with an extremely determined expression upon his aristocratic face. It was evening at St. Jim's—a hot July evening.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther were chatting in the doorway of their study as the swell of the School House came along, and D'Arcy eyed them rather warily.

"Here's one of the rotters!" said Lowther.

D'Arcy adjusted his eyeglass and stared haughtily at Lowther.

"May I trouble you to wepeat that wemark, Lowthah?" he asked.

"Certainly!" said Lowther politely. "It wasn't addressed to you, but I don't mind repeating it. I said, here comes one of the rotters."

"I wufese to be alluded to as a wottah," said D'Arcy. "I should be sowwy to have to thwash you now, Lowthah, as I have somethin' else to attend to; but—"

"You would be sorrier still when you started," said Lowther.

"Peace, my children!" said Tom Merry, with a wave of the hand. "The kids did us this afternoon, but we don't bear any malice. Let dogs delight to bark and bite, let Blake and Digby growl and fight; but, Monty, you should never let such angry passion rise, your little fists were never meant to dot Augustus' eyes."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"What is the animal doing in this passage, anyway?" said Lowther. "The next passage belongs to those Fourth Form kids."

"I am going to see Skimpole," said D'Arcy. "I have

somethin' wathah important to say to Skimpole, and I shall pwobably give him a feahful thwashin'!"

"Hallo, Gussy's on the warpath!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What has Skimpole been doing?" asked Tom Merry curiously. "What are you going to slay him for? He seems to me to be a harmless ass enough."

"Has he been talking Determinism again?" asked Lowther.

"Pway don't wot, Lowthah!"

"Then what is the matter?"

"It's his feahful cheek!" explained D'Arcy. "At pwesent I see nothin' for it but to give him a feahful thwashin'; but if you can suggest any alternative I shall be gwateful, as it is wathah hot weathah to thwash anybody."

"I should think so, to say nothing of the possibility that he might thrash you," remarked Manners.

"I wufese to admit any such possibility. When my tempah is woused I am wathah a tough customah to tackle, I think," said D'Arcy. "I shall just wush upon him and give him a thwashin'—"

"But wlat has he been doing?"

"It's his feahful impertinence. The cheeky wottah has had the awful nerve to fall in love with my Cousin Ethel."

"But you've done that yourself in your time."

"That is quite a different mattah," said D'Arcy, with dignity. "The silly ass has been witin' a sonnet!"

"A what?" exclaimed three voices in unison.

"A sonnet."

"My only Panama hat!"

"Cousin Ethel found it slipped under her door," said D'Arcy indignantly. "She gave it to me and asked me to find out who had sent it, and to tell him not to be silly."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, it's all vewy well to laugh. Tom Mewwy; but I wegard it as feahful cheek. I knew Skimpole's handwriting at once, you know, and so I've come here to speak to him about it, and I think I ought to give him a feahful thwashin', too. What is your opinion, deah boy?"

"We ought to see the sonnet first," said Tom Merry gravely.

"I've got the wotten thing here," said D'Arcy, fumbling in his pocket. "Yaas, here it is! Wead the silly wot out, Tom Mewwy."

(Continued on page 19.)

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HALLO, chums! This is the final week in our Free Gift Scheme, so dig up all the coupons you have collected—including that in this week's issue of the GEM—and send them in. Full particulars of where to post your collection are given on page eleven. If you think your total is not big enough why don't you persuade a pal to pool his collection with yours? You'll stand a better opportunity that way of winning a handsome book. Now for next Wednesday's star programme. First, of course, is the long complete yarn of Tom Merry & Co. It's entitled:

"THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING HEIR!"

and it shows Martin Clifford in brilliant form. There's plenty of fun in this yarn for next week as well as lively adventure, so stand by for something really good. David Goodwin's story of the Navy is going great guns. In next week's chapters you will not be disappointed if you are looking for thrills, so make sure of your copy of the GEM. Potts, the Office Boy, supplies another big laugh for the week, whilst I have some more unusual news pats jotted down in my notebook. If any of you readers are looking for another school story paper, I can honestly recommend the "Magnet"—our companion paper—which tells of the amazing adventures of Harry Wharton & Co. and Billy Bunter of Greyfriars. The "Magnet" is on sale at all newsagents every Saturday, and, like the GEM, it costs twopenny. Try a copy—you'll wonder why you haven't been reading it every week then.

SWITCH ON FOR WARMTH!

Soon we shall be able to snap our fingers at the bitter cold of the winter, for electrical experts have been busy devising means to keep us warm, whether we be indoors or out of doors. The indoor stunt takes the form of laying a number of wires beneath insulating material which can be so treated as to look like ordinary wallpaper. When the current is switched on, these wires throw out a gentle heat in all directions, thus beating the common or garden fire, which throws a heat in a limited area. For the outdoor man, especially the point-duty policeman who is often obliged to stand in one spot for hours on end, the electrical expert has devised a waistcoat which is "tuned" with wires. In the pocket of the waistcoat is a special battery which charges the wires with warming current when a switch is turned on. Airmen, of course, who have to fly at great altitudes, have been supplied with electrically-heated suits.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,272.

for many years now, but somehow or other they have never proved so popular with their wearers as was expected. Perhaps the fear of fire, with so much petrol at hand, supplies the reason.

WE WONDER!

Is the pen really mightier than the sword? Yes, say those people who live their lives among facts and figures that would give most of us a nasty headache. According to them more steel is used in the manufacture of the world's demand for pens than in the world's demand for guns and swords, etc.

EVER BEEN HAD?

Most of you know that April the Fifth was the winner of this year's Derby, so this little story is worth passing on. On the great day at Epsom a certain gentleman "backed his fancy" with a bookmaker, and his choice was April the Fifth. Imagine his joy when the horse won, and his woe when he went to collect his money, for, alas! the bookmaker had bolted. Behind him he had left a notice which read "April the First."

HAT WIRELESS!

He was a flash crook, always did his lawless job quickly and cleverly, and invariably made a good getaway. But his day was coming. His latest raid was discovered, and the police organisation worked swiftly, too. From headquarters went out a wireless call to every policeman in London, giving him particulars of what had happened, a description of the law-breaker, and the direction in which he was heading. The result was the bandit found himself roped in before he had gone very far. The smartness of his capture puzzled him—until one of the policemen took off his helmet and explained that inside it was a miniature wireless receiving set via which all particulars of the bandit's raid and dash for liberty had been received from police headquarters. This "helmet wireless" is one of the latest experiments in the Police Force, and it looks like a winner.

FASTEST TRAIN IN THE WORLD!

Who says that Britain can't build records! Look at the remarkable achievement of the Cheltenham Flyer—now the fastest train in the world! Just recently this Great Western loco did the seventy-seven and a quarter miles journey from Swindon to Paddington in the almost incredible time of fifty-six minutes forty-seven seconds, or, if you prefer it this way, at an average speed of 81.6 miles an hour. At one stage of the journey the Flyer hit

up a speed of ninety-two miles an hour—just imagine three hundred tons of metal, woodwork, and "cargo" in the shape of passengers, rocketing along the rails at that speed! Yet the passengers were able to have their tea without spilling it, even when the train was travelling at full speed. Would you have liked to have been the fireman on that record run? He had to feed the furnace with coal at the rate of a hundredweight every three miles—and each three miles was "run off" in just over two minutes!

THE WOLF MAN!

For ten years, Mr. D. S. Stuart has tamed the wolves at the London Zoo, but people who were at Whippsnade Zoo a short time ago were not aware of that fact. To their horror, they suddenly saw a man walking about in the Wolves' enclosure, and quite naturally thought that his "number was up." The wolves caught sight of the visitor in their compound and bounded towards him. One of them jumped upon his shoulders and sent the man flying. Then, to the amazement of the spectators of this extraordinary scene, the wolves circled round Mr. Stuart like a lot of frolicsome puppies, and just as tame. In him they recognised an old friend, although it was a matter of nine months since they had last seen him, and were showing their affection in their own way. Properly trained, says Mr. Stuart, wolves are really affectionate—we will take his word for it!

TRAPPING THE SMASH AND GRABBER.

Worried shopkeepers whose stocks have suffered at the hands of smash-and-grab raiders are singing "There's a good time coming," etc. They have recently witnessed a demonstration of new devices to baffle the smash and grabber. One of these tests was eminently successful. A spanner was thrown at a window and immediately overpowering ammonia fumes were released from a tube. In addition, a smoke bomb went off with a bang, and the air was made hideous with the shrieking of a syren. The ammonia fumes and the smoke bomb sent those who witnessed this test scuttling out of the way, but it means that your smash-and-grab raider will have to equip himself with a gas helmet if he's going to continue in business—and that's not likely, for a gas helmet is much too noticeable among bowler hats, etc. The fate of the poor pedestrian or innocent shopgazer who happens to be in the vicinity when the ammonia fumes start shooting around, to say nothing of the smoke bomb, however, doesn't appear to have been considered. But that's the way of this world!

A REPLY TO J. J., OF LEEDS.

Query: How many bullets does a machine gun fire in sixty seconds.

Answer: The modern machine-gun can deal out hot lead at the rate of five hundred bullets a minute.

Ed.—So, J. J., you and your pal were both wrong!

HEARD THIS ONE?

Father: "You're home from school early, son."

Son: "Yes, father. I hit our master over the head with a cricket ball in the match this afternoon."

Father: "Good heavens! What did he say?"

Son: "Nothing. He hasn't come to yet!"

YOUR EDITOR.

COUSIN ETHEL'S CHAMPION!

(Continued from page 17.)

Tom Merry took the sheet of paper D'Arcy handed to him. It was a gilt-edged, scented sheet, but the great sprawling writing upon it was not very elegant. Tom Merry, amid chuckles from his chums, read out the following sonnet:

"I gaze upon the midnight skies at night,
And in the stars see Ethel's eyes the while;
I gaze upon the sun at noon so bright,
And see the splendour of my Ethel's smile.
I listen to the summer breezes light,
And seem to hear her voice so sweet beguile;
Oh, nothing but the grave and cold grim death'll
Make me forget the love I feel for Ethel."

Monty Lowther shrieked. Manners gasped. Tom Merry leaned against the door and sobbed. D'Arcy frowned.

"What do you think of that, deah boys?"
"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Lowther.
"My only aunt!" groaned Manners.
"Oh dear—oh dear!" murmured Tom Merry. "It's—it's ripping, especially the last lines. I particularly admire the last lines."
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Don't you think he ought to have a feahful thwashin' for his cheek?"
"I don't know about that, but he ought to have one for his rhymes."

"A thrashing won't meet the case," gurgled Lowther. "What he really wants is something with boiling oil in it."
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"You chaps can come with me if you like," said D'Arcy. "You can see me make an example of the feahful ass."
"Come on, kids!" said Lowther. "Lead on, Macduff!"
D'Arcy marched on to the door of Skimpole's study, and knocked. However terrific a temper he might be in, the polite swell of the School House could never have forgotten to knock before entering. He pushed open the door and entered, the Terrible Three bringing up in the rear.

Skimpole was alone in the study. He had a mass of footscaps on the table before him, and was writing and erasing alternately. He did not look up, apparently not having heard the knock or the opening of the door.

"Skimpole!"
The amateur poet took no notice. His pen scratched away for some seconds, and then he leaned his chin on his hand.

"I must have a rhyme for despair," he murmured. "Hair—I wonder if that would do? 'I gaze upon your golden hair, and feel the pangs of dark despair.' 'I gaze upon your face so fair and feel the pangs of dark despair.' That is better, or—'I think for me you do not care, so feel the pangs of dark despair.' H'm! 'It is a pain I cannot bear, to feel the pangs of dark despair.' No, that is not so good. 'I like wounded lion in his lair, I feel the pangs of dark despair.' Good!"

Apparently satisfied, Skimpole began to write again. "You uttah ass!" said Arthur Augustus. Skimpole finished the line and looked up. "Is that you, D'Arcy?"
"Yes, you silly ass!"
"Please don't interrupt me now. I am composing a sonnet—"

"You composed this one, didn't you?" said D'Arcy, flinging Skimpole's effusion on the table. Skimpole started.

"How did you get that, D'Arcy?"
"My cousin gave it to me."
Skimpole smiled blissfully.

"Ah, she has sent you with a message to me! She has sent a reply? Dear one, tell me her message—quick!"
"She says you're not to be a silly ass."

"Eh?"
"Well, to be exact, she said you were not to be silly."

"Silly!"
"Yes. And I have something to say about it myself. Ethel is my cousin."

"Oh, would she were mine!"
"Yours? You uttah idiot—"

"I mean, would she were my cousin."
"I don't care what you mean. You wrote this feahful wot and slipped it undah her door. It was like your feahful

impertinence. As Ethel's cousin I am bound to pwotect her frowm a wavin' maniac!"

"Away, base varlet!"
"What?"
"I love Ophelia," said Skimpole, quoting from Hamlet—"I love Ophelia! Forty thousand brothers could not, with all their quantity of love, make up my sum. The same thing applies to your cousin."

"You uttah ass!"
"I refuse to discuss the question with you. I think you must have misrepresented Miss Ethel's message to me."

"If you doubt my honah, Skimpole, I shall have no alternative but to wipe up the floor of the study with you."

"Oh, I don't suppose you would deliberately misrepresent," said Skimpole. "But with your low intellect you would naturally not understand matters of this kind."

"Bai Jove!"
"A common-place person has no right to interfere with a genius. I request you to retire that I may finish this sonnet."

"Wot!"
"Pray go! 'I gaze upon your hair so fair,'—I mean, 'I feel a pain I cannot bear, and fair the pangs of dark despair.' Dear me! You are confusing me, and I am getting mixed. Will you retire from the study?"

"Wathah not."
"You are interrupting me."

"I am not goin'," said Arthur Augustus, "until you have pwomised me, honah bwight, to dwop all this silly wot!"

"I can promise nothing of the kind."

"Then I shall give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"You do not comprehend these matters. I adore the realisation of the ideal—the incarnation of the ineffable—"

"I don't believe for one moment that you know what one of those words mean," said D'Arcy. "I am suah I don't. So don't spout them at me."

"The ineffable is—"

"Wats! Will you pwomise to dwop this wot, or shall I thwash you? I shall be sowwy to have to thwash you on such a sultwy evenin', but if you persist in actin' the gid-day goat, I shall have no alternative."

"I refuse to discuss the matter," said the amateur poet loftily.

"Then look out, you uttah duffah! Tom Mewwy, what do you think of the mattah? Can I allow this feahful ass to go on plastering my cousin with silly sonnets?"

"Certainly not!" said Tom Merry promptly.

"What do you think, Lowthah?"

"I think a feahful thrashing would about meet the case."

"So do I," said Manners. "Make him eat all his poetry, and swear never to write any more. It ought to be stopped, if only as cruelty to animals."

"You hear that, Skimpole?"

"I am not listening to your absurd remarks," said Skimpole. "Like wounded lion in his lair, I feel the pangs of golden hair—I mean 'dark despair.'"

"Take off your jacket!"

"Please don't interrupt me."

"Are you goin' to make that pwomise?"

"Certainly not!"

"Are you going to stop witin' this sillay wot?"

"You are quite mistaken. It is not silly rot, but first-class poetry, and worth a guinea a box—I mean, a guinea a line."

"Are you goin' to stop witin' it?"

"It is impossible for the outpourings of genius to be checked at the bidding of a representative of the extremely common-place."

"Then I shall have to deal with you wathah severely," said D'Arcy. "Firstly, I will destwoy this silly piffle."

The swell of the School House picked up the inkpot, and

(Continued on the next page.)

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inverted it over Skimpole's poem. The outpourings of genius were immediately blotted out of view by an outpouring of ink.

Skimpole gave a yell and jumped up. He went for D'Arcy like a thunderbolt, and the School House swell had only just time to put up his fists.

"Goth! Vandal! Hun!" hooted Skimpole.

"Silly duffah!" retorted Arthur Augustus.

"You have spoiled my poem!"

"I am goin' to spoil your face."

"Go it!" shouted Monty Lowther encouragingly. "Go it!"

And D'Arcy and Skimpole, locked in a deadly embrace, reeled to and fro in the study. The Terrible Three looked on, laughing and cheering.

CHAPTER 11.

Skimpole is Obstinate!

"H A, ha, ha!" The loud laughter from the study door was not long in attracting attention. Several fellows belonging to the Shell came out of their studies to look on, and the Fourth-Formers came from the next passage. Blake & Co. were among the first to arrive. They had known of D'Arcy's intended visit to Skimpole's quarters, and they guessed what the uproar meant when they heard it.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake, pushing his way forward. "What's the trouble?"

"Gussy is giving Skimpole a fearful thrashing," said Tom Merry. "Don't stop the fun. This is as good as any circus."

"Better!" grinned Blake. "Go it, Gussy!"

"I am goin' it, deah boy!" panted the swell of St. Jim's. "I am goin' to make a tewwible example of this sillay duffah. Skimpole, you ass, if you twead on my feet I shall give you—"

"Leggo my neck!"

"I wefuse to let go your neck! I—"

"Yaroooh!"

"I am twyin' to get his head into chancewy!" panted D'Arcy. "But the obstinate bwute is stwugglin' so much."

"Go it, Gussy!"

"Buck up, Skimmy!"

The crowd thickened in the corridor. Fellows came from all sides to look on, and giggle and cheer. The uproar was terrific, but no one cared for that. Skimpole and D'Arcy reeled to and fro.

D'Arcy did not succeed in getting Skimpole's head into chancewy. But the amateur poet was getting some punishment. His spectacles had fallen off, and Tom Merry picked them up and put them on the mantelpiece for safety. D'Arcy's eyeglass was dangling at the end of its cord. His clothes were getting terribly rumpled, but in the excitement of the moment he had forgotten even that.

"You howwid wottah! I will make you wiggle!" gasped D'Arcy.

"You unpoetical rotter! I'll make you sit up!"

"Go it!"

"Buck up!"

"Play up, there!"

The combatants reeled heavily against the table. Study tables were not built to stand that sort of thing. It went over with a crash, and books and papers and ink were mingled in a heap on the floor.

"Oh!" gasped Skimpole. "My poem!"

The next moment he was over, sprawling upon ink and poem, with the swell of the School House sprawling across him.

"Ow! My poem is ruined!"

"All the bettah!"

"Beast!"

"Ass!"

D'Arcy sat astride of the chest of his vanquished opponent. He felt for his eyeglass and jammed it into his eye.

"Now then, Skimpole, are you goin' to pwomise to dwop that nonsense?"

"Never!"

"Then I will wub the ink into your hair and ovah your face!"

"Ow! Help!"

"Look out!" shouted a voice from the passage. "Cave!"

It was the warning of a master's approach, but D'Arcy was too excited to heed it. The juniors at the door scattered, and Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, looked in the study with a frown on his face. With him was Cousin Ethel.

"D'Arcy! Skimpole!"

"Bai Jove! Mr. Wailton!"

"Get up at once!"

Arthur Augustus unwillingly rose to his feet and looked sheepishly at Ethel. A little more ink and Skimpole would probably have made the required promise. The swell of St. Jim's looked decidedly ruffled and rumpled as he stood up. Skimpole sat up in the midst of his wrecked manuscript and blinked. The Housemaster looked at them sternly.

"What is all this about?"

"We were havin' a little argument about poetry, sir," said D'Arcy, after a moment's reflection.

The Housemaster could not restrain a smile.

"Is that the way you conduct an argument upon the subject of poetry?" he asked.

"Yaas, sir. Undah the peculiah cires I think—"

"Then you must learn to argue more quietly," said Mr. Railton. "You will take two hundred lines each!"

"Oh, weally, Mr. Wailton!"

"You hear me, D'Arcy? You will return immediately to your own study. If you enter this study again you will be caned!"

"But undah the cires—"

"Go at once!"

"Yaas, certainly, sir, if you insist."

D'Arcy left the study.

Mr. Railton looked severely at Skimpole.

"And you had better go and get yourself cleaned, Skimpole," he said.

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Railton walked away, and with him went Cousin Ethel. But Skimpole did not go to get himself cleaned. He devoted his attention first to collecting up his wrecked poem. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy returned to Study No. 6, where he found his chums making tea. They had left tea to come and see the row, as a matter of fact.

"Hallo, you do look a sight!" said Blake, glancing at the swell of St. Jim's. "I don't see how we can admit this disreputable-looking boulder into the study!"

"Certainly not," said Digby. "We can't allow D'Arcy to get this study a name of slovenliness."

"Oh, pway don't wot!" said D'Arcy. "I have had a most excitin' time, and it has thwown me into quite a fluttah. My clothes will want pweessing, and I had these same things pweessed only last week. I wegard Skimpole as a beast. Still, I have given him a fearful thwashin'."

"Is he going to give up writing the sonnets?"



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Skimpole crossed to Tom Merry's bed and shook him by the shoulder. Tom Merry started out of his slumber and hit out with his right. "Yoop!" Skimpole received the blow on the nose and sat down with a gasp.

"No; he refused to do so. But I think I should have brought him to terms if Mr. Wailton hadn't come in at the wrong moment," said Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha! That's the worst of having masters in the school," said Blake gravely—"they're always coming along at the wrong moment!"

"It was weally most exaspewatin'! I shall have to deal with Skimpole again, as it is impos to allow him to go on actin' in this widiculous mannah. Of course, I know he doesn't mean any harm, but it is widiculous, and I don't want Ethel's name to become a joke, you know."

"You are quite right," Blake said seriously. "You are an ass, as a rule, but you're right in this case. Skimpole has got to be stopped."

"If you fellows will back me up—"

"Rather!"

"We could put him through it to-morrow," said D'Arcy. "We could make him regularly sit up, you know, and make him sick of the subject. A fwog's-march wound the quadwangle and a duckin' in the fountain would make him see weason, pewwaps."

Blake wrinkled his brow in thought.

"Skimpole is an ass!" he remarked, "and we ought to be able to jape him out of it. It's no good licking him, Gussy—that will only make him more obstinate. He must be put through it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We must put our heads together over it," said Blake. "Suppose we have a jaw with Tom Merry after tea, and see if we can think of a really ripping wheeze between us? Entre nous, you know, that chap Merry does have good ideas sometin's."

"Yaas, that's wathah a good plan."

"Then it's settled."

And after tea the chums of Study No. 6 consulted with the Terrible Three, and a plot was plotted for the discomfiture of the amateur poet of the School House.

CHAPTER 12.

A Letter for Skimpole!

"DEAR me!" said Skimpole. "That is for me, I suppose."

The poet of St. Jim's had just come into his study after tea.

Skimpole had had tea in the Hall, and had then sat in the quadrangle in the dusk composing the fifty-eighth canto of his great poem. Now he had come in, looking very thoughtful—or, as Lowther described it, moody—and as he entered the study a note stuck in the corner of the looking-glass caught his eye.

The envelope was an ordinary square one, and upon it, in a somewhat large hand, was written: "Herbert Skimpole, Esq." Skimpole blinked at it for a moment before taking it down.

"That must be for me," he murmured. "But I really wonder who has taken the trouble to leave a note for me, instead of speaking to me?"

"That's not for you," said Gore, entering the study as Skimpole murmured the words aloud, and taking down the letter; "it is for me."

"You are quite mistaken, Gore," said the St. Jim's poet mildly, "it is addressed to me."

"That makes no difference. The word 'Esquire' shows that it can't be for you!" grinned Gore. "As a sincere Determinist, you are bound to ignore absurd distinctions of that sort."

"Yes, but——"

"As the note can't be for you, it must be for me, as I share this study," said Gore, slitting the envelope open with his finger.

"Gore, you must not open my letter!"

"It isn't your letter!"

"Give it to me!"

"Shan't!"

"As a sincere Determinist, I am opposed to violence in every shape and form," said Skimpole; "but if you do not hand over my letter, Gore, I shall be compelled to strike you!"

"You'll be ready for a funeral the next minute, then," said Gore. "This letter can't be for you; it's in a girl's hand, and what girl could possibly write to you?"

Skimpole started.

"Are you sure?" he exclaimed.

"Of course I am! You see, it must be for me."

"On the contrary, that circumstance makes it certain that the letter is for me," said Skimpole. "Besides, it's addressed to me!"

"Well, I'm going to read it."

"You're not."

"We'll see," said Gore, taking the letter out of the envelope. "My hat, this will be ripping fun! I knew our champion ass was in love, and there will be some further information in this letter!"

"Give it to me!"

"Rats!"

Tom Merry looked in at the door. He stepped forward and grasped Gore's wrist just as the bully of the Shell was unfolding the letter. Gore looked up with a start and an angry scowl.

"Let go my wrist, Tom Merry!"

Tom Merry's eyes flashed with scorn.

"You were going to read Skimpole's letter, Gore?"

"It is nothing to do with you!"

"Give Skimpole his letter."

"Shan't!"

Tom Merry pushed back his cuffs. Gore quailed before the gleam in his eyes, and, with a forced laugh, flung the letter on the table.

"Of course, I was only joking!" he said.

"Of course," assented Tom Merry. "But the joke has gone quite far enough. You'd better take your letter away, Skimpole, or Gore will start joking again when my back is turned."

"If you think I'm afraid of you, Tom Merry——"

"Oh, shut up, Gore! We all know how brave you are—towards small boys and weedy specimens like Skimmy."

"Really, Merry——"

"Oh, cut along, Skimmy!"

"If you did a little more cricket and a little less sonneting, you wouldn't be so weedy."

"I am much obliged to you for your interfering, Tom Merry. Although I am vastly Gore's superior intellectually, he is physically stronger than I am. I am very much obliged to you!"

And Skimpole took his letter and scuttled away with it. Tom Merry followed, and closed the door of the study. Then he entered his own, in which Lowther and Manners, Blake and D'Arcy, were waiting.

Tom Merry shut the door and then burst into a chuckle. Blake looked up inquiringly from the draught-table, where he was playing with Manners.

"Hallo! What are you chuckling at, Merry?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Skimmy's got his letter. It was lucky I was on the watch, though. Gore nearly had it from him, and that would have spoiled the fun."

"Good!" said Lowther. "Now we've only got to wait developments!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Meanwhile, Skimpole had hurried out of the School House. He had the letter tightly gripped in his hand, and his heart was beating violently. Gore's statement that it was in a feminine hand had thrown him into flutter. Was it an answer to his touching sonnet to Cousin Ethel?

It seemed impossible to Skimpole that anybody could read his sonnet without being touched and moved, and naturally the object of his adoration must have a tender heart. It was evident that his love was reciprocated.

He hurried into a lonely spot in the quadrangle, and opened the letter in the light of the moon, just showing in a silver crescent over the corner of the gymnasium roof. The hand was a large one, and looked like that of a school-girl. But Skimpole was unacquainted with Cousin Ethel's writing, so that was no clue to him.

"Dear me!" murmured Skimpole, adjusting his spectacles. "I am greatly excited! Is it possible that the object of my adoration is equally permeated with a yearning for the ineffable? Is it possible that during our conversation by the

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river to-day my intellectual powers struck her and awoke her admiration? She seemed pleased when Tom Merry came, and yet girls are so clever at disguising their feelings. Yes, it must be so!"

And he read the letter. It ran as follows:

"If the writer of the sonnet is in earnest, will he come to the woodshed at eleven o'clock to-night to meet one who is also a yearner after the ineffability of the inexplicable? One who amid the giddy throng pines for a kindred soul with whom to exchange elevated thoughts and poetic outpourings and soarings!"

There was no signature, but Skimpole did not need that. The reference to the sonnet was evidence enough as to whom the writer was.

"Dear me!" murmured Skimpole. "It is indeed as I thought—how utterly absurd it was, when you come to think of it, for either Figgins or Tom Merry to enter into competition with me! What is Figgins' athleticism, or Tom Merry's good looks, compared with the vast intellectual endowments I can pit against them? I shall certainly keep this appointment, and exchange thoughts and poetic outpourings with the dear girl."

And Skimpole kissed the letter.

"And she returned my sonnet by D'Arcy, in order to throw him off the track," murmured Skimpole. "It was very clever. D'Arcy has not the faintest suspicion that I have cut him out. I am sorry for D'Arcy, and I must be careful not to show any exultation or triumph in my manner to wound him."

Skimpole read the letter through again and put it into his pocket. He slowly took his way back to the School House, his brows corrugated with thought.

"I shall certainly keep the appointment," he murmured. "But, when I come to think of it, eleven o'clock at night is an awkward hour. I wish it was possible to see the dear girl and fix an earlier time. The whole place will be in bed, and the door's locked up."

Skimpole started out of his reverie as he felt a slap on the shoulder. Tom Merry stood before him.

"Hallo!" said Tom genially. "Wherefore that wrinkled brow? Are you composing the hundred-and-seventy-seventh canto of a poem?"

"No," said Skimpole; "at the present moment I am not composing any poem. But if you like I will read you some of the stanzas I have already composed. I cannot read you the whole manuscript, as D'Arcy has brutally destroyed part of it."

"Don't bother!" said Tom Merry hastily. "I'll hear it another time. I——"

"It would be no trouble——"

"I've sent in your poem with the copy for the 'Weekly,'" said Tom Merry, changing the subject. "I had to cut out six lines to make it go in. That doesn't matter, does it?"

Skimpole blinked.

"I am afraid it will alter the sense of it, Merry."

"Well, I could not find any sense in it," said the Editor of "Tom Merry's Weekly." "I read it through after altering, and there didn't seem to be any less meaning than before. By the way, it was meant to mean something I suppose?"

"Certainly!"

"What did it imply, then?"

"The fervid outpourings of a soaring soul——"

"Oh, I see! Well, I expect it will be all right with a few lines cut out. It will make it more like modern poetry, too, if you have to guess what it means. I say, Skimmy, are you game for a lark to-night?"

"A lark!" said Skimpole. "What sort of a lark?"

"How do you like the idea of raiding the Fourth Form dormitory after eleven o'clock?" asked Tom Merry.

Skimpole started.

At eleven o'clock he had to be in the woodshed, exchanging elevated thoughts and poetic outpourings with his charmer. It would be distinctly annoying if the Shell were awake and on the warpath at that hour. His excursion to the woodshed could hardly be kept a secret.

"I say, Merry, I—I—I wish——"

"You wish to join in the raid? Good!"

"No; I don't mean that. I wish you'd put off the raid till another night, and then I'd join you with pleasure."

"Why not to-night, Skimmy?"

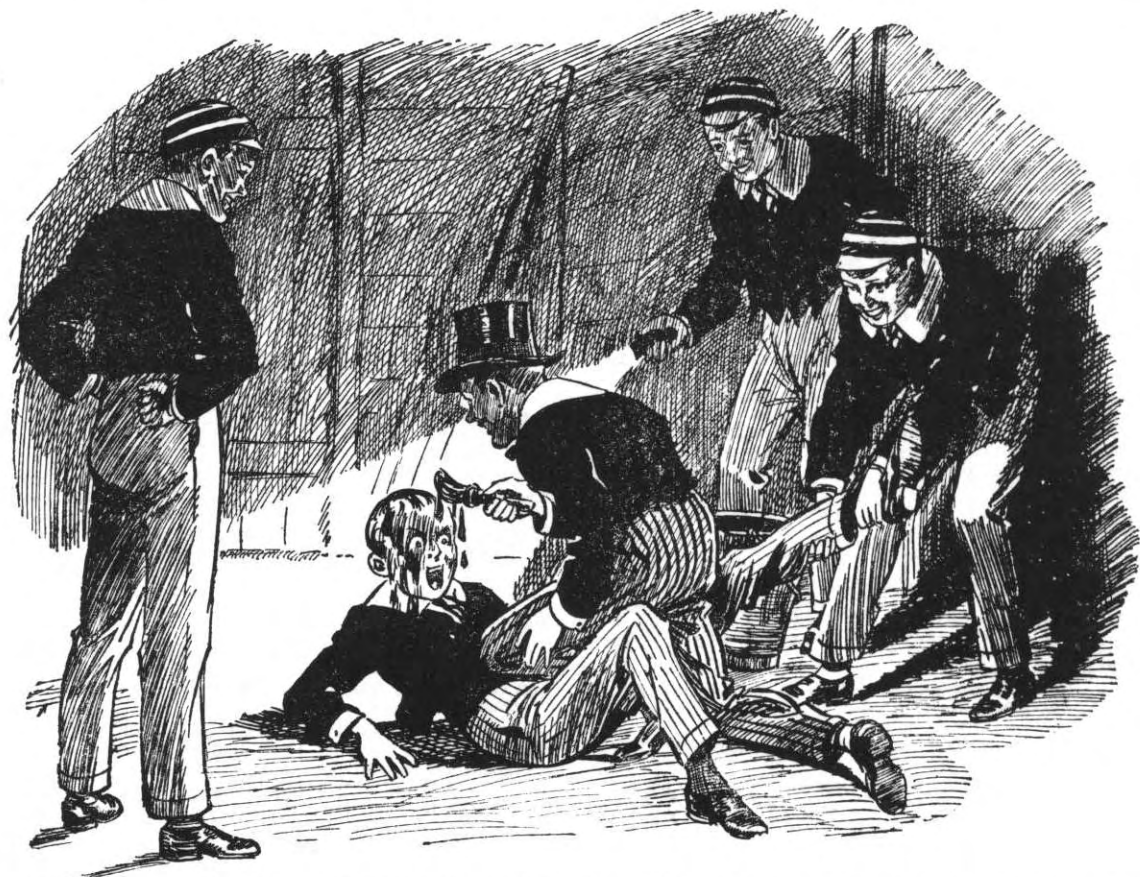
"I—I've got an engagement."

"Oh, I mean after lights-out!"

"But my engagement is after lights-out," said Skimpole. "In fact, I was thinking of taking you into my confidence over the matter."

"Thank you!" said Tom Merry.

"Not at all! I want you to help me. I have to leave



"Ow—yow—wow!" Skimpole howled and struggled wildly as D'Arcy commenced to paint his face with the tar-brush. He opened his mouth to yell again, and received a dab of the brush that made him shut it promptly! "Gug-gug! Groooh!"

the School House shortly before eleven o'clock to—to keep an appointment—"

"My hat!"

"I have never broken bounds by night before," said Skimpole. "As a Determinist I am bound to obey all laws and rules until they are proved to be wrong, and so I have always endeavoured to keep the college rules. I believe that you have been out of the House after lights-out, though."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Yes, I think so, Skimmy. Only for fun, of course."

"Yes, of course. You are not the kind of fellow to break bounds, like Gore, for instance, for evil purposes," said Skimpole. "As you know how to get out of the House after it is locked up, however, I should like to have your assistance in this matter. Under a better system of school government, I should acquaint the Housemaster with my desire to go out to-night, and ask him to lend me a latchkey; but under the present circumstances that is scarcely feasible."

"Well, you could do it," said Tom Merry. "Only you'd be more likely to get a licking than a latchkey, that's all."

"I fear so. The liberty due to every junior is not considered at all in making the rules of a school—"

"Hard cheese, isn't it? But if you want to get out you've come to the right person for help. What's the matter with being lowered on a rope from the window of the Shell dormitory?"

Skimpole looked dubious.

"Would it be safe?"

"Well, I've done it, and I'm no cleverer or pluckier than you are, Skimmy, and I haven't your intellectual powers, either."

"That is true. I suppose I can venture to be lowered on a rope from the dormitory window," said Skimpole. "You alone could not manage it, though."

"Oh, Manners and Lowther will help, of course!"

"What about the raid you were speaking of?"

"That can be left over till another time."

"I am really very much obliged to you, Merry! You have got me out of what might have proved a serious difficulty."

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry. "I'm willing to help you

to get out of the dormitory window, understand. I'm not responsible for anything that follows."

"Oh, exactly! I should not be so unjust as to hold you responsible for anything that followed, Merry."

"I don't know. You might change your views about that when the time comes."

"Oh, not at all!"

"Then that's arranged," said Tom Merry. "At eleven o'clock to-night we shift you out of the window of the Shell dormitory."

"Not at eleven, Merry. I have to be at the woodshed by eleven—I mean, have to keep my appointment at eleven o'clock. I think a quarter to eleven is better."

"Very well, then, make it a quarter to eleven."

And Skimpole went on his way rejoicing. Tom Merry also went on his way rejoicing; and when he told his chums of that chat with Skimpole, they rejoiced also.

CHAPTER 13.

Skimpole Keeps the Appointment!

DARKNESS and silence enwrapped the ancient building of St. Jim's. The quarter to the hour had chimed out from the tower, and silence had fallen again, broken only by the distant noise of a dog howling at the moon. Over the old school the moon floated in a mass of clouds, shedding a dim light on the quadrangle. There was at least one person in the Shell dormitory in the School House who was wide awake, and he started up from bed as the quarter struck.

It was Skimpole.

Skimpole's heart was beating. He was excited. It was his first appointment of this kind, and though he wished it had been made at a more reasonable hour, he was looking forward to it very much. To exchange poetic soarings and outpourings in the woodshed with a charming girl who knew how to prize intellect above mere good looks, was an attractive prospect to the amateur poet.

"Tom Merry!"

Skimpole whispered the name, fully expecting the hero of

the Shell to be as wide awake as he was himself. There was no reply.

"Tom Merry!"

Still silence!

"Dear me!" murmured Skimpole. "He has actually forgotten, and gone to sleep. Dear me, that is very thoughtless and careless of Tom Merry. I suppose I had better shake him. I cannot be late for my appointment."

He crossed to Tom Merry's bed and shook the leader of the Terrible Three by the shoulder.

Tom Merry started out of slumber and hit out with his right. Skimpole received it on his nose, and sat down on the floor with a gasp.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry, sitting up in bed.

"Really, you—you—Ow, my nose!"

"I'm sorry! Did I hit you?"

"Yes, Merry, you certainly did, and with considerable force, too, upon the end of my nose, and—"

"I was startled. I was dreaming about a scrap with the New House kids," explained Tom Merry. "Sorry! Is it time yet?"

"Yes," said Skimpole, rising and rubbing his nose ruefully. "It is turned the quarter to eleven, Merry."

"Wake up Manners and Lowther, then."

That was not needed. Skimpole's bump on the floor had awakened the chums of the Shell. Manners and Lowther were already getting out of bed.

"We're all ready," said Lowther. "I hope you didn't forget the rope, Tom?"

"I've got it under my bolster."

"Pray let us lose no time," said Skimpole. "It would be inexcusable to be late for the appointment."

"Oh, horrid!" said Lowther. "You must never keep a lady waiting, especially in a woodshed—"

"Shut up, Monty!" said Tom Merry warningly. "Open the window, and don't jaw!"

"Right you are!"

The window was high up in the wall, and the chums had wheeled a bed there to stand upon.

Skimpole adjusted his spectacles, and blinked into the starlight. The closer he came to the task the less he liked it. But there was no turning back now.

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry. "I'll tie it under your arms. Shove this blanket round you first, so that the rope won't hurt you."

"That is very thoughtful of you, Merry."

"Yes, I'm an awfully thoughtful chap when I start thinking. You had better jump out of the window, and we'll hold the rope."

"It might slip through your fingers."

"Well, that's hardly likely to happen."

Skimpole shivered.

"If you don't mind, I'd rather lower myself slowly from the sill," he said. "I should feel more easy in my mind that way."

"Oh, just as you please! You would show more nerve by jumping out."

"I—I don't particularly want to show any nerve."

"Very well! Out you go!"

The rope was secured round Skimpole. Tom Merry was very careful to make it safe. He didn't want any accident to happen to Skimpole.

The amateur poet slid out of the window to the sill, and the Terrible Three commenced to lower him. They did not do it in the most comforting way. The rope ran out slowly for a few feet, and then, with a sudden jerk, then another pause, and another jerk.

Skimpole swung round dizzily, wondering whether he was on his head or his heels, awake, or dreaming.

"D-d-don't be so-so-so-sudden!" he gasped. "Really—Oh!"

His feet touched the ground.

Skimpole detached the rope. It whisked up into the air, and disappeared into the window of the Shell dormitory. The hour struck from the clock tower.

"Dear me, I shall be late!"

Skimpole ran off at top speed in the direction of the woodshed. The Terrible Three chuckled at the window of the Shell dormitory. They did not believe that Skimpole would be gone so long as he imagined.

Skimpole reached the door of the woodshed. It was unfastened and ajar, showing that someone had arrived and entered. The amateur poet opened it wider.

"Are you there?"

He whispered the words in trembling tones. His heart was beating like a hammer now between shyness and excitement.

"Are you there?"

An unexpected voice replied from the dense darkness of the interior of the shed:

"Yaas, wathah!"

Skimpole staggered back in amazement.

It was the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and it flashed into his brain, as he heard it, that he was the victim of a practical joke.

But it was too late to retreat.

Even as he gasped with amazement, unseen hands gripped him in the darkness, and he was hauled into the woodshed and flattened on the ground, and a knee was planted on his chest.

"Got the beastlavy wottah!" said the voice of the hidden D'Arcy. "Bwing the pail of tar!"

CHAPTER 14.

Skimpole Falls Out of Love!

SKIMPOLE struggled desperately.

"Leggo! Lemme gerrup! Beasts! Yow!"

"The wottah is stwugglin' feahfully!" said D'Arcy.

"Lend me a hand with him, Blake! Hold his legs, Dig! Sit on his fat head, Hewwies!"

"Certainly!" said three voices together.

"I say," exclaimed Skimpole, "don't! Please don't be so rough! I really wish you would let me get up, and would take yourselves off. I am expecting a lady here."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is no laughing matter. She is coming—in fact, should be here by now! She will be frightened if she sees—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I consider this most ungentlemanly. I—"

"You uttah wottah!"

"Let me rise! I must—"

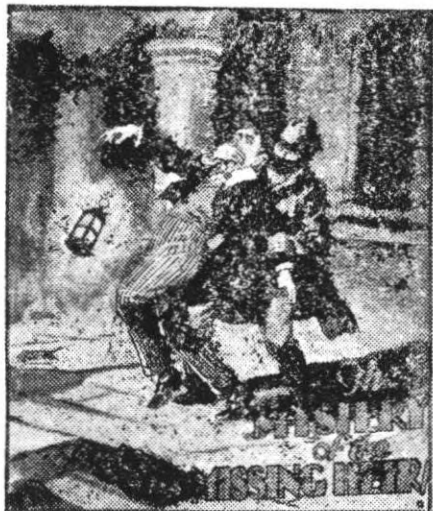
"You silly ass!" said Blake. "We've got a pail of tar here, and we're going to anoint you with it, unless—"

"Ow! Wow! Help!"

"I'll put some in your mouth if you don't shut up. Look here, we've laid this little ambush to give you a lesson."

"THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING HEIR!"

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"How did you know—"

"Oh, we knew that letter would fetch you!" grinned Blake. "I copied my sister's handwriting to make it look like a girl's."

"Eh?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If the writer of the sonnet is in earnest," chuckled Digby, "will he come to the woodshed at eleven o'clock to-night?"

"To meet one," continued Herries, "who is also a yearner after the ineffability of the inexplicable."

"One," said Blake, "who, amid the giddy throng, pines for a kindred spirit with whom to exchange elevated thoughts and poetic outpourings and soarings."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Skimpole could only gasp. The letter was safe in his pocket, and he knew that the chums could have had no opportunity of seeing it since he received it. The whole plot was clear to him now.

"You—you wrote the letter, Blake!" he gasped.

"Certainly!"

"You made me think that Cousin Ethel—"

"If you hadn't been a silly, conceited ass, you wouldn't have thought anything of the kind."

"Oh, really!"

"You've got to stop this rot, Skimpole."

"Yaas, wathah! We insist upon your stopping this rot, Skimpole, deah boy. You are not to write any more sonnets, never to see or speak to my Cousin Ethel again, and to immediately fall out of love."

"Impossible!"

"Then you can be tarred all ovah for a start, and if that doesn't cure you, deah boy, we'll feathah you into the bargain."

"Really, I—I— Listen to me!"

"I'm afraid we haven't time to listen to your wavings, deah boy. Pway bwing that pail of tar heah, Hewwies, old man!"

"Here it is!"

"Good! Is the brush in it?"

"Yes. Here—"

"Ow! I didn't tell you to shove it into my face, you silly ass!"

"Well, I thought you couldn't see it."

"You have smothered my face with beastly tar."

"Never mind. Don't waste time growling over trifles. Give Skimpole a dose!"

"Don't!" gasped Skimpole. "Please don't! Why, it would take hours to get it off! I object most strongly—"

"That won't make any difference, Skimpole. You have got to undertake to do as I have told you, or else you are in for it! Now—yes or no?"

"No!" exclaimed Skimpole. "Certainly not. I—ow—yow—wow!"

D'Arcy was in deadly earnest. He commenced to paint the face of the helpless poet with the tarbrush, by the light of an electric torch held by Herries. Skimpole struggled and writhed desperately. He opened his mouth to yell and received a dab of the tarbrush that made him shut it again.

"Ow-w-w-wow!"

"Have you had enough, deah boy?"

"Oh! Oh! Wow-oooooh! Grooooooh!"

"Have some more, then."

D'Arcy plunged the brush into the tar bucket and brought it out thick with tar. He dabbed it on Skimpole's face, and painted away.

"Don't! Ow! Wow! Help! Stop him!"

D'Arcy considerably ceased his operations.

"Are you going to listen to weason, Skimpole?"

"No—yes! Yes!"

"Will you give up witin poetry to Cousin Ethel, and nevah let her have the faintest ideah that you are such a silly ass as you weally are?"

"No—yes!"

"Will you pwomise, honah bwight, to fall out of love immediately?"

This was rather a hard demand; but Skimpole was in no position to refuse. He gasped out an assent.

"Good!" said D'Arcy. "Then I think we may be satisfied, deah boys. I wegard Skimpole as a faithful ass, but I believe he has pwinciple, and will keep his word."

"As a sincere Determinist it is impossible for me to break my word."

"Vewy good! I will trust you! I am sowwy to have to use you wuffy, deah boy, as I disapprove of wuffness on principle. I often find the wuffness of these boundahs vewy twyin'. But you leave me no alternative when you persist in actin' the giddy ox. I hope I have cured you completely—"

"It is impossible to part with the ideal of the ineffable."

"That is all wight, so long as you keep to ideals," said Arthur Augustus. "It is when you come down to the weal that you become an insufferable twouble to ewewybudy. I cannot allow my cousin to be bathed by a silly ass!"

"Certainly not!" said Blake. "But Skimmy will keep his word—I'll say that for him—though he's a raving maniac on most points. He can go back to Determinism, or become an amateur detective again, if he likes."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The knee was removed from Skimpole's chest; there was a sound of retreating footsteps. The chums of Study No. 6 were gone.

Skimpole slowly rose to his feet.

"Dear me!" he murmured. "I have been used very roughly. And the letter was not written by Ethel, after all. That is very unpleasant. It is possible that, after all, she does not reciprocate my attachment. She may even be annoyed by it. That is very unpleasant. Upon the whole, I think I acted rather hastily in coming down from the ideal to the real. I think I should have done better to allow my poetic spirit still to soar in the blue depths of empyrean instead of descending to the common things of earthly life. I think— Dear me! How ever shall I get all this tar off my face?"

The amateur poet ruefully took his way back to the School House. Blake & Co. had disappeared, and were doubtless in their dormitory by this time. Skimpole arrived under his window and found three grinning faces looking down at him in the starlight. Blake had evidently given the chums of the Shell a word of information as he went in.

"Are you there, Tom Merry? Pray let down the rope."

"I'm waiting for Skimpole."

"I am Skimpole."

"You're not! You're a giddy nigger! Skimpole was a blonde when he went out, and 't's a moral impossibility for him to come back such a pronounced brunette."

"Really, Tom Merry, this is no time for joking! I have been taken in in a most outrageous way, and smothered with tar in the woodshed."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Please let down the rope."

The rope came whisking down so suddenly that Skimpole jumped as it dropped on his head.

"Really, you know, I—"

"Oh, catch hold! We want to go to bed."

"Certainly, but—"

"Buck up!"

Skimpole fastened the rope under his armpits, and was drawn up to the window of the Shell dormitory. A closer view of his face sent the chums of the Shell almost into convulsions. They dragged the amateur poet into the room, and landed him gasping on the floor and untied the rope.

"My only hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "You look ripping, Skimmy—you do, really!"

"Black, but comely," grinned Monty Lowther.

"I have had a most unpleasant time," said Skimpole. "If any of you fellows would oblige me by scrubbing my face—"

"Can't be did! If you go about recklessly falling in love and making appointments in woodsheds, you must take the consequences."

"Let me explain."

"My dear chap, we know more about it than you do. You thought you were going for some poetic, soulful outpourings; we thought you were going for a tarring, and we were right. I hope it will be a lesson to you, Skimmy, not to be such a howling ass."

"Really, Tom Merry—"

"Good-night!"

And the Terrible Three went to bed. Skimpole went to his washstand and began to wash. But tar was not easily removed. He scrubbed and scrubbed till the skin was red and raw, but the tar did not come off.

Tom Merry awoke for a moment an hour later and looked drowsily out of bed. Skimpole was still standing at his washstand patiently scrubbing away.

Tom Merry gave a sleepy chuckle and closed his eyes again.

Skimpole presented a sleepy and somewhat piebald appearance in the morning. But he had benefited by his experience. He confided to Tom Merry later in the day that upon reflection he had resolved to stick to the ideal and leave the real alone.

Cousin Ethel received no more sonnets, but she long remained Skimpole's ideal.

THE END.

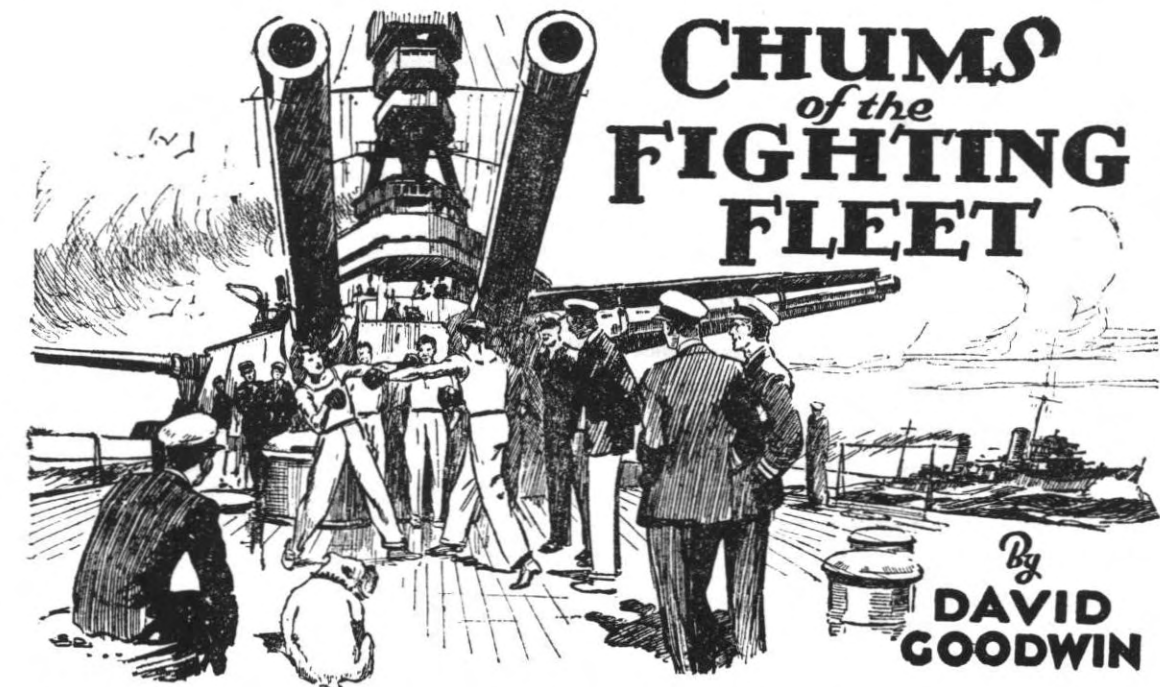
(Tom Merry disappears in next week's thrilling yarn, "THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING HEIR!" Don't miss it, boys.)

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MEET NED AND JINKS, OUR MIDDY HEROES, AND READ OF THEIR LIVELY ADVENTURES.

CHUMS of the FIGHTING FLEET

By
**DAVID
GOODWIN**



Ned Hardy and his pal Jinks, muddies on the Victorious, are determined to clear the name of Ned's brother Ralph, who was dismissed the service after a robbery. Ned believes he was "framed" by Russian spies. On holiday Ned and Jinks set out in the Merlin with Lieutenant Watson hunting "coupers," who sell illegal drinks to fishermen on the Dogger Bank. Ned falls into the hands of Long Dennis, a notorious "couper," and when he fires Dennis' ship Ned is tied to the mast and left there. Jinks and Watson arrive just in time, and the rescue party jump into the sea as the burning boat is about to sink!

The Taking of Long Dennis!

WITH a swift dash through the flames they hurled themselves into the sea, the gunner and Jinks bearing Ned between them, their arms under his shoulders. The plunge down into the black waves was a glorious relief, after the scorching breath of the burning vessel. Up they came, gasping, Sheriff supporting Ned's limp form.

"This way—the boat!" roared the gunner.

The Merlin, unable to make fast to the burning smack, had slid past and lay to. One of her boats was already dashing towards the men in the water, and in a few moments Ned was lifted aboard her, and the others helped in after him.

"Get alongside!" cried the petty officer at the tiller.

"Was there anybody else on the smack?" panted Jinks.

"If there was, Heaven help him!" returned the gunner grimly. "Look yonder, sir!"

The Black Witch was drifting slowly to leeward, blazing like a furnace, and as the crew of the boat looked at her, her decks suddenly lifted amidships with a roar, and a column of blue flame leaped to the height of the mast as the second hold full of spirit barrels caught fire.

"Only just in time," said the gunner. "An' thank Heaven's mercy we wasn't two minutes longer on the way!"

Rough but tender hands were doing all they could for Ned as the boat pulled back. His eyes were open, and he was breathing faintly; but he lay on the floor gratings like a log, unable to speak.

A cheer rang from end to end of the Merlin when Ned was taken aboard, and the crew learned that he was living. A terrible fear was yet at Jinks' heart lest they were too late. He followed below with Watson as they carried Ned into the cabin.

"The clothes are nearly burnt off his legs," said Watson, tending Ned swiftly. "And he's had suffocation and shock enough to kill a fellow. But I believe his life's out of danger. It's been a near thing. Help me to get him out of his clothes, and get him into a berth. It'll be long before he stands on his feet again, poor chap!"

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"How did it happen?" said Jinks furiously. "Who tied him up on that burning ship?"

"That's what I want to know," said Watson grimly. "I'd give a year's pay if Hardy could speak, for he might put us on to the track in time, and we could avenge this ghastly business. By George, he's coming to! Give me that brandy!"

Ned opened his eyes feebly. The spirit revived him enough to speak.

"How d'you feel, old chap?" asked Jinks anxiously.

"Don't know; pretty queer," said Ned faintly, closing his eyes again. "Where am I? In the old gun-room?"

"On the Merlin, safe as a house," said Lieutenant Watson. "Only one thing we want to know. Who tied you to that mast?"

"Long Dennis," murmured Ned, blinking.

"Long Dennis! What became of him?"

"With an effort Ned managed to reply.

"Boarded a Dutchman," he said, in a faint whisper.

"Took Dennis, crew—Simmons, too, I think. Dutch smack, with gaff-topsail. Don't know any more. Think you'd better—"

His head fell back, and he relapsed into unconsciousness.

"That Dutch trawler we saw, I'll bet!" exclaimed Watson, jumping for the companion-ladder.

Lieutenant Watson dashed up to the bridge. The Merlin was soon flying to the northward like a hound on the trail. The word had gone swiftly round the ship that Ned's plight had been the work of Long Dennis, and that they were in full pursuit, with every hope of catching him. The couper would have got short shrift at the hands of any man on the Merlin at that moment.

Jinks made Ned as comfortable as he could below, and with great relief saw that the swoon was passing into a quiet sleep. Jinks joined Lieutenant Watson on the bridge.

"It'll be the mischief's own job catching that trawler!" said Watson. "The night's as black as pitch."

"It's my belief, sir, he'll lay a course for Amsterdam!" said Jinks. "If only that searchlight— By Jove, here it comes! Have you got it to work, Johnson?"

"Ay, ay, sir! She's all in trim now!"

"Thank goodness!" said Watson. "Now we've got a chance. We can't be so far behind him!"

The searchlight was fixed, and in another minute its dazzling three-mile-long dagger of light was sweeping the dark sea like a gigantic eye.

"That's making Long Dennis scratch himself, if he can see it!" said Jinks viciously, as the Merlin steamed swiftly onward, her searchlight sweeping a huge circle all around and to the far horizon.

The look-out men were alert to catch the first glimpse of the quarry. A strong breeze was blowing up rain from the south.

"A gaff-topsail we've to look for," said Watson. "Smart of young Hardy to spot that, and have the sense to tell us first thing! Not many Dutchmen carry that rig."

"There go two trawlers!" cried Darby, as the light suddenly showed a couple of smacks sailing side by side a long distance to windward.

Two pairs of glasses were instantly directed at them as the ray lit them up. But both of them had the common, jib-headed topsails that eight trawlers out of ten carry, and the Merlin was spared a fruitless chase.

"Try out in the other direction," said Watson. And turned the gunboat on an easterly course.

Suddenly a tall red sail was sighted as the searchlight flashed past it, stopped, hovered back again, and then lit up a big Belgian ketch with a raking mizzen and main gaff-topsail.

"Now we have her!" cried Jinks. "That's her! See, she's got a double crew aboard! It'll be the Black Witch's lot as well as her own. There must be twenty aboard her."

"We'll settle accounts with Long Dennis, I think," said Lieutenant Watson quietly. "Man and arm the whaleboat, boatswain!"

"She's going to try to run for it!" exclaimed Jinks, as the big trawler suddenly threw round on the other tack.

"Forward, there! Give her a shell across the bows!" said Lieutenant Watson sharply. "If that doesn't stop her, cut her mast down!" He watched the smack keenly. "If that cloud of mist and rain reaches us before we've got her, she may give us the slip yet!"

It was a near thing, as Jinks saw. The sea-fret was driving fast from the south, and once into it the searchlight would be useless, and the trawler invisible.

Boom! went the first shell from one of the light quick-firers forward. It sang across the path of the trawler, but she slashed away towards the oncoming wall of sea-fog and rain.

Boom—crack! The Dutchmen's mast toppled over at the cap and fell headlong, the whole topmast hanging down like a broken wing. The smack staggered round, head to wind, and lay motionless and crippled.

"Away, the whaler!" cried Watson, wishing from the bottom of his heart that he could lead the boarding-party, instead of waiting in command of the gunboat till the smack was taken. "Make sure of Long Dennis!"

Jinks and a petty officer, Tom Sheriff, the gunner, and six seamen dashed away in the whaleboat straight for the crippled smack, Jinks steering.

But before they even reached her the seamen saw that there was a rare tussle in progress upon the trawler's decks already. Shouts and oaths arose, men were grappling with each other, and Jinks' eye caught the flash of knives.

"Give way, men!" he shouted. "Put your backs into it! What the blazes are they up to there?"

"It's Long Dennis an' his men fightin' with the Dutch crew, sir!" cried the petty officer, who sat next to Jinks in the sternsheets. "That lanky swab in the jersey is he! I know him!"

The P. O. was right. Long Dennis and his gang, furious with the Dutchmen for stopping because their topmast was shot down, had urged them to continue their flight and take their chance in the mist which had now swept down upon trawler and gunboat alike, and which had already blotted out the Merlin, only a hundred yards or so away.

The Dutchmen were all for safety first, and Long Dennis and his men, frantic to get away, at once tried to force the men to run for it, topmast or no topmast. The result was a hand-to-hand fight, in which Clegg and his gang were quickly overpowering the foreign crew.

"Pull away!" cried Jinks in the whaleboat. "Dashed good thing for everybody if the brutes all cut each other's throats. But I'm ordered to take them prisoners. Stand by to board!"

"Get to the helm, Ike!" yelled Long Dennis to one of his men, as he struck down one of the last of the resisting crew. "Round with her! We'll dodge the beggars yet! Let fly the jib-sheets, Joe!"

He turned and shook his fists at the whaleboat, now not a dozen lengths away.

"Keep off, you dirty dogs!" he roared. "D'y'e see this?"

He made a plunge in amongst the crew huddled to leeward, and dragged out a draggled, exhausted-looking man in the uniform of a naval artificer. It was Simmons, white and worn out, powerless to defend himself; the coup r held him by the throat with one hand.

"D'y'e see your mate?" roared Clegg savagely to the whaleboat's crew. "D'y'e see him? You come a yard nearer an' you'll get his corpse! Keep off, I say, or I'll stick him like a pig!"

He drew his own dirk and made ready to spring as the wretched Simmons writhed and cried out. Long Dennis shouted to his mate at the wheel to put the helm hard up.

Jinks was aghast. It seemed that Simmons' life would be the price of Long Dennis' liberty.

"He daren't do it!" gasped Jinks. "Pull, men, with all your might!"

He drew his own dirk and made ready to spring as the whaleboat dashed up to the trawler.

Long Dennis gave a cry of rage, and, tightening his grip vengefully upon his victim, raised the long blade to strike.

Crack!

The petty officer next to Jinks whipped out his revolver and took a swift snapshot. Long Dennis relaxed his grip of Simmons, and fell with a choking cry, rolling into the scuppers as the knife tinkled across the deck.

"Well done!" shouted Jinks. "Aboard with you, lads!"

He sprang on to the trawler's deck, dirk in hand, with his men close behind him, and launched himself straight at the Black Witch's steersman.

The Capture of the St. Jean!

THE rousing cheer and rush of the bluejackets drove the couper's crew back towards the stern. But, led by the big ruffian from the late Black Witch, they made a quick rally, and faced the boarding party. For the fog and rain had closed down upon them, and the Merlin was blotted out and no longer visible.

"They've lost the gunboat! At 'em, lads!" yelled a voice. The next moment both sides were in the thick of a desperate struggle.

The couper's crew had all the advantage in numbers, and every one of them was armed.

The big steersman fired a revolver almost in Jinks' face. The bullet grazed his ear as he dashed forward, and the powder stung. The steersman struck furiously with the revolver-butt, and received Jinks' dirk through his arm.

He grappled with the middy, and they both came to the deck with a heavy thump, the fight raging all round them.

Jinks managed to extricate himself and spring up, active as a terrier. He had lost his dirk in the fall, and the steersman whipped out a long sheath-knife.

Jinks kicked the knife out of the man's hand; promptly flung himself on the prisoner, and sat on the nape of his neck. He had secured the leader of the enemy.

The scuffle was sharp and short—so much so that Jinks had scarcely floored his man when it was all over. There was a splutter of pistol-shots, a clash or two of iron, and the crew, after one savage assault upon the boarders, fell back and scattered.

Four of the Black Witch's crew were down, nor did any of them stir again. Four more were wounded, and of the bluejackets only one was at all seriously hurt. The dash of the Merlin's trained fighting-men was too much for the mongrel crew before them, and before another minute passed the remainder fled down the companion-way, and vanished into the cabins, scuttling for refuge like rabbits.

"Slam the hatches over them!" shouted Jinks. "Set a guard over the lot!"

"Where's the skipper o' this pigsty?" cried Tom Sheriff.

"Here!" said Jinks, who had got hold of the big steersman's revolver, and was still sitting on his neck.

"I give up!" growled the man sullenly.

"Where are the irons?"

"Six pairs in the whaleboat, sir," said Sheriff.

"Get 'em out quick, then, and make sure of these fellows," said Jinks.

The irons were soon brought, and the steersman secured with them to ensure his giving no further trouble.

"You flatfoots can fight!" he growled. "But if my lot had been all white men, instead of half-mongrel Russians, you'd never ha' got us!"

"We'd have got you, or forty more like you!" returned the petty officer coolly.

"Handle him gently," said Jinks; "his arm's punctured. I'll dress it myself as soon as all's straight. Who's got Long Dennis? That's the chap who tried to stab Simmons, isn't it? How is he?"

"Dead, sir," replied a seaman, turning over the form of Clegg, which had lain in the scuppers where he first fell.

Long Dennis' eyes were sightless, already his huge form was stiffening. The petty officer's bullet had done its work. The North Sea couper's life was closed for ever.

"It's no less than his deserts, after the way he tried to treat Ned!" said Darby grimly. Never again would Dennis Clegg poison a trawler's crew with his rotten liquor, and leave them at the mercy of the winter gales.

A quick examination was made of the other men on deck. Seven had thrown down their weapons and surrendered. These were all disarmed, and a guard put over them. Of the fallen, besides Dennis and the steersman, five were dead and two mortally wounded. The fight, though short, had been fierce while it lasted, for the outnumbered bluejackets fought to kill. If for a moment they had been overwhelmed, every man of them would have been knifed or shot instantly.

"A great fight, lads! Hail the Merlin! Where is she?"

The gunboat was nowhere to be seen—nothing was visible but the dense blanket of fog, the damp from which dripped from the sails and spars like raindrops drumming on the deck.

All hands peered into the mist on every side. They remembered that the Merlin had disappeared for a moment or two when the fog came on, but they had quite expected to find her keeping handy again when the squall was over—in fact, they had wondered why she did not send a second boat off to help when the smacksmen showed fight.

Johnson shouted into the fog. There was no reply—not even the distant beat of screws.

"I thought I heard her siren just now," said Jinks. "Get the megaphone out of the whaleboat. Sheriff, you hail her!"

The big speaking-trumpet, with the seaman-gunner's tremendous voice behind it, boomed the words out:

"Merlin ahoy!"

There was no reply. Nothing but fog and silence.

"No wonder those beggars went for us!" said Jinks. "They thought they could get away with it in the fog. Hail again, Sheriff—keep on shouting!"

The seaman-gunner's voice roared forth again, and presently came the sound of the Merlin's siren in reply, very faint and distant.

"She's a dickens of a way off!" said Jinks. "Round with the smack, and sail her the other way; the sound came from astern."

They did so, for a fitful breeze was blowing with the fog, as it generally does in the North Sea.

Tom kept shouting, and the Merlin's siren hooted again, and the gun was fired, but sounded farther off still. Half a minute later the hoot sounded as if it were right in their ears, on the windward side.

"Starboard your helm!" said Jinks. "We're right on top of her now! Shout away, Tom; we've got her!"

But there was no sign of the gunboat, and a few seconds later the hoot sounded again, far in the other direction.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir," said the petty officer. "It's this 'ere fog. The sound seems to come from all sides at once, an' it's never twice alike. I've often known it like this."

"Hang it all, it's as bad as blind man's buff!" said Jinks impatiently. "Here, four of you, go below with your revolvers, and look after that lot who scuttled down the companion-way. Disarm them, and you'd better tie them up with rope, or they'll be hatching mischief. We must look after ourselves if the Merlin's going to leave us in the lurch like this. There are more of those fellows than there are of us still. Keep her going, Johnson. I'll look after the wounded."

All midshipmen have to go through a course of "first aid," as so many in the ranks, and Jinks knew how to bandage a wound.

He attended to the injured men, and the bluejackets who went below, led by a leading seaman, had no trouble in subduing the remaining fugitives who had taken refuge there. They were imprisoned in the main hold, every man being searched for weapons, and secured with irons. The cut-throat brigade were now perfectly safe, and the leading seaman went on deck and reported.

The smack was still trying to find the Merlin, but it was like a blind man looking for a light in a dark room—or rather worse. The way the fog played tricks with the sense of hearing was astonishing.

Jinks ordered the smack to be hove to, for fear they might dodge each other, and let the Merlin do all the searching for a while, as she had steam power, and could manoeuvre better. The prize crew on the St. Jean kept up a continuous battering on pails and saucepan-lids to let the Merlin know where they were. But the tricks the wind and fog played resulted in the gunboat getting out of range altogether, and her siren was heard no more.

"Well, this is a nice game!" said Jinks impatiently. "Here we are, stuck on this old windjammer, with a cargo of dead men, and the Merlin's goodness knows where. It'll be daylight soon, and when the fog lifts we shall sight her. Johnson, search this stinking old fish-basket, and see what there is in the way of grub!"

A barrel of salt beef was found, some pork, and plenty of biscuits, as well as a demijohn of rum that had probably come from the Black Witch. A square meal was soon tackled thankfully by all hands. Jinks had a tot of rum served out all round, for the men were cold and wet. He also had rations served to the prisoners—dry rations, without rum.

(There are thrilling adventures ahead of Jinks and his prize crew before they rejoin the Merlin. Look out for next week's instalment.)

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