

"COUSIN ETHEL'S BIRTHDAY!"

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**CONTINUOUS
VARIETY!
YOUR FAVOURITE
STARS—
TOM MERRY & Co
INSIDE!**

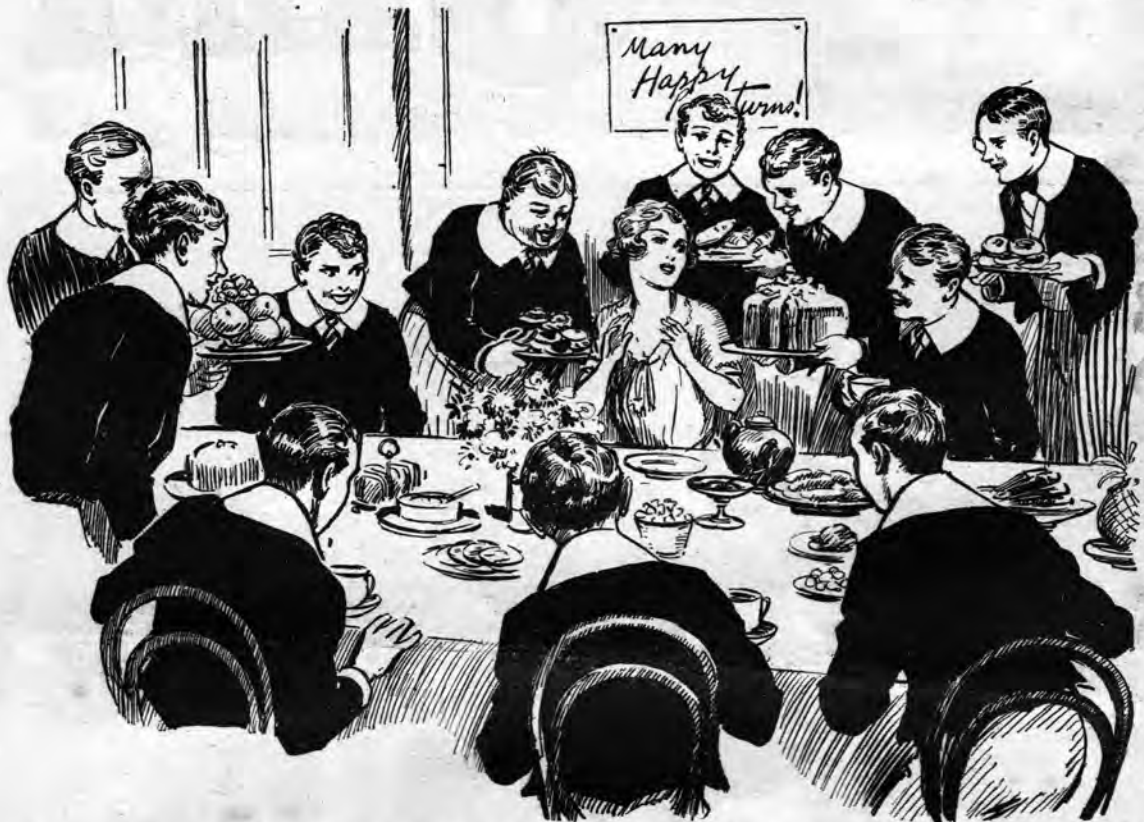
The GEM

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A GRAND STORY OF HOUSE RIVALRY AT ST. JIM'S, FEATURING—

COUSIN ETHEL'S



There is a great celebration at St. Jim's in honour of Cousin Ethel's birthday. But poor old Gussy, who is "spoons" on Ethel, gets cut out by Figgins!

CHAPTER 1. Money is Tight!

TOM MERRY went through his pockets slowly and methodically. Manners and Lowther watched him with interest, not to say anxiety.

The three chums were standing in the porch of the School House at St. Jim's. Morning school was over, and the sunny quadrangle was alive with boys. Through jacket pockets, waistcoat pockets, and trousers pockets Tom Merry went with method and care, but the result was the same in each case. Every pocket was drawn blank.

"Stony?" asked Lowther.

"Looks like it."

Tom Merry drew out the lining of his trousers pocket to its fullest extent, in the vain hope that some coin might yet be hidden there. But the hope was unfounded. A piece of string, some cobbler's wax, and an ancient seed ball came to light, but nothing in the shape of cash.

"Rotten!" said Manners.

"Yes, it's rather rotten," agreed Tom Merry; "and jolly careless of you chaps to run out of tin just when I happen to be stony."

"What the dickens do you mean by being stony just when we've run out of tin?" said Manners.

"Well, we must have some tin," said Lowther decidedly. "We've asked Fatty Wynn over to tea, and the cupboard's empty. We've got to lay in a supply by hook or by crook."

"And a good supply, too," said Manners. "You know what Fatty Wynn has been like ever since he came back from his sea voyage."

Tom Merry made a grimace.

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"Yes, I don't see how we could do it under five bob, kids, to give him a decent spread, but—"

"But we haven't fivepence," said Manners.

"Exactly!"

"Well, I must say it was rather reckless of you, Merry, to ask a chap—especially a chap like Wynn—to tea, without having a shot in the locker," said Monty Lowther severely.

"It was the only way. Figgins & Co. have got something on—we know that—and it's certain it's something up against the School House. If we can get Fatty Wynn over here to tea, and feed him up to the chin, and get him into a jolly good temper, he's certain to chatter something out."

"Yes. But how are we to fill him up to the chin when we've nothing in the cupboard but the remnant of an old ham, half a stale loaf, and a pepper-caster, and when all the available funds are comprised in a lucky halfpenny and a French penny?" demanded Lowther.

"That will want thinking out, of course."

"Why, we shall have to have tea in Hall ourselves, by the way things look at present," said Manners. "Fancy asking Fatty Wynn to a tea in Hall! He would faint!"

"My dear kids, we're not at the end of our resources yet," said Tom Merry placidly. "When in doubt, rely on Tom Merry—"

"Oh rats!"

"Here comes Blake, and he looks in a remarkably good temper with himself; I think we're quite safe for the five bob. We'll try, anyway. If he doesn't turn up trumps there's only Augustus to fall back on."

Jack Blake of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, and Study No. 6 in the School House, was coming out of the House. He glanced at the chums of the Shell and stopped as they closed up in his way.

—THE FAMOUS CHUMS TOM MERRY & CO., AND FIGGINS & CO.!

BIRTHDAY!

By
**MARTIN
CLIFFORD.**

"Pax!" said Tom Merry, laughing, as Blake assumed a somewhat warlike attitude. "Behold us in the guise of suppliants."

"What's the little game?"

"We're stony."

Jack Blake grinned.

"Then I can sympathise with you, my sons, because I'm busted myself."

"Well, of all the unreliable rotters, you take the biscuit!" exclaimed Tom Merry in disgust. "We are looking for a Good Samaritan with five spare bobblets—"

"Sorry!" said Blake. "I blued my last tin on some new tools for my toolchest. If you wait till Saturday—"

"Why don't you say till Christmas?"

"Is it very important, then?"

"Awfully important! We've got a distinguished guest coming to tea, and have run out of supplies, and of tin at the same time."

"Then you'd better send your guest a telegram and say you're dead, and ask him to put it off till next week."

"No good; it's Fatty Wynn."

"Oh, I know it's no good trying to stop Fatty from coming to a feed!" assented Blake. "But what on earth are you having a New House bounder to tea for? If you wanted someone to come to tea I'd have come if there'd been a decent spread."

"Policy, my dear kid—policy," said Tom Merry.

"Policy! What are you driving at?"

"Thereby hangs a tale. There is something on in the New House; Figgins & Co. are very mysterious, and Fatty Wynn, of course, is in the secret. We're going to feed him up and get something out of him."

"Well, I wish I could help you. But, I say, if you're thinking of feeding Fatty Wynn up, it's a big job. It can't be done on the cheap."

"Well, we were thinking of starting him on fried potatoes," said Tom Merry. "They're nice, and they're cheap, too. We could keep the delicacies out of sight at first, and get him to lay a good foundation of fried potatoes, and produce the more expensive 'tommy' afterwards, and then there would be enough to go round."

Blake laughed.

"Well, it's a good wheeze. Get him to take in five or six pounds of potatoes, and that would take the edge off his appetite. But, I say, if you are on the borrowing tack you can go up to Study No. 6 and see D'Arcy."

"Is he in funds?"

"He must be; he had a fiver from his Aunt Adelina yesterday, and he's changed it. He can't have blued it all already."

"Good! Come on, kids, and we'll interview Gussy."

Blake went down the steps of the School House, and the Terrible Three went upstairs. Between the Terrible Three and Study No. 6 there was something of a rivalry, the leadership of the School House juniors being at stake; but when they were not ragging one another they were very good friends. And Tom Merry had not the slightest doubt of being able to raise a loan from the obliging Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House.

A youth with a large head and a pair of big spectacles nearly ran into the Terrible Three as they reached the top of the stairs. He stopped as Monty Lowther gave him a playful dig in the ribs that took all his breath away.

"Really, Lowther!" he gasped. "Dear me! I wanted to see you particularly, Tom Merry."

"And I particularly didn't want to see you, Skimpole," said Tom Merry, walking on.

Skimpole caught him by the sleeve.

"Hold on a minute, Merry! It's important."

"Oh, buck up, then!"

"As you know, I am a Determinist," said Skimpole, blinking at the chums of the Shell. "On that account—"

"If you're going to talk Determinism—"

"No, no, don't be hasty; I am not. I mentioned the fact that I was a Determinist simply to explain the other fact—more important at the present moment—that I am stony. As a sincere Determinist, I cannot refuse pecuniary aid to all who ask it, and in consequence my pocket-money quickly goes. But, in any case, my allowance is not large enough

for the sum I at present require. I believe you have a very generous allowance from your old governess, Miss Fawcett?"

"I believe I do," assented Tom Merry.

"And when you want any extra little sums she sends them to you?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Sometimes."

"Good! Then perhaps you will be able to lend me ten pounds?"

"Eh?"

"Perhaps you will be able to lend me ten pounds?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothing comical in that, is there, Merry?" said Skimpole, blinking in a puzzled way at the chums of the Shell. "I asked you if you could lend me ten pounds."

"You are too moderate, Skimpole. You ought to make it £10,000."

"Really, Merry—"

"Or £10,000,000," suggested Monty Lowther. "You would be just as likely to get it, you know, so you might as well."

"I am particularly in want of ten pounds at the present moment, and I will repay it in a few weeks, out of the profit of the great book I am writing on Determinism. It will be ready for publication as soon as I have completed the 424th chapter."

"My dear ass," said Tom Merry kindly, "I've never—or hardly ever—had such a sum as ten pounds in my life, and I wouldn't have the cheek to ask Miss Fawcett for half as much, however badly I wanted it. And, not to put too fine a point on it, I think your modest request is the finest example of pure, unadulterated cheek that I've ever happened to come across."

"Passed unanimously!" said Monty Lowther.

Skimpole blinked at the chums of the Shell with a rather worried expression.

"Well, you see, I want ten pounds particularly," he explained. "There's no one else I could think of to ask. Still, if you couldn't manage ten, I could do with five."

"Go hon!"

"I want to buy somebody a present—a person I esteem very much—on her birthday," said Skimpole. "Of course, I can't be mean about a thing like that."

"You mean Tom Merry can't be mean," grinned Lowther. "It's his cash you're thinking of spending."

"Not at all, Lowther. You are quite mistaken. I shall repay Tom Merry to the last farthing out of the profits on my book."

"Well, Skimpole, if you made it half-a-crown I might manage it next week," said Tom Merry, laughing. "But at present I am stony, and am on the borrowing lay myself."

"Dear me, that is very unfortunate! I shall have to seek assistance in another quarter, I suppose."

"You certainly will."

And the Terrible Three walked on, leaving Skimpole troubled.

The chums of the Shell chuckled.

"Ten pounds!" murmured Manners. "What I like about Skimpole is his moderation. Nobody in the School House would lend him tenpence, as a matter of fact."

"And whom on earth can he want to give a present to at such a figure as ten pounds?" said Monty Lowther.

"Must be somebody very special," said Manners, with a chuckle. "Skimpole has been in love before now, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here we are," said Tom Merry, "and here's Gussy. Come in!"

And the Terrible Three entered Study No. 6.

CHAPTER 2.

D'Arcy Is Sorry!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY was alone in the study. He was sitting at the table, with a thoughtful frown on his face, a pencil in his hand, and a paper before him, upon which he was jotting down figures. He was too deeply absorbed to notice for the moment the entrance of the chums of the Shell Form. "Three pounds ten!" he murmured. "Three pounds ten! I am afraid that it will not be enough; but, on the

other hand, there is no way of gettin' any more. Even if I wrote to my governah and asked him for some cash, it is extremewly probab that it would not get heah in time. It is wathah wotten. Bai Jove! Is that you, Tom Mewwy?"

Arthur Augustus looked up, and turned over the sheet he was jotting figures upon face downwards on the table.

He looked a little pink and confused, and the Terrible Three noted it with some surprise. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was famous for his self-possession, which very seldom deserted him, even in the most trying moments.

"Deep in decimals?" said Tom Merry cheerily.

The swell of the School House shook his head.

"No, deah boy, I am not deep in beastlay decimals."

"Learning shorthand?"

"No, certainly not!"

"Oh, I thought I saw a lot of dots and dashes on the paper!" said Tom Merry. "It would be a useful accomplishment, too."

"I am not likely evah to need shorthand, I suppose," said D'Arcy.

"Yes, certainly. You'd be able to take down your own speeches verbatim in the House of Lords, you know, when you get there."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Or you could get twenty-five bob a week as a junior clerk," suggested Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"But we haven't come here to talk of Gussy's future prospects," said Tom Merry. "What we want to know, Gussy, is this. Can you spring the humble but indispensable five bob to three respectable youths who are down on their luck, the same to be faithfully returned on Saturday, when those three same respectable and deserving youths will receive their respective allowances?"

"Well put!" said Manners, with a nod of approval. "If Gussy can resist an appeal like that he must have a heart as hard as Skimpole's head."

Arthur Augustus coloured uncomfortably.

"Weally, deah boys—" he began.

"That's how the case stands, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "We're stony broke to the wide, busted till Saturday. We've got a distinguished guest coming to tea after school—a distinguished guest with a distinguished appetite. Can you lend us five bob? You shall have it back on Saturday. You know I never fail in little matters of that kind."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "I know that vewy well, Tom Mewwy."

"Oh, we'll keep him up to it!" said Lowther. "You can rely upon me."

"Hearing that you were rolling in filthy lucre, we gave you second chance after discovering that Blake was broke," said Tom Merry. "It isn't every fellow I would borrow five bob of. You may regard yourself as honoured!"

"Distinctly honoured!" said Manners.

D'Arcy's face was crimson.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"We're not rotting, old chap!" said Tom Merry, somewhat surprised by the evident confusion in D'Arcy's manner.

"We're hard up, and we want you to lend us five bob."

"I should be extremewly pleased, Tom Mewwy—"

"So should we. So hand it over!"

"It would be a weal pleasure to me, but—"

"Oh dear, here's another good man gone wrong! Are you stony, too?"

Arthur Augustus hesitated.

"Well, not exactly, deah boy, but—"

"I understood from Blake that you had a lot left out of a fiver sent you by your Aunt Semphronia—"

"My Aunt Adelina, Tom Mewwy!"

"Well, your Aunt Adelina, then. I'm not particular as to the name of the aunt, so long as the fiver was all right."

"The fivah was all wight, deah boy."

"You can't have blued it all, Gussy; that's impossible. And if you have, I shall have to keep an eye on you in future," said Tom Merry, shaking his head seriously.

"It has occurred to me several times that your governor is a little too liberal with you in the matter of money. I have thought that if I wrote to him and explained that it was not good for a Fourth Form kid to have so much loose cash he might send me some of the fivers instead. Do you think he would?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"But at present it is five bob I am in want of. If you haven't it, Gussy, don't mind saying so, and I'll go farther up the passage."

"I—I—I—"

Tom Merry looked at the swell of the School House in surprise. He could not account for D'Arcy's confusion and blushes. Lowther and Manners were equally surprised.

"It's all right, Gussy, if you haven't the tin," said

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Lowther. "Don't be worried about it. There are others, you know."

"It isn't exactly that, deah boys. I've got the tin—"

"Then why don't you hand over the loan?"

"You see, I—I—"

Tom Merry coloured a little.

"You don't want to lend me the money?"

"It isn't that, deah boy. You see, I—I want the tin for a most particular purpose—"

"Why, what scheme have you got on now?"

"I have not any scheme on, but—"

"Well, never mind, Gussy," said Tom Merry good-naturedly. "I don't want to pry into your little secrets. I must look out for the tin somewhere else."

"I'm feahfully sowwy, Tom Mewwy—"

"That's all right."

"I mean, I don't want you to think I wouldn't lend you the money," said D'Arcy, greatly distressed. "I'd twust you with anythin'. But—"

"It's all right."

"And you're not watty about it?"

"Not what?" asked Tom Merry.

"Watty."

"Ha, ha, ha! I'm not ratty, if that's what you mean. You have a right to do as you like with your own tin, I suppose."

"You see, I'm in an awkward posish myself. I have barely enough money for what I want, and so, you see—"

"No, I don't see; but it's all right," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Don't trouble to explain. We take your word for everything. Come on, chaps!"

"You are quite sure you are not watty, Tom Mewwy?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes, quite sure."

And the chums of the Shell quitted the study.

CHAPTER 3.

The Mystery Deepens!

THE bell rang before the Terrible Three could decide in which direction to bend their borrowing footsteps, and they went into the dining-room.

Arthur Augustus came in a little later, and he had the paper in his hand, and conned over it several times in a surreptitious way at the Fourth Form table.

"The young ass is up to something!" Monty Lowther observed to Tom Merry, in a whisper. "He was muttering something about three pounds ten when we went into Study No. 6, you remember. What is he going to do with three pounds ten that he can't spare five bob out of it as a loan for old and tried friends like us?"

"Something on!" said Manners.

Tom Merry looked puzzled.

"There seem to be a lot of things on just now," he remarked. "D'Arcy has something on, Figgins & Co. have something on, and even Skimpole is going about like a wolf seeking whom he may devour to the tune of ten pounds."

"Well, I think we shall soon be up to Figgins' little game," said Lowther. "It all depends upon whether we can raise the funds to feed Fatty Wynn."

"We've got to raise them somehow."

"Silence at the table!" said Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell.

And the chums relapsed into silence.

After dinner they turned the matter over in their minds as they stood on the steps of the School House looking out into the old quadrangle, bright and green in the autumn sunlight.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came out, so buried in thought that he did not notice the chums of the Shell standing there.

The little, crumpled paper was in his fingers, and it was more thickly covered with figures than ever. Skimpole of the Shell came out a minute later, and spotted D'Arcy near the steps, and blinked at him with satisfaction. He was evidently looking for the swell of St. Jim's. He crossed over quickly and took hold of one of D'Arcy's jacket buttons—an objectionable way Skimpole had when he wanted to claim anybody's attention.

"D'Arcy, I've been looking for you—"

"Pway welease my button, deah boy," said D'Arcy politely. "I am afwaid that you may make it loose, and nothin' looks more waggad and wotten than a loose button."

"Ah, yes, certainly! Can you lend me ten pounds, D'Arcy?"

"Eh?"

"Can you lend me ten pounds?"

"Weally, Skimpole—"

"I want it for a particular purpose, and I shall be very much obliged for the loan of ten pounds, which I will repay out of the first profits on the publication of my great book on Determinism."

"I don't wish to be wude, Skimpole, but I must wemark that I wegard you as a howlin' ass, deah boy! I haven't ten pounds. My governah is vewy genevous, but he vewy

seldom sends me a tannah, and if I had one I should certainly not feel inclined to give it away. I wegard your wequest as a piece of feahful cheek."

"I cannot see it in that light myself, D'Arcy, especially as the repayment of the little loan would be so certain and so prompt. However, if you cannot spare ten pounds, I could make ten shillings do."

"I am extremely sowwy, Skimpole, but I haven't any money to lend."

"Dear me, that is most unfortunate! I wanted to make a certain person a present, and I didn't want to be mean about it. I was sure I could borrow a small sum from you."

"At pwsent I am feahfully short of money, deah boy."

"Well, I suppose it cannot be helped. It is very annoying, though." And Skimpole wore an injured look as he drifted away.

Tom Merry looked at his chums with a grin. Arthur Augustus strolled away, still conning over his little paper.

"Skimpole seems destined to meet with nothing but disappointments," remarked Tom Merry. "Surprising that he doesn't come across a chap with ten pounds to give away. I say, there is old Figgins across the way. Suppose we go over and try him for five boblets?"

"It's all right," said Figgins immediately. "What do you chaps want?"

"Five bob," said Tom Merry, with equal directness.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What is there to cackle at in that?" demanded Tom Merry. "Haven't you ever borrowed five bob yourself in the wild and reckless days of your youth?"

"Oh, yes, rather—of you before now, too."

"Well, can you spring five bob till Saturday?"

"I would if I could, old chap," said Figgins, "but I can't."

"What about you, Kerr?"

"Same here," said the Scottish partner in the New House Co. "I'd do it like a shot; but under present circumstances it's impossible."

"Circumstances! What are you so blessed mysterious about? If you haven't the tin—"

"Well, as a matter of fact, we have the tin," said Figgins.

"But—but the fact is, we want all the money we can raise just now for a—a particular purpose."

The Terrible Three stared.

"What's the little game?"

"Well, that's a secret; but we'll tell you in a day or two."



"Biff them!" shouted Gore. "Kick them out! Heave the table over!" Crash! The Shell were in earnest. There was crash on crash in the study, and all kinds of property flew through the air.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a rather amusing plan. The rivalry between School House and New House was keen.

Tom Merry knew that Figgins of the New House had something on, and he naturally suspected that it was something to the detriment of the School House. The Terrible Three justly regarded it as a master-stroke of policy to feed Fatty Wynn, and wait for the secret to roll from his lips. To borrow the cash of Figgins to stand a feed was really an exquisitely humorous idea.

"My hat!" said Manners. "It's a ripping idea, and Figgins will want to kick himself hard later on. Let's tackle him."

Figgins and Kerr were going down to the junior football ground. The Terrible Three intercepted them on the way, putting on their sweetest smiles to show that it was not a House row they had in view.

"Ripping afternoon, Figgins!" said Tom Merry affably.

"Oh, right you are! You're getting as mysterious as Gussy and Skimpole. Seems to me that you Fourth Form kids are going off your rockers," said Tom Merry.

"Whom are you calling kids?"

"Sorry! I meant goats!"

And the Terrible Three walked away considerably puzzled.

It was mystery on mystery, Pelion piled on Ossa, as Manners expressed it. Digby of the Fourth, Blake's chum in Study No. 6, was walking along with his hands in his pockets, whistling cheerily, when the chums of the Shell caught sight of him, and bore down upon him.

"Hold on a minute, Dig," said Tom Merry. "Are you in funds?"

Digby shook his head.

"I've only got eight bob, Tom Merry."

"Eight bob!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "And what on THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,235.

CHAPTER 4. The Only Way!

earth is a kid in the Fourth Form doing with eight bob in his pockets all at once? We had better rob Digby."

"We're looking for some chap to lend us five bob!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Sorry! I'd do it like a shot, only—"

"Only what?"

"I'm saving six for a special purpose. You can have two if you like."

"What sort of a special purpose?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, that's a little secret," said Digby, showing some embarrassment.

"My hat! I'm getting fed-up with little secrets to-day!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "You're the fifth."

"The fifth what?"

"The fifth ass who wants money for a special purpose all of a sudden."

Digby grinned.

"Am I? I didn't know there were so many up to it."

"Up to what?"

"It," said Digby; and he walked away, chuckling.

He left the Terrible Three looking decidedly wrathful. A little mystery was all very well in its way, but as Tom Merry said, you could get fed-up with it in the long run.

What was the particular purpose to which so many juniors were all at once devoting their spare cash? It was an impenetrable mystery.

"I can't catch on to it," said Tom Merry. "Come to think of it, the little game that Figgins & Co. are up to may not be a wheeze against the School House, after all. It may be the same affair, that's bothering Dig and D'Arcy and Skimpole. They're all up to something."

"Well, we shall get it out of Fatty Wynn, if we feed him."

"Looks as if we shan't be able to feed him!" grunted Manners.

"Rats!" said Tom Merry. "We haven't come to the end of our resources yet, my sons. I saw Herries go round just after dinner to feed his beastly bulldog. Let's go and interview Herries."

"May as well," assented Lowther.

The three chums made their way to the little building behind the New House, where the boys of St. Jim's were allowed to keep their pets.

The sturdy Fourth-Former was feeding his bulldog, and he did not look up as the chums of the Shell came in.

"I say, Herries, old man—" began Tom Merry.

"Don't bother now. I'm feeding Towser. If you wouldn't mind, you chaps, I'd like you to clear out for a bit. It disturbs Towser to have a lot of asses watching him when he's feeding."

The chums of the Shell exchanged glances.

"Certainly, Herries. But—"

"Oh, do buzz off! You're worrying Towser, and when he gets excited I can't always hold him. I should be sorry for any of you to get bitten, but—"

"Gr-r-r-r!" came from Towser.

The Terrible Three rather hurriedly left. It was nearly time to go in for afternoon lessons, and they walked back to the School House in a rather disconsolate mood. Reilly of the Fourth was standing on the steps, and he nodded, with a grin.

"Faith, and is it going to a funeral ye are?" asked the boy from Belfast.

Tom Merry brightened up. He remembered that he had seen the boy from Belfast with a registered letter in his hands after letters were given out that morning. Reilly was sometimes in funds.

"Hallo, Reilly! We're looking for a chap to borrow five bob of."

Reilly looked concerned.

"Faith, and if it was at any other time it's meself would oblige you!" he exclaimed. "Sure, I've had a pound from my uncle, but I want it for a particular purpose—"

"For what?" yelled the Terrible Three together.

"For a particular purpose," said the boy from Belfast, in surprise, unable to guess the cause of the wrathful excitement that followed his words.

"Another of 'em!" said Manners darkly.

"You-you young rascal!" said Tom Merry, with a magisterial air. "You're the sixth! How dare you have a particular purpose!"

"A what?"

"I'll teach you to have a particular purpose! Collar him!"

"Faith, 'are and 'onnds, and what are you after doing entirely?" roared Reilly.

He had cause to be astonished, for the Terrible Three seized him with a simultaneous grasp, rolled him over, and bumped him down upon the bottom step, and flattened his cap over his eyes. Then, somewhat relieved in their feelings, they walked into the House, leaving Reilly firmly convinced that they were stark, staring mad.

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"NICE state of affairs!" said Monty Lowther, as the chums of the Shell left the class-room after afternoon lessons. "Fatty Wynn will be arriving at our study as five sharp, and he'll find nothing there but half a stale loaf."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's no laughing matter, you ass!"

"Look here," said Manners, "couldn't we work it off as a huge joke, you know? Give Fatty Wynn the crust, and let him see we were rotting all the time."

"Yes, that's a good way to get information out of him!" said Lowther scowling.

"Not to be thought of," said Tom Merry decidedly.

"We've got to feed him—"

"But how? There's hardly time to get the grub in if we have the tin, and we haven't any, and there's no time to borrow if we could find somebody to lend."

"No time for jaw either, Monty. Come along!"

"Come along where?"

"Follow your uncle," said Tom Merry severely, "and don't ask questions!"

"Look here, you image—"

But Tom Merry was going. Manners and Lowther followed him, considerably puzzled as to what he intended to do. They could usually rely upon their leader's ingenuity when in a fix, but at the present moment difficulties seemed to be closing them in on all sides, and they could see no avenue of escape.

"He's bluffing!" growled Lowther as he followed Tom Merry up the School House stairs. "That's what it is, Manners."

"Shouldn't wonder," grunted Manners.

They reached the study in the Shell passage which was shared by the Terrible Three. Tom Merry went in and picked up a bag that was used to carry football things when the juniors played away.

Manners and Lowther watched him.

"No good standing there like a couple of sphinxes," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Buckle to!"

"Rats! Buckle to what?"

"Get the place ready for tea. It's twenty to five, and Fatty Wynn will be here sharp at five. In fact, I shouldn't wonder if he puts his watch on, so as to have an excuse for getting here a few minutes early. There's no time to lose!"

"But what are we to do?" demanded Manners helplessly.

"You're to light the fire, boil the kettle, and lay the table."

"I—I'll do it. But what's the good when there's no grub?"

"There will be some grub by the time you've got the kettle boiling. Come on, Monty. You know what Shakespeare wrote about conjunctures like this?"

"No, I don't; and I don't believe Shakespeare ever gave study feeds either."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I mean, he was alluding to predicaments and emergencies. He said that desperate diseases are relieved by desperate remedies—or words to that effect."

"Did he? Well, what about it, ass?"

"This is a desperate emergency, and we've got to take desperate measures. The fellows are all gone down to the footer, and the earliest won't be in to tea for another half-hour. There's ample time for us to raid all the Shell studies—"

"Eh?"

"If we can't find enough tommy in the Shell studies, we'll go along to the Fourth Form passage. I'd rather stick to our own Form if possible, though."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther. "I don't suppose the Shell would rather you did."

"I'm not undertaking all this trouble to please the Shell. We've got to get out of this fix somehow, and that's the only way I can think of. Can you suggest a better one?"

"Ha, ha, ha! No."

"Then stop criticising your uncle, and come along."

"There'll be a fearful row!"

"Will it be the first we've had since we came to St. Jim's?"

"Well, no, not by a few hundred or so."

"Very well, then. As a matter of fact, the Shell won't lose by it. I shall stand the whole Form a feed to make up for it. I shall write to Miss Priscilla Fawcett and explain to her that I owe the Form a feed, and she will see me through. But never mind that now. The business of the present moment is to rope in the tommy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle afterwards, Monty, if you want to, though why you should want to make a curious row like that—"

"Look here—"

"No time. Bring the bag and follow your uncle."

And Tom Merry led the way from the study. Lowther

seized a bag and followed him. Manners was already busy lighting the fire to boil the kettle.

Gore's study was next to Tom Merry's, and it was favoured first. Gore's cupboard yielded a good supply. Gore was a fellow usually flush of money, and he “did himself” well in the feeding line. There was sometimes trouble in the study on that account. Skimpole shared the study with Gore, and Skimpole, whose ideas were weird and wonderful, to say the least, could not refuse Gore's provisions to anybody who asked for them. It was not unusual for Tom Merry to hear a sound of bumping from the next study, and at such times he guessed that the freak of the Shell had been at work again, carrying out his principles.

“This is ripping!” said Lowther, shoving a rabbit-pie, a string of sausages, and a large cake into his bag. “If the other studies turn out as well, we shall be able to do Fatty down in fine style!”

“Good! Now we really shan't be long!” grinned Tom Merry. “We'll try Gibbons' room next, and then Norton's.”

Gibbons' and Norton's studies both furnished good supplies. Nearly every study in the Shell was visited in turn, and by the time they had finished their round, Tom Merry and Monty Lowther were heavy laden.

They made their way back to their own quarters with light hearts and heavy bags, and found that Manners had lost no time. The fire was gleaming cheerily, and the kettle already on the boil. The teapot stood on the little hob to warm. The cloth was laid, and the study crockeryware disposed to the best advantage, and the scene was really cosy in the light of the incandescent burner which Tom Merry had lately rigged up on the gas jet.

“Well, this is ripping!” muttered Tom Merry. “Shove out the things, Monty!”

“I only hope the Shell won't come in to tea before Fatty Wynn's gone, that's all,” said Monty Lowther. “A row with the Form would rather spoil the effect.”

“Well, we must hope for the best, that's all. We've done our best ourselves, and when a fellow's done his best, he can't do more.”

“Good! Fatty will be pleased. Hallo, here he is! It's not five yet!”

“About five minutes to,” said Manners.

Fatty Wynn was looking in at the door with a beaming smile. His smile grew more beaming—in fact, positively ecstatic, as he saw the splendid array of comestibles on the tea-table. He came into the study.

“Am I early, you chaps?” he said affably. “My watch says five o'clock.”

Tom Merry knew perfectly well that Fatty Wynn had put his watch forward five minutes, as an excuse for coming early, but he was too polite to make the remark. He shook his head with a courteous smile.

“That's all right, Wynn; you couldn't come too early.”

“Good! I say, you've got a ripping spread here, you chaps.”

“We've done our best,” said Tom Merry modestly.

“Well, as a matter of fact, most of the Form have contributed to this feed,” said Monty Lowther, with great gravity.

Manners exploded into a sudden chuckle, and Tom Merry gave his chums a warning glance.

“Have they really?” said Fatty Wynn. “That was rather decent of them. I suppose they knew I was coming?”

“Well, no, they didn't,” said Tom Merry. “They'll know it later.”

“They will, by Jove!” murmured Lowther.

“Did you speak, Lowther?”

“Yes; I hope you'll like the feed, Fatty.”

“Oh, I'm not a difficult chap to please!” said Fatty Wynn.

And the guest of the Terrible Three was soon busy, while the chums of the Shell looked on him and supplied his need with great assiduity.

CHAPTER 5.

The Price of a Secret!

FATTY WYNN could always be relied upon to do justice to a feed, and on this occasion, fresh from the class-room, with a whole afternoon's hunger stored up, as it were, he was in splendid form.

The Terrible Three had seen him eating before, but they had never seen him surpass his efforts on the present occasion.

The chums did not eat; they looked after Fatty Wynn. They were in no hurry for their tea, and they would not diminish the supply; though, as a matter of fact, the supplies on the study table were sufficient for any six ordinary youths.

Gore's rabbit-pie and sausages vanished in record time, and Norton's cold beef, and Harris' ham, and Gibbons'

pickles. That was simply a start. Fatty Wynn was settling down to business now. A cold beefsteak-pie belonging to Macdonald disappeared, and then Fatty Wynn gave a sigh.

“Anything wrong, Fatty?” asked Tom Merry anxiously. The fat youth shook his head.

“Not at all, Merry. I was just thinking what a ripping spread this is, and how happy life would be if a chap had two or three like it every day.”

“Quite right, Fatty. Will you try the apple-pie now?”

“Yes, I think I will, Merry. I think I've laid a pretty good foundation.”

“My hat!” murmured Lowther. “I think you have.”

“Did you speak, Lowther?”

“Yes; I hope you won't stint yourself, Fatty. You're not in very good form. Don't spare the grub, you know. There's plenty more where that came from.”

“Good! I think I shall make a good tea before I finish. But you fellows are not eating anything.”

“Oh, that's all right; we're in no hurry for our tea.”

“Another cup of tea, Fatty?” asked Manners.

“Well, yes, I think so, thank you!” said Fatty, who had already swallowed three cups of tea. He drank tea with steak-pies and pickles without wincing; and, in fact, with the appetite of a cormorant and the digestion of a horse, there were few things eatable or drinkable that Fatty Wynn would have declined at any moment.

He had surreptitiously unfastened the lowest button of his waistcoat. The apple-pies vanished, and the plum-pudding followed. Then Fatty Wynn started on the tarts. The table was beginning to look bare.

“Ripping!” said Fatty Wynn. “I shall have to return the compliment to you fellows some time. Pity we can't get up a feed like this on Wednesday afternoon.”

“Why on Wednesday afternoon?” asked Tom Merry.

Fatty Wynn coloured a little.

“Ah, I forgot; you don't know!”

“We don't know what?”

“Oh, nothing!” And Fatty Wynn helped himself to more tarts. “Sorry, Merry, but—but it's not my secret, you see.”

Tom Merry exchanged glances with his chums. Fatty Wynn, of his own accord, had approached the subject which had been in their minds all the time.

“Oh, I see,” said Tom Merry. “And you can't take us into it—eh?”

“Well, I can't very well,” said Fatty Wynn reflectively. “I feel jolly well inclined to, especially after you've stood me such a stunning feed, but I suppose I'd better keep mum. You see, it's a secret.”

“Another cup of tea, Fatty?” said Manners hospitably.

“I don't know—well, yes.”

“Try the marmalade tarts; they're ripping!”

“I've tried them, Lowther; they are! Yes, I'll have some more. What is that cake like?”

“Jolly good! Gore always has decent cakes.”

“Gore?”

“I—I mean, it's a jolly good cake!” stammered Lowther.

“Try it!”

“Thanks! You can help me; I'll finish the tarts first. But, I say, you fellows are not eating anything!”

“That's all right. How do you like the tarts?”

“Very good—very good indeed! Blessed if I don't think I might let you into the wheeze after all! I wonder you haven't thought of it yourselves.”

“Yes, it's surprising, isn't it?” said Tom Merry, wondering what on earth the secret could be, and more eager than ever to probe the mystery.

“Yes. Hasn't D'Arcy told you?”

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed. Then it was the same secret, as he suspected; the same secret shared by D'Arcy of the School House and Figgins & Co. of the New House.

“No,” he said; “Gussy is awfully close sometimes. I know he's saving up his tin for something very important.”

Fatty Wynn chuckled.

“So are we all, Merry. I've got twenty-two bob.”

“Twenty-two shillings!” ejaculated Tom Merry. “You've got twenty-two shillings, and haven't painted the tuckshop red with it?”

“Of course, it's a most particular purpose,” said the fat junior. “As a matter of fact, I had twenty-four, but two went. Money does go, and I get so hungry this time of the year, too!”

“But you've got twenty-two left.”

“Yes; and I'm going to be awfully careful with that. You see, it's tips from a lot of relations, and I lumped 'em together. I don't usually have so much money.”

“And you'll be able to carry out the particular purpose?”

“Oh, yes! I've seen a nice little brooch in Wayland that

I can get for twenty-one-and-sixpence, and it will do rippingly!"

The Terrible Three stared. Why the fat Fourth-Former should want to buy a brooch, however nice, was a mystery to them.

"You're not going to start wearing jewellery, are you?" demanded Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you chuckling about?"

"You see— Yes, I'll have some cake, Lowther."

"Sorry! Here you are."

"Thanks! You're right, this is a ripping cake! You may as well give me three or four slices at once; it will save time. I'm much obliged to you chaps for this feed. I never really expected anything quite up to this."

"It's such a pleasure to have you with us," said Tom Merry. "But you were saying something about—"

"Was I? What ripping cake!"

"Yes. But about that brooch—"

"I'm going to buy it, you see. I shall cut over to Wayland early on Wednesday afternoon on my bike and rope it in. I think it will do very well."

"Yes. But what will it do very well for?"

"Any more tea in the pot, Manners?"

"Yes, rather!" said Manners. "But it's getting rather weak. I'll make some more."

"So buying a brooch in Wayland is part of the scheme you and Figgins are getting up?" said Tom Merry.

"Yes. Figgins is going to get a muff."

"A what?"

"A muff! One of those little white muffs, you know, that look so ripping. They're jolly expensive, and Figgy is getting his aunt in London to get it for him. They're all the fashion this year, Figgy says."

"What, in the name of all that's idiotic, does Figgins want a little white muff for?" almost shouted Tom Merry. Fatty Wynn chuckled again.

"Is Kerr buying anything, too?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes, Kerr is getting a silver pencil," said Fatty Wynn, with his mouth full of cake. "He's going to have the initials engraved on the case."

"Eh? What initials?"

"E. C., of course," replied Fatty Wynn unguardedly. "That is, of course—er—I'll have some more cake, please. It's a pity to leave any when it's so ripping."

"E. C.," said Tom Merry; "that stands for East Central."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, what the dickens does it stand for, then?"

"Well, you see, that's the secret. I really wonder D'Arcy hasn't told you. I suppose he is keeping it awfully dark, though, so as to have the matter all to himself. Very likely he doesn't know that Figgins knew the date all along."

"The date? What date?"

"Wednesday, you know—this Wednesday."

"There's a half-holiday on Wednesday."

"There's something else as well. Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn looked round at Manners. "I'll have some more of that tea, Manners. That was a jolly good cake."

"Try some of the biscuits; they're Norton's—I mean Huntley and Palmers, and they're really good. I can recommend them."

"Well, perhaps I'll have a few."

"So you are going to buy a brooch, and Figgins a muff, and Kerr a silver pencil with initials on it," said Tom Merry. "Are you going to open a bazaar?"

"Ha, ha, ha! No."

"Is anybody else in the scheme?"

"Yes; Skimpole knows."

"Skimpole?"

"Yes; for he tried to borrow ten pounds of me as I was coming over here from the New House. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, look here, Fatty Wynn—"

"I'll have another cup of tea, Manners, please."

"Look here—"

"And just a few nuts to finish with."

"Look here—"

A bump at the study door interrupted Tom Merry, and it was hurled open, and Gore of the She'l came stamping in, his face inflamed with rage.

CHAPTER 6.

Facing the Music!

GORE looked excited. It was not difficult for the chums of the Shell to guess the cause of his excitement. But nothing could have been more unsuspecting than the look of innocent inquiry they turned upon him.

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"Hallo, Gore!" said Tom Merry. "Anything wrong?"

"Wrong?" roared Gore. "Yes, I should say so! Have you seen Skimpole?"

"Skimpole?"

"Yes. I thought perhaps he was here, as I heard somebody; and you're always backing up that rotten freak!"

"Well, he's not here. What has he been doing?"

"Scoffing my grub again!" said Gore, almost stuttering with rage. "You know, I've licked him time and again for giving my grub away. He'll take anything out of my cupboard and give it to a tramp at the gate."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, none of your rotting! He's cleared out the cupboard again—everything gone! I had a rabbit pie, a lot of sausages, and a big currant cake, and I was bringing Mellish and Lefevre of the Fifth to tea—and the grub's all gone!"

Monty Lowther chuckled, but Tom Merry remained perfectly grave.

"Hard cheese!" he said sympathetically.

"Do you know where the idiot is?"

"No, I haven't seen him for some time."

George Gore stamped out of the study. He slammed the door behind him with a force that made the tea-things dance on the table.

"My hat!" murmured Tom Merry. "That's only the beginning. The other fellows will be coming in soon. Looks as if the game is up."

Fatty Wynn rose to his feet. He had loosened a second button on his waistcoat. That garment seemed to fit him like a glove. He gave a glance over the table, but there was nothing left to tempt him further.

"Thanks, awfully, you chaps!" he said. "You've done me down well, and I'm really much obliged. Thanks again!"

"That's all right, Fatty. About that little affair on Wednesday—"

"Well, you see— Hallo!"

The door of the study was flung open again, and Skimpole rushed in, panting for breath. The Determinist of St. Jim's looked in a sorry plight. His collar was torn out, as if someone had clutched him there and he had broken away by main force. His spectacles were half down his nose, and his tufty hair stood on end.

"Help!" he gasped. "Help! They're mad!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They're after me! I— Dear me! Oh!"

He leaned against the wall, gasping for breath. There was a sound of pattering feet in the corridor. They pattered on past the door of the study.

"Well, good-bye, Fatty!" said Tom Merry hurriedly.

There was no time to make any further effort to extract the secret now. The manner in which the feed had been provided was certain to come out, and Tom Merry had a natural desire that Fatty Wynn should not be present when it did.

"Good-bye, old chap!"

"I'm sorry about that little secret."

"Oh, that's all right! Don't bother. Manners, old chap, you'll see Fatty down to the door, won't you, in case any of the fellows spot a New House cad—I mean a New House chap? Good-bye, Fatty! And I hope you'll come again."

"Good-bye, Merry—and I certainly will!"

And Fatty Wynn went out of the study with Manners.

The footsteps were pattering back along the passage now; the pursuers evidently guessed that Skimpole had taken refuge in one of the studies.

As Manners and Wynn went towards the stairs Gore and Mellish and Lefevre looked into Tom Merry's study.

"Is that ass Skimpole here? Oh, there he is!"

And they rushed in.

Skimpole promptly dodged round Tom Merry.

"Keep off! I say, keep them off, Merry!"

"Let me get at him!" roared Gore.

"Hold on! What's he been doing? Explain yourself, Skimpole! And you shut up for a minute, Gore!"

Gore, angry as he was, did not desire to enter into a fistical encounter with Tom Merry if he could help it. He paused, panting, and Skimpole gasped out his explanation.

"I—I haven't done anything, Merry; I assure you that I haven't. I saw Gore coming down the passage a few minutes ago, and I went up to him to ask him if he could lend me ten pounds, and—and he sprang at me like a wild beast, and punched my nose in a way that I can only characterise as absolutely brutal and vindictive, and—and then Mellish kicked me, and Lefevre grabbed hold of my collar. If they are not mad, they must have been drinking, or else—"

"He's scoffed my rabbit pie!" yelled Gore. "He's boned my sausages! He's wolfed my cake! He's grabbed my grub!"

"I haven't! I haven't done anything of the sort! It is

several days since I gave Gore's plum cake to a tramp at the gate. But Gore has already made a fuss about that."

"I'm not talking about a plum cake," said Gore. "You've scoffed my rabbit pie and sausages and currant cake—"

"I haven't—"

"And I was bringing these chaps in to tea, and now there's nothing there. We're going to slay the burglar!"

"We're going to jump on him," said Mellish. "I'm hungry."

"So am I," said Lefevre of the Fifth. "When Skimpole starts taking rabbit pies, it's time something was done!"

Manners re-entered the study, and gave Tom Merry a nod. Tom drew a deep breath. Fatty Wynn was safe out of the School House, and the time for confession had arrived. He pushed Gore back with a hand on his chest.

"Hold on a minute, Gore, old chap, while I explain."

"Blow your explaining! Let me get at that beastly burglar."

"Hold on a minute!"

"The dickens you have."

"It was the only way. But it's all right."

"All right, is it?" roared Gore. "I'll jolly well ~~show~~ you whether it's all right!"

"Yes, it's all right. We're going to stand a feed next Saturday to make up for it, or, if you prefer, we'll replace the—the borrowed articles. In times of emergency you have to commandeer things, you know. We are willing to make compensation."

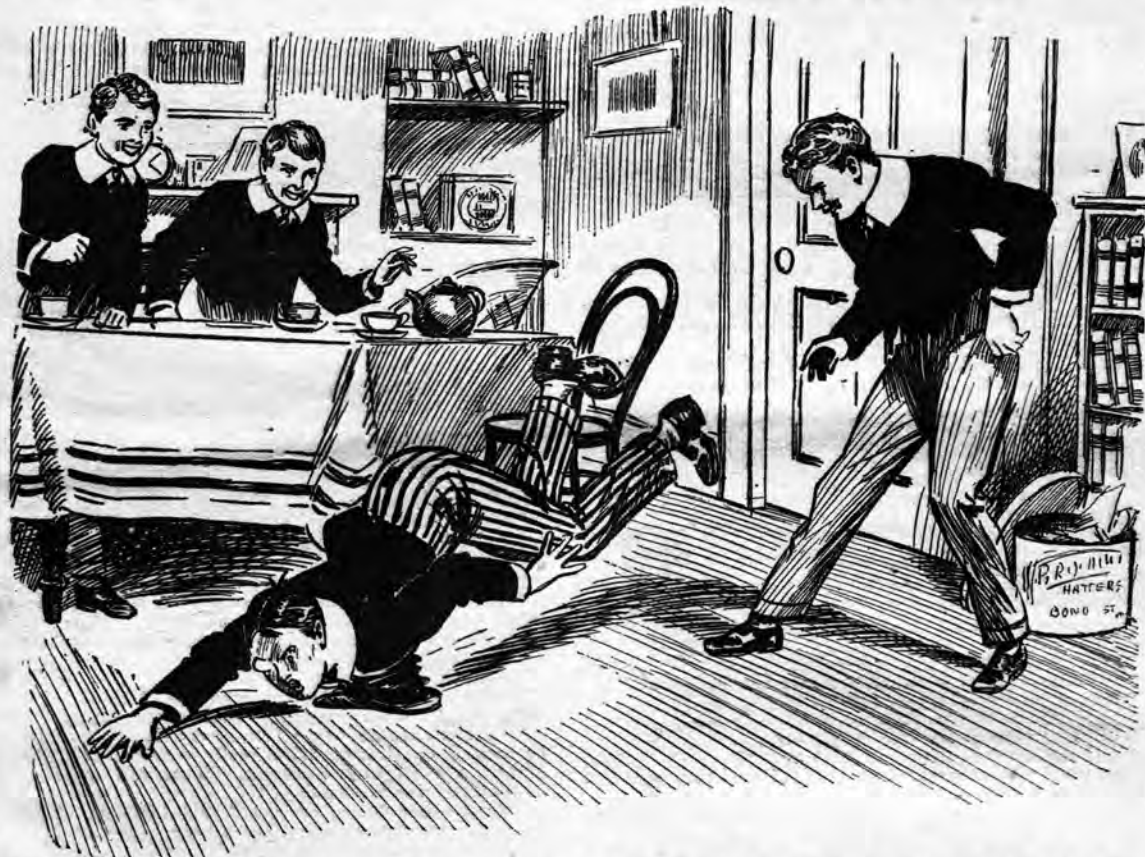
"You—you—you— We want our tea to-night, not on Saturday!"

"That's where it comes rather rough on you, I admit. You'll have to wait till Saturday."

"Wait a whole beastly week? You—you rotter!"

"Now, take it calmly, old chap. What's the good of grumbling at what can't be helped? You ought to be glad you were able to assist your Form captain in a time of stress!"

"Hallo!" said Macdonald of the Shell, looking into the study. "Do you fellows know—"



"Blake! You uffian, hold on!" D'Arcy rushed forward to the rescue of his beloved topper. Biff! He fell over Blake's outstretched leg, tumbled forward and alighted fairly upon the silk hat. "Ow! My hat! Ow!" he gasped.

"Lemme pass, Tom Merry, you beast! Back me up, you chaps!"

"Hold on, Gore! Skimpole didn't wolf your rabbit pie!"

"Rats! Who did, then?"

"I did!"

Gore was petrified for a moment. He stared at Tom Merry blankly.

"You did? You took my rabbit pie?"

"Yes; and the sausages and the cake!"

"You—you—you— Have you turned burglar, then, Tom Merry?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Not exactly. I've only borrowed them—"

"Oh, I see! If it's a joke, I don't mind. I suppose you've got them stowed away somewhere. Get them out, then, and hand them over, and it's all right."

"Well, they're stowed away inside Fatty Wynn, you see."

"Eh?"

"And I don't see how I'm to get them out."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Monty Lowther.

"Look here, Tom Merry, if you've scoffed my grub—"

"It was a terrible emergency, Gore. You're not the only one. We've raided nearly all the Shell studies."

"What's happened?"

"There's been a New House raid, I think. My study has been cleaned out of grub—a steak pie and pickles and biscuits."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?" demanded Macdonald indignantly. "It's no joke to have my grub scoffed by a New House rotter! Norton says he saw Fatty Wynn going out of the House. I suppose he—"

"It was I, my son," interrupted Tom Merry.

"You?"

"Yes. In a time of need the captain of the Form naturally commandeers all the grub he can lay his hands on."

"Does he?" said Macdonald, coming into the study.

"Then I suppose he expects to have some trouble on his hands afterwards—"

"Look here—"

"Because, whether he expects it or not he's bound to get it."

"That's what I say," said Lefevre. "He's bound to have some trouble on his hands. That's what I say."

"I say," broke in Norton, looking in, "any of you fellows

seen anybody raiding my study? My cold beef's been scoffed!"

Three or four fellows came along after Norton, all looking wrathful. The excitement in Tom Merry's study attracted them there, and they all had questions to ask.

"Somebody's wolfed my ham!" said Herries.

"And my pickles!" said Gibbons.

"And my apple pies!" said Bland.

"It was Tom Merry!" shouted Gore. "It was these three rotters! They raided all the studies to feed up a New House waster!"

There was a threatening murmur, and the Shell crowded into the study, and every moment the crowd was reinforced by fresh Shell fellows, who had discovered that articles of diet were missing from their studies, and had set out in wrathful search of the raiders.

CHAPTER 7.

The Terrible Three Are Ragged!

TOM Merry exchanged a quick glance with Manners and Lowther. The Terrible Three drew together, placing themselves in a careless way so that they could not be approached from behind. It looked like war, and war with the odds heavily against the chums of the Shell.

Tom Merry was quite ready to "face the music," and he did not mean to be caught napping.

"Look here, you fellows—" he began.

"Did you scoff that tommy?" demanded Norton.

"Yes, but—"

"You've raided our studies—"

"In a case of emergency you chaps ought to be willing to come to the rescue like Britons. I suppose I couldn't send a guest away hungry?"

"Well, you horrid bounder, that would be better than filling him up with our grub!" said Harris excitedly.

"What do you mean by it?"

"Why don't you listen?" shouted Tom Merry. "We're going to stand a big feed on Saturday to compensate for this little raid—"

"Little raid! You scoffed nearly everything in the whole passage."

"Every chap who considers himself aggrieved can have a good feed on Saturday—"

"We want a feed this evening!"

"You see—"

"Are you going to take this lying down?" shouted Mellish of the Fourth. "Are you going to stand it, or are you going to rag those rotters?"

"Look here—"

"They've raided our studies!" shouted Gore. "Let's raid their beastly quarters! There's enough of us!"

"Hurrah!"

"Look here! Don't you see—"

"Biff them! Kick them out! Heave the table over!"

"Bust up the crockeryware!"

"Hurrah! Stick your foot through the dishes!"

"Biff that plate at the looking-glass!"

"And the ink over the books!"

The Shell was exasperated and excited, and they were not in a humour to listen to reason.

Tom Merry expostulated. Manners explained. Lowther threatened—all three shouted themselves hoarse; but all in vain. The Shell were in earnest. There was crash on crash in the study. Books and crockery, ornaments, cricket bats and football boots, all kinds of property flew through the air. The table was overturned with a terrific crash, and the bookcase went sprawling across it. The fender was dragged out and crashed against the looking-glass, the drawer was jerked from the table and banged against the wall, scattering papers and ink and pen-nibs far and wide. The study was crammed with eager and excited wreckers.

The Terrible Three, of course, were not likely to take the wrecking calmly. They "sailed in" with a will. But the odds against them were hopeless. They were cornered by overwhelming numbers, and, though there were an assortment of swollen noses and discoloured eyes among the Shell fellows, Tom Merry was soon on the floor, with Manners and Lowther sprawling across him, and half a dozen of his Form-fellows sitting on top to keep them there.

Gore was in his element now. He would willingly have given a dozen rabbit pies to get the Form to back him up in a rag like this. Mellish was enjoying himself, too. He attended to any little bit of mischief that the others overlooked—such as pouring ink into the salt-cellars, and cramming butter into the inkpot, mixing pepper into Tom Merry's handkerchief, and pouring pickles over Manners' new sweater.

"Go it!" said Gore. "By the time we've finished, those chaps will be fed-up with raiding, I think."

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three struggled furiously. But they were pinned down by sheer weight, and at the mercy of the raggers.

"Here, hold on," said Harris, as Gore started mixing gum with the ashes of Tom Merry's curls. "Hold on; that's enough!"

"I'll do as I like, Harris."

"No, you won't," said Harris, pushing him away. "Get off!"

Gore caught his foot in the overturned table, and sat down with a bump. The opened gum-bottle fell from his hand, and dropped on his chest, and the gum ran over his waistcoat. He sat up with a yell, and the sticky liquid ran down in a stream over his trousers.

Harris gave a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha! It was your own fault, Gore!"

"You—you—I'll—"

"Oh, hold on!" said Norton. "I think we've finished here. Are you sorry you raided our studies and scoffed our grub, Tom Merry?"

"I'll show you presently!" said Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha! Come on, kids, let's slide before a perfect comes. We've been making rather a row. I can hear somebody in the passages."

The Shell crowded out of the study. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther sat up amidst the wreckage, and looked at one another, with feelings too deep for words.

CHAPTER 8.

Looking For Information!

TOM MERRY gave a glance round the study.

The Form captain's heart sank a little. The place was so absolutely gutted that it seemed almost impossible to ever get it in order again. Lowther and Manners looked round, also, and their looks were expressive as they turned upon their leader.

"Of all the howling asses!" said Lowther.

"Of all the shrieking duffers!" said Manners.

"Hallo, what are you growling about?"

"You dummy!"

"You lunatic!"

Tom Merry stared.

"What's the matter?"

"This is what comes of your giddy raids," said Lowther witheringly. "How long will it take us to clear this muck up?"

"Well, it was the only way. We had to feed up a guest."

"Rats! The feed was all wasted—you never screwed the secret out of Fatty Wynn, after all!"

"Well, we were interrupted by those bounders."

"You ought to have foreseen that."

"A chap can't foresee everything."

"Some chaps can't foresee anything, I think," growled Manners. "I think this study wants a new leader."

"Oh, don't grouse!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "It can't be helped, you know. What really worries me is that we haven't got on to the wheeze. What can those rotters be planning for Wednesday?"

"Blessed if I know, or care!" said Lowther. "I'm too dusty to care for anything but a wash just now."

"We must get on to the secret."

"Blow the secret! I'm going to get on to a bath-room!"

"Well, that's not a bad idea," grinned Tom Merry. "We want a wash and brush-up, and no mistake. Let's get along!"

The Terrible Three left the study.

There was a yell of laughter in the passage. Jack Blake was coming along, and he stopped, and held his ribs at the sight of the Terrible Three.

"Ha, ha, ha! My only Panama hat!" he roared.

"Have you been through a mangle, or bucking against a motor-car in a bad temper?"

"Oh, it's nothing!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Monty Lowther crossly. "It's bad enough to be ragged, without having a chap going off just like a jumping cracker."

"Ha, ha, ha! Hear me smile! Ha, ha, ha!"

Lowther and Manners dodged past, but Blake stopped Tom Merry. The chums of the Shell looked such disreputable objects that Blake's laughter was excusable, and Tom Merry, who knew how they looked, was grinning himself.

"Hold on a minute," gasped Blake. "I was coming along to speak to you. I say, there's some secret wheeze on, with both School House and New House fellows in it."

"I know there is," growled Tom Merry. "That's what we were trying to get out of Fatty Wynn."

"Did you get it out of him?"
 "Well, we couldn't manage it in the time."
 "Didn't you feed him up?"
 "Ye-es, but we were stony, and we had to raise the grub by raiding the other studies."
 "Well, that was rather cool."
 "It was the only way. The other fellows cut up rough, for some reason—"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "And they wrecked the study. It was a record rag."
 "Well, I should say it was, judging by your appearance," grinned Blake. "And you didn't get the secret out of Fatty Wynn, after all! That was rather hard cheese."
 "Can't be helped. You see—"
 "Yes, I see. I expect I should have managed it all right. But the curious thing is that Gussy is in the secret, and so is Dig, and they won't tell me."
 "I know they are. It's very curious. Something is to come off on Wednesday afternoon, and Figgins & Co. are buying things, but what the idea is, Fatty wouldn't let on."
 "I thought you might have screwed it out of him. I shall have to get it out of Gussy, then."
 "Skimpole knows, too!"
 "Oh, does he? The ass was trying to borrow ten pounds of me—"
 "Ha, ha, ha! He's been trying to borrow ten pounds of everybody at St. Jim's, I think. It's for the same wheeze on Wednesday, whatever it is."
 "Let's make 'em own up, then," said Blake. "I'll screw it out of Gussy if I can, and you bouncers screw it out of Skimmy, and we'll compare notes. Is it a go?"
 "Right-ho! It's agreed."
 "Good! Now you can go and get your wash—you need it."
 Tom Merry hurried on after his chums, and Blake walked away with a thoughtful brow. The Terrible Three were some time cleaning themselves down after their rough experience, but they came out of the bath-room at last, looking a little cleaner and tidier. The first person they met was Herbert Skimpole. He came eagerly towards Tom Merry.
 "Ah, I was looking for you, Tom Merry!"
 "And I was just going to look for you!"
 "Were you really? I want to speak to you."
 "And I want to speak to you."

"Come along to the study," said Monty Lowther, with a grin. "We can hold our little talk with Skimmy more comfortably there."
 Tom Merry and Manners linked arms with the freak of the Shell, and walked him off. Lowther brought up the rear to cut off any chance of escape.
 Skimpole, rather surprised and quite pleased by the unlooked-for cordiality of the Terrible Three, beamed upon Tom Merry through his glasses.
 "It's about that loan I asked you for, Merry. You declined to lend me ten pounds—"
 "I'm still in a declining state."
 "I have noticed that there is a registered letter for you downstairs," said Skimpole. "I happened to see the prefect sign for it. It undoubtedly contains a remittance from your esteemed governess, Miss Priscilla Fawcett."
 "Good!" said Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther with one voice.
 "I was thinking, Merry, that you might probably be inclined to lend me the remittance, whatever the amount, as I will return it to you out of the profits of my book."
 "Blessed if I know what could possibly make you think that, Skimmy. Anything wrong with your thinking apparatus?"
 "Really, Tom Merry—"
 They had reached Study No. 10. The Terrible Three marched Skimpole in, and Tom Merry pushed the bookcase out of the way and closed the door. The Determinist of St. Jim's viewed this proceeding in some alarm.
 "Now," said Tom Merry sweetly, "what do you want the tenner for?"
 "Really, Merry—"
 "What is this wheeze that's on for Wednesday afternoon?"
 "Really—"
 "Do you perceive that muck on the floor—ashes and gum and pickles and tea?"
 "Ye-es. My sight is not very good, Merry, but I certainly perceive the muck you describe," stammered Skimpole.
 "Would you like to have your head rubbed in it?"
 "Dear me! Certainly not!"
 "Then you'd better impart the information we're looking for, Skimmy, old man."
 And the Terrible Three closed round the freak of the Shell with relentless looks.

(Continued on next page.)

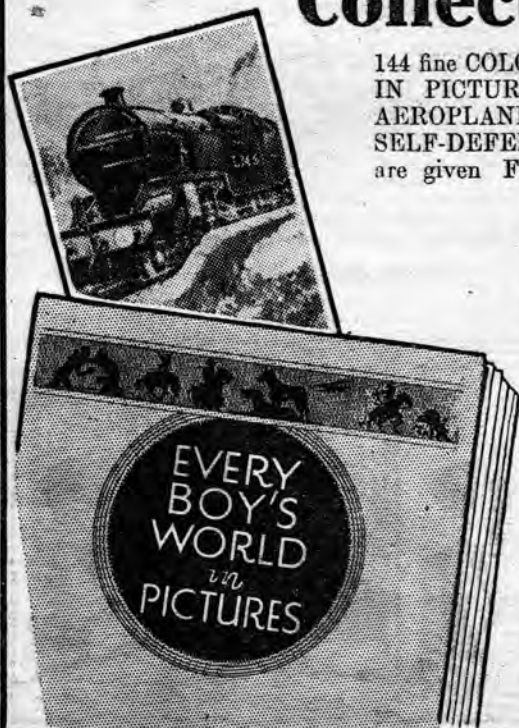
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CHAPTER 9. Light at Last!

"THWEE pounds ten!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy muttered the words to himself as he sat in Study No. 6, with a pencil in his hand and a fragment of scribbled paper on his knee. He was alone in the study, and too intently engaged upon his calculations to observe Jack Blake coming in.

"Thwee pounds ten and a half-a-crown makes thwee pounds twelve-and-sixpence."

"Did you do that in your head, Gussy?" asked Blake cheerfully.

Arthur Augustus started, and closed his hands over the paper. He looked up at Blake with a rather guilty expression.

"Bai Gussy, you startled me, deah boy!"

Blake closed the door of the study.

"I am going to startle you some more," he said.

"What are you dwivin' at?" asked D'Arcy, looking rather uneasy.

Jack Blake approached him with slow deliberateness, drew a chair up facing him, and sat down upon it. He laid his palms on his knees, and looked straight at D'Arcy.

The swell of the School House watched these proceedings with growing uneasiness.

"Now, Gussy, I've got a bone to pick with you."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Do you think you are acting like a chum?"

"Like a what?"

"A chum. There's something on, and you know what it is, and Figgins of the New House knows what it is, and I don't."

"Figgins! How does Figgins know?"

"Haven't you put him up to it?"

"I? Certainly not! I should not be likely to speak to Figgins about it. He has always shown too much cheek in that direction already."

Blake looked exasperated, as he felt.

"In what direction? What are you talking about?"

"The fact is, deah boy—"

"What are you keeping it dark for?"

"I'm not exactly keepin' it dark."

"Well, you're not telling anybody anything about it."

"Yaas, that is cowwect."

"Well, what does it all mean?" demanded Blake.

"You see, deah boy, it's wathah a delicate mattah. If I were to tell you kids, you would wush in with a lot of pwesents and spoil the effect."

"We—we should rush in with a lot of presents," said Blake dazedly. "Where—when—why?"

"I suppose Figgins knows the date, though it's wathah a cheek of him to take note of it. But—but pewwaps she told him herself."

"Will you explain what you are talking about?"

"I don't see how I weally can, Blake. I can't have a lot of youngstahs wunnin' into the mattah and spoilin' the effect. I have managed to waise thwee pounds twelve-and-sixpence, and I'm goin' over to Wayland to buy a little watch bwacelet—"

"What for?"

"For a pwesent, of course. The only twouble is, I don't know much about those things, and I don't know whethah you can get a decent one for thwee pounds twelve-and-sixpence."

"Gussy, I put it to you as a chum, and you won't let on. Now—"

"Oh, pway don't say that, Blake, deah boy," said D'Arcy, looking distressed. "It's vevy hard for me to wefuse—"

"I've agreed with Tom Merry to get the information and compare notes. He's going to get it from Skimpole if he can."

"What does Skimpole know about it?"

"As much as you do, apparently."

"It is like his feahful impertinence to know anythin' about it."

"Are you going to tell me?"

"You say you have agweed to tell Tom Mewwy?"

"Yes, I have."

"Well, I put it to you. Can I tell you, and have you tell him, and have him tell Lowthah and Mannahs, and then pewwaps all the Shell?"

"Is it something up against the New House?"

"Certainly not!"

"Well, I don't see how it could be if it's the same wheeze Figgins & Co. are up to, and it seems to be," said Blake.

"Now, I tell you—"

The door of the study opened, and Digby came in. Digby was looking a little troubled.

"I suppose you can't lend me two bob, D'Arcy?" he said.

"I am sowwy, Dig, but it is imposs. I have only thwee pounds twelve-and-sixpence, which I am pweservin' for a vevy important and particulah purpose."

"I've got eight. I was thinking I could get one of those little purses for six; but on second thoughts I think I ought to make it ten."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Can you lend me a couple of bob, Blake?"

"I can lend you a couple of thick ears!" said Blake wrathfully.

Digby backed away a little.

"Ah, I forgot! You were not in it. My mistake! It's all right."

"Is it all right?" exclaimed the exasperated chief of Study No. 6. "It isn't all right, my son, by a long chalk! What the dickens do you mean by keeping a secret from your lawful leader, lord, and master? Eh, what do you mean by it?"

"You see, this is a rather delicate matter. We can't have a lot of fellows rushing in with presents and spoiling the effect."

"What effect? Why presents? You utter dummy!"

"You see—"

"If you don't want me to jam your heads together," said Blake, "you'll explain at once. Human patience has its limits."

"I—I don't know," said Digby, hesitating. "I don't like to keep a chap out of it, especially a chum; but, you see, I promised D'Arcy not to tell anybody. He told me about Wednesday being the date."

"You wottah! You heard me speakin' to myself about it, and surprised me into admittin' it, you mean," said D'Arcy. "The least you could do, undah the circs, was to pwomise to wefwain fwom jawin' it all over the school!"

"So it rests with Gussy, does it?" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then I give you one minute to explain."

"It's quite imposs. If you would pwomise to keep it quite dark, and not to give a pwesent of a highah value than thwee pounds twelve-and-sixpence I might do it; only you will have to tell Tom Mewwy now."

Potts, the Office Boy!



"That's your fault."
 "Undah the circs. I am compelled to keep it dark."
 "Very well."
 "What are you doin', deah boy?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, as Blake picked up his hatbox. "Pway be careful with that toppah, Blake. What are you takin' it out of the box for?"
 "To jump on it."
 "Eh? My toppah! What?"
 "I give you ten seconds to tell me the giddy secret," said Blake, placing the hat on the floor and measuring the distance with his eye for a jump.
 Arthur Augustus sprang up in alarm.
 "Blake! You wuffian! Hold on!"
 "Are you going to tell me?" said Blake, raising his foot.
 D'Arcy did not reply, but he rushed forward to the rescue of his beloved topper. He fell over Blake's outstretched leg, tumbled forward, and alighted fairly upon the silk hat. There was a crash.
 "Ow! My hat! Ow!"
 Arthur Augustus' chest had struck the hat fairly as he fell, and the shining topper was crushed as flat as a pancake.
 "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.
 D'Arcy scrambled to his feet. He surveyed the smashed topper with anguish in his eyes. Then he turned his glimmering eyeglass upon Jack Blake.
 "What did you do that for, Gussy?" said Blake innocently.
 "You—you uttah wottah! You feahful wuffian!"
 "Blaming me?" exclaimed Blake in surprise.
 "Yaas, wathah, you—you feahful beast! I wegard you as a wottah! It think it will be impos for me to considah you again in the light of a fwient; and I uttably and absolutely wefuse to tell you a single word about my Cousin Ethel's birthday!"
 "What?" roared Blake.
 "I wefuse—"
 "You shrieking ass!" howled Digby. "You've told him now that Wednesday is Ethel's birthday, and put him up to the whole bag of tricks!"
 D'Arcy looked witheringly at his chums.
 "Is this what you call a pwomise, Dig?"
 "Eh?"
 "You pwomised to say nothin', and now you have let out the whole thing."
 "I?" howled Dig. "Why, you let it out!"
 "Pway don't pwevawicate. I am willin' to believe that you meant to keep your pwomise, but you have let the secret out in the most stupid way—"
 "You silly ass—"
 "You uttah duffer—"
 "Cousin Ethel's birthday!" shouted Blake. "I see! My hat—my only hat! I must go and tell Tom Merry this!"
 "Blake, deah boy—"
 But Jack Blake had bolted from the study.

CHAPTER 10. The Secret Out!

JACK BLAKE tore along the corridor. He was naturally excited. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's pretty cousin, Ethel Cleveland, was on the best of terms with the chums of St. Jim's. Whenever she came to the school there was a silent but none the less keen rivalry for her smiles. D'Arcy considered that as she was his cousin he

had the first right in every way, but Ethel didn't seem to see the matter in the same light.

Most of the juniors flattered themselves that Cousin Ethel thought a little more of them than the others, each individual arrogating to himself chief place in her regard.

Cousin Ethel was chummy with all. She was a kind, sweet-tempered girl, and the chums were all proud of her friendship, and all envied D'Arcy the possession of such a cousin.

Blake dashed along to Tom Merry's study and hurled the door open and rushed in.

A gasping voice was audible in the study.

"Please don't do anything of the sort, Merry! It would be most unpleasant for me to have my head bumped in that sticky-looking mess—"

"Then expound!" said Tom Merry. "You're generally only too willing to jaw, and now here's a good chance, and you won't take it. What's up on Wednesday—"

"Under the circumstances, I cannot tell you. I do not desire you to all start making presents, and perhaps putting mine in the shade," said Skimpole. "It is quite possible that I may not be able to raise ten pounds—"

"It's all right!" shouted Blake.

The Terrible Three turned round quickly.

Skimpole jerked himself from their grasp and set his glasses straight.

"You've got the secret?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Yes. Gussy blabbed it out."

"Good! Skimpole, you can cut!"

Skimpole did not cut. He remained in the study and blinked at the chums of the Shell.

"I do not bear you any malice, Tom Merry, for threatening to use me with brutal violence."

"Good! Cut!"

"And I am quite willing to forgive you. Blake appears to know now what is going on on Wednesday, so perhaps you now may be willing to subscribe together to raise the ten pounds for me—"

"Cut!" roared Tom Merry.

"I am quite willing to accept five pounds, or even four."

Tom Merry took Skimpole by one shoulder and Blake took him by the other. They ran him out of the study and bumped him down in the passage, then they slammed the door on him.

"And now what's the giddy secret?" demanded the Terrible Three in one voice.

"Wednesday is—"

"What?"

"Cousin Ethel's birthday."

"Cousin Ethel's birthday?"

"Yes—"

"My only hat! And—and those rotters were going to keep it dark!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"The unspeakable toads!" ejaculated Manners. "Going to keep it dark, and not give us the chance to send anything—even a card!"

"Reptiles!" said Monty Lowther.

"It doesn't matter so much about you chaps," said Blake.

"Cousin Ethel is in the Fourth, as it were—as D'Arcy's cousin. Fancy the young boulder having the cheek to keep it from me—me—the chief of Study No. 6! Serve him jolly well right, his silk topper getting flattened!"

"Who's flattened his topper?"

"He fell on it," said Blake blandly. "These things will happen, you know, when fellows start arguing and disobeying their lawful lords and masters."

HE TROD ON A STAIR THAT WASN'T THERE!



"Ha, ha, ha! Well, we're in the know now. The young ass! Why, if we put our heads together over the matter we can get up a ripping celebration for Cousin Ethel's birthday!" said Tom Merry excitedly.

"I was just thinking the same," said Manners. "I say, isn't it horrid that we're all stony now?"

"I'm not stony," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "There's a registered letter downstairs waiting for me, and it's bound to be something decent. And what's mine belongs to the study, kids, you know; and, under the circumstances, Blake takes equal shares if he likes."

"Good!" said Blake. "Much obliged; and if I can't manage otherwise, I'll be glad to. I'm stony at present, but a fellow must do something on an occasion like this."

"Where is Gussy now?" said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "We must have a jaw about this. We don't even know where Cousin Ethel is at present. Let's go and see him."

"What about clearing up this muck?" said Manners.

"Ah, yes! I forgot that. You can clear that up, Manners, while I go and speak to Gussy."

"No fear!" said Manners promptly.

"Then let it wait, my son. We'll tip Taggles a bob to put it right; that's the best way. Come along now to Study No. 6."

The juniors left the study.

Skimpole was waiting in the passage, and he immediately captured Tom Merry by the button of his jacket.

"Merry, I'd like you to think that over—"

Blake gave Skimpole a gentle dig in the ribs, and the freak of the Shell staggered away. The juniors walked on, leaving Skimpole gasping. They entered Study No. 6, and found Digby, D'Arcy, and Herries there having tea. D'Arcy and Dig were engaged in an extremely warm argument.

"I thought Herries and Blake ought to know all along," said Dig. "I'm jolly glad you've let it out, so there!"

"I am not so much opposed to Hewies and Blake knowin' all about Ethel's birthday," said D'Arcy, "but I refuse to have the lettin' out of the secret imputed to me. You gave it away to Blake in the most wiculous way—"

"You gave it away yourself, you ass!"

"I decline to be alluded to as an ass!"

"You gave it away—"

"It was you gave it away—"

"Why, you said—"

"And you said—"

"Oh, ring off, both of you!" said Blake. "It was Gussy gave it away, but that doesn't matter now. I was bound to get on to it."

"Nothin' of the sort, Blake. Dig allowed the secret to escape him in the most wiculous mannah—"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy! The secret's out now, anyway. Now, we're thinking of getting up a little celebration on this happy and auspicious occasion, if it can be worked."

"That's wathah a good idea!"

"Where is Cousin Ethel now?" asked Tom Merry.

"She's stayin' with some friends ovah in Wayland," said D'Arcy. "They are also friends of mine, and I am goin' to see her on her birthday."

The juniors exchanged glances.

"I suppose you've been asked if you'd like to bring a few friends?" Blake remarked, in a careless sort of way.

"No, Blake, I haven't been asked anythin' of the sort."

"They'd naturally expect you to take a chum with you."

"If they did," said D'Arcy grimly, "they'd be disappointed. I am not goin' to take any boundahs along with me on Wednesday aftahnoon."

"Now, Gussy, if that's what you call standing by a chum, I—"

"Aftah the disgustin' way in which you wuined my silk hat, Blake, you can scarcely expect me to wegard you as a chum."

"That's right; blame me!" said Blake resignedly. "I suppose I must bear the blame whenever a clumsy ass falls over his hat in this study!"

"I refuse to be chawacterised as a clumsy ass!"

"Where is Cousin Ethel staying in Wayland?" asked Tom Merry.

"I wegard that information as quite superfluous," said D'Arcy. "It cannot interest you to know the pwecise address of my cousin."

"Look here, you ass—"

"If you call me an ass, Tom Mewwy, I shall have no alternative but to give you a feahful thwashin'."

"You're jolly near getting one yourself at the present moment, Gussy!" said Blake warningly. "You've only got to keep on in your present style. We're getting fed-up with your funny ways. We're thinking that perhaps Cousin Ethel could be induced to come over here on her birthday."

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"Bai Jove, that's a good ideah!"

"We could get up a birthday feed, and celebrate the occasion properly," said Blake. "We wouldn't invite Figgins & Co., as a punishment for their cheek in keeping Ethel's birthday a secret from us!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, where is she?" demanded Tom Merry. "I can write to her and ask—"

"I think I had better write to her," said Blake thoughtfully. "We want to put the matter in the politest, and at the same time the most sensible manner possible."

"The mattah had better be left in my hands," said D'Arcy. "I will wite to Ethel, and put the mattah to her. I will explain that we particularly want to make a School House celebration of it, so as to put that wottah Figgins down."

"You ass!" growled Monty Lowther. "Then she won't come!"

"Weally, Lowthah, I wegard myself as quite capable of witin' a lettah to my own cousin without any beastlay assistance fwom a wotten Shell-fish!"

"Now, look here, Gussy!" said Blake persuasively. "I'm the proper person to write that letter, and you know it."

"It would have more weight coming from a fellow in a higher Form," said Tom Merry.



A car pulled up and Figgins sprang forward to assist a charming Cousin Ethel a cheer. "Merry!"

"Rats, and many of 'em!"

"It's no good arguin'," said D'Arcy. "I'm goin' to wite the lettah, or else it won't be witten at all. That's settled. And if you make a wov about it, deah boys, I'll go ovah to Wayland on Ethel's birthday, instead of asking her heah at all!"

The juniors glared at Arthur Augustus; but the swell of the School House held the whip-hand, and they had to give in.

"Well, I suppose we must leave it to that ass," said Tom Merry. "Of course, he'll make a muck of it."

"I see no reason to suppose anythin' of the sort."

"I say, perhaps Figgins knows Cousin Ethel's address," suggested Digby. "He seems to know a jolly lot about Cousin Ethel."

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "We'll go over to the New House and ask him."

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Come on!"

And the juniors hurried out of Study No. 6.

Arthur Augustus was left alone. He took out his pencil, and unfolded a piece of paper covered with scribbled calculations.

"Thwee pounds twelve-and-six," he murmured. "All my resources combined amount to only thwee pounds twelve-and-six, and it comes to just the same, whethah I add it up from the top or the bottom, so I suppose it must be wright. Bai Jove, though, there's that thwee bob that Mellish owes me! Pewwaps I can wope that in. I'll go and look for Mellish. That will make it thwee pounds fifteen-and-six."

And Arthur Augustus also left the study.



to alight. The juniors, in the exuberance of their feelings, gave y returns!" said Figgins.

CHAPTER 11.

Thrown Out!

IT was dusk in the quadrangle as Tom Merry & Co. crossed to the New House.

The juniors were feeling very well satisfied with themselves, and even the Terrible Three had almost recovered from the Form rag. They had discovered the secret—that was the great point. The feeding of Fatty Wynn had been in vain, and the "rag" had been endured for nothing; but they had found out the mystery, and they were satisfied. A few bumps and bruises and a wrecked study counted for nothing, now that they were in the secret.

Most of the fellows were indoors now, and some hostile glances were cast at the School House chums as they entered the rival House. But the five were the pick of the fighting

men of the School House, and not likely to be tackled, even in the enemy's quarters. They marched in coolly, and Blake caught sight of Fatty Wynn's plump form through the open door of the junior Common-room.

"This way, kids!" he said.

The School House juniors went into the room. Figgins was not visible, but Fatty Wynn and Kerr were chatting together. They looked up in surprise at the sight of Tom Merry. Some of the New House juniors made a movement as if to cut off the School House retreat to the door, but Fatty Wynn waved them back.

"It's all right, you chaps," he said. "It's pax. What do you want here, kids?"

"Come to see Figgins," said Tom Merry.

"Figgins! What do you want to see Figgins for?" asked Kerr.

"We want to know Cousin Ethel's address in Wayland," said Tom Merry directly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at? I dare say Figgins knows the address."

"Ha, ha, ha! I dare say he does."

"We're on to your little secret," said Tom Merry, with a sniff. "We know it's Cousin Ethel's birthday on Wednesday."

"You ass, Fatty—"

"I didn't let out!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn indignantly. "I was too jolly careful!"

"We screwed it out of Gussy," said Tom Merry. "Blake did, rather! The whole school can know it now. We're thinking of getting up a celebration."

Kerr and Wynn went off into a yell of laughter. Their merriment was evidently genuine, and it puzzled the School House juniors. They could not see a humorous side to the matter, so far. If there was a laugh, it ought to have been on their side, as they had discovered the secret so carefully guarded by Figgins & Co.

"Blessed if I can see what you're cackling at!" said Blake. "There's nothing funny in a birthday celebration, is there?"

"Ha, ha, ha! That's according," said Kerr, wiping his eyes. "I suppose you're thinking of a School House celebration, with the New House left out in the cold."

"Well, if Figgins gives us Cousin Ethel's address, we'll have you chaps to the feed."

Fatty Wynn's eyes sparkled.

"Oh, there's going to be a feed, is there?"

"Yes, we shall have a little party, if we can get Cousin Ethel to come over."

"I say, Kerr, in that case—"

"Shut up, Fatty—"

"Yes; but couldn't we manage to combine the two—first one and then the other—"

"Shut up!" yelled Kerr.

"Hallo, what's that?" exclaimed Tom Merry, quick to catch a clue. "Are you New House rotters thinking of getting up a celebration?"

"Find out!"

"Well, where's Figgins?" demanded Blake. "We want to see Figgins."

"He may be in any minute."

"Where is he, then? It's past locking-up."

"He's gone out for a spin on his bike."

"Oh, don't be funny! The gates have been closed half an hour."

"He has a pass from Monteith."

"Well, he ought to be in by this time," said Blake crossly. "I don't like kids being out after dark. It isn't good for them."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo, here he is!" said Herries.

Figgins had just entered the room. His face was flushed with warmth and exercise, and he looked dusty after a long and rather hard ride.

"Figgins, we've come to see you—"

"Thanks," said Figgins. "Now you've seen me you may as well travel."

"We want to ask you—"

"Not to-day."

"Eh?"

"I haven't any old clothes to give away!"

The New House juniors chuckled gleefully. Tom Merry & Co. turned red. They were greatly inclined to go for Figgins on the spot; but that would not have been a judicious way of approaching the subject of Cousin Ethel's address.

"Look here!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "We want you to tell us the address of Cousin Ethel in Wayland. We know she's there, and we know Wednesday's her birthday. We're going to get up a little celebration—"

"A little celebration?" grinned Figgins.

"Yes; in the School House—"

"In the School House? Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at, you image?"
 "Ha, ha, ha! Can't I cackle if I like in my own House?" demanded Figgins. "Hear me smile! Ha, ha, ha! I say, Kerr—Wynn, it's all right."
 "All right?" said the Co. eagerly.

"Yes, right as rain."

"What's all right?" demanded the School House juniors, in chorus.

"Oh, you'll know, some time! I'm peckish after my ride, Fatty. Anything to eat in the study?"

"Yes, Figgy, I've had tea over the way, so I was able to leave you a couple of the sausages."

"A couple!" roared Figgins. "Why, there were nine of them!"

"Were there really? I didn't count them, but I thought you'd like me to leave you a couple. I get jolly hungry in this October weather myself."

"Look here, Figgins, are you going to give us Cousin Ethel's address?"

"Not this evening," said Figgins blandly. "Some other evening."

"We'll ask you to the feed."

"I'm afraid I shall have another engagement."

"Poof! I don't believe you know the address."

"Don't I? You'll believe it on Wednesday!" chuckled Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Co.

"Look here, you cackling asses—"

"Oh, travel along, you School House youngsters!" said Figgins, with a wave of the hand. "You're right out of this, you know. It's not much good your trying to buck against the New House when we're in earnest."

"You—you long-legged freak—"

"Long-legged!" said Monty Lowther. "You don't call those things legs, do you? More like pipe-stems, to my mind."

Figgins turned red. His legs were long, and they could not by any stretch of imagination be called plump. It was a rather sore point with Figgins.

"You let my legs alone!" he growled.

"Certainly!" said Lowther. "I wouldn't touch 'em. I should be afraid they might break, and I shouldn't like to be responsible."

That was too much for Figgins. Some of the New House fellows were giggling, as well as the visitors.

"Chuck those cheeky kids out!" said Figgins wrathfully.

"Come on."

"You couldn't chuck half of us out!"

"We'll jolly well try!"

The New House juniors made a rush.

"Now, then!" roared Tom Merry. "Straight from the shoulder!"

And the School House fellows hit out.

Figgins and Kerr and Pratt and French and Jimson rolled along the floor; but the rush was overwhelming. By force of numbers the School House juniors were swept out. Figgins was up again in a flash, and his foot was one of the first to help the School House visitors down the steps of the New House. Tom Merry & Co. rolled in the quadrangle, and the steps of the House were crowded with laughing and jeering juniors.

"Come on!" yelled Digby, making a rush for the steps again. But Blake caught him by the shoulder, and swung him back.

"No good!" he growled. "Better cut!"

And they cut.

CHAPTER 12.

Cousin Ethel's Reply!

THE next day was Tuesday, the eve of Cousin Ethel's birthday. The Terrible Three were down early, and they met Arthur Augustus sunning himself on the steps of the School House. The elegant junior gave them a nod.

"Good-mornin'," he remarked. "I heah that you mucked things up, as usual, last night, ovah in the New House."

"Yes," said Tom Merry. "It was all through your not being with us, you know. What we wanted was a really capable leader."

"Exactly!" said Lowther. "Without Gussy, what could be expected?"

"What, indeed?" said Manners gravely.

"I wathah think that you wottahs are wottin'," said D'Arcy. "But, as a mattah of fact, you are uttawin' gweat twuths by mistake. If I had been there it is vewy pwob that you wouldn't have been chucked out. Figgins didn't give you Cousin Ethel's address?"

"No; he's an obstinate rotter. What is the address?"

"That's tellin', deah boy!"

"Now, Gussy, be sensible!" urged Tom Merry. "You

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know how ripping it would be to have Cousin Ethel here to a birthday celebration, and what a dot in the eye it would be to the New House. Let me write to her—"

"I wote to her last night, deah boy!"

Tom Merry gave a groan.

"Then you've mucked it up already, and there's nothing more to be done."

D'Arcy turned his monocle upon Tom Merry with a glance that ought to have withered him up on the spot.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I failed to see that my witin' the lettah is bound to muck up the mattah. As a mattah of fact, I don't want all sorts and conditions of boundahs to wite to my cousin. I bar you Shell boundahs!"

"When do you expect to get her reply?"

"I expect she will wite at once, as I have wequested her to do so. The lettah will come about midday, and Cousin Ethel will be heah to-morrow aftahnoon."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, I am pwetty certain she will not wefuse me!"

"Rats! Bosh! Scat!"

And, with those scathing remarks, the chums of the Shell passed out into the quadrangle.

Jack Blake came out a little later and joined them, wearing a worried look.

"That ass has written," he said. "I urged him last night to leave it in my hands, and he told me he had written and posted the letter in the school box while we were in the New House. That's settled it!"

"I wonder if she'll come?"

"Well, Gussy is pretty certain to have made a muck of it."

"Blessed if I can understand how a Fourth Form kid can have so much beastly nerve," said Monty Lowther.

Blake gave him a freezing glare.

"Gussy may have mucked it up," he said, "but the muck-up would have been a dead cert if any of you Shell-fish had had a hand in it. Go and eat coke!"

And Jack Blake stalked away.

During lessons that morning both the Fourth Form and the Shell showed signs of restiveness. Figgins & Co. grinned at Study No. 6 in a very exasperating way, and by the time lessons were over Blake was in almost a homicidal frame of mind.

Arthur Augustus, however, looked very pleased with himself as he came out of the class-room.

"I wathah expect there will be a lettah for me in the wack," he remarked.

"Yes—containing a decline with thanks!" growled Blake.

"Oh wats, deah boy!"

Sure enough there was a letter in the rack for the swell of the School House, and it was addressed in the well-known hand of Cousin Ethel. Arthur Augustus felt in his pocket for his penknife, while his chums stood round him with eager looks.

"Well, why don't you open it?" howled Blake.

"I haven't a papah-knife here."

"You—you—you—"

"I'm feelin' for my penknife—"

"Stick your thumb into it!" said Herries savagely.

"I am surprised at your suggestin' such a thing, Hewwies. I have nevah been guilty of openin' a lettah by stickin' my beastlay thumb into it."

"Well, buck up with the penknife!" grunted Digby.

"I am huwwyin' as fast as I can," D'Arcy felt in one pocket, and then in another. "Bai Jove! I appeah to have mislaid my penknife. It is vewy unfortunate, as I am weally eagah to open this lettah. Has any of you chaps got a penknife?"

"You—you—you image—"

"I wefuse to be addressed as an image. Follow me up to the study, deah boys. I am almost certain there is a papah-knife there."

Blake gripped D'Arcy by his shoulders as he was walking off to the stairs; he swung him back with a whirl that made his head swim.

"Stand there, you image! Now open the letter!"

"I wefuse to open the lettah unless—"

"Here's a pocket-knife!" howled Herries.

"I cannot open a lady's lettah with a gweat wuff pocket-knife like that."

"Try the small blade, you—you—"

"Hallo! What's the row?" exclaimed Tom Merry, coming up with Manners and Lowther. "Is that a letter from Cousin Ethel?"

"Yes; and the young demon won't open it because he hasn't a paper-knife—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Scrag him!"

"I wefuse to be scawged, and—"

"Here's a penknife, Gussy."

Tom Merry extracted a little silver-handled penknife from his waistcoat pocket, and Arthur Augustus deigned to accept it.

"Thank you vewy much, Tom Mewwy. Pway open it for me."

He handed it back, and Tom Merry gravely opened it, while the juniors stood round Arthur Augustus, watching him like hungry tigers, or like a football team watching the player of the opposite side taking a penalty kick.

"Thank you vewy much, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus, taking the open penknife and slitting open the envelope with it. "There is your knife, deah boy. If you fellows will stand back and be quiet I will pwoceed to wead this lettah."

"Read it out," said Lowther.

"I shall probably wead it out, Lowthah, but I must wead it to myself first."

"Buck up, then, you horrid rotter!" yelled Blake.

"I wefuse to be called a howwid wottah."

Blake glared, but Arthur Augustus was impervious to glaring. It was better to "give him his head," as every interruption made it longer before the letter was read.

He opened it with great deliberateness, and adjusted his eyeglass, and read it through. His face was seen to fall, and he ejaculated:

"Bai Jove!"

The juniors were on tenterhooks.

But D'Arcy did not seem in a hurry to explain. He slowly read the letter through a second time, and then folded it and put it into his pocket and walked off.

The juniors glared at him in blank amazement for a moment, and then there was a general whoop, and they rushed at him. Half a dozen pairs of hands seized him, and he was yanked back.

"Bai Jove! Pway don't be such wuff asses, deah boys—"

"What's in that letter?"

"What does she say?"

"Is she coming?"

"Bai Jove! I forgot you wanted to know," said D'Arcy. "Pway excuse me. No, she is not comin'."

"Not coming!"

"No, it is imposs."

"Read it out, then!" growled Tom Merry. "I'm pretty certain it's your fault."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy!"

"You have made a muck-up of it! But read the letter out."

"I wefuse to admit that I have made a muck-up of it."

"Read the letter out."

"Vewy well. Don't cwoyd me like that."

And Arthur Augustus began to read the letter.

"Dear Arthur,—I am sowwy it will be impossible to accept your kind invitation to a celebration in the School House on the occasion of my birthday. I have already accepted a similah invitation fwom Figgins—"

"What!"

It was a general howl.

"Pway don't intewwupt me, deah boys—"

"Look here, are you rotting, you ass?"

"I am not wottin', and I wefuse—"

"Go on with the letter."

"Vewy well."

And the swell of St. Jim's continued to read:

"I have already accepted a similar invitation fwom Figgins to have tea in the New House on the Wednesday aftahnnoon. I hope I shall see you then."

"Your affectionate cousin,

"ETHEL CLEVELAND."

"That is all, deah boys, except that she sends her wegards—"

"Figgins!"

"That's where he had gone last evening!"

"He's done us!"

The School House juniors were furious.

D'Arcy put the letter in his pocket. Of all the group, he was the only one just then whose manners had the repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

"We've been done!" growled Monty Lowther. "Catch Figgins inviting us to the feed! Of course, he'll keep us out!"

"It's all D'Arcy's fault," said Manners.

"I weally fail to see how you make that out, Mannahs."

"Of course it is!" said Tom Merry hotly. "If you had told us before that Wednesday was Cousin Ethel's birthday we should have had time to act."

"Yes, rather! It's all Gussy's fault."

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Figgins & Co. have done us, all through that howling ass!"

"I wefuse to be alluded to as a howlin' ass."

"Bump him!" yelled Lowther.

"I wefuse to be bumped."

"You can refuse till you're black and blue in the chivvy, but you're going to be bumped all the same," said Jack Blake. "Collar him!"

"Weally, Blake— Pway don't be so wuff! I say, deah boys— Gweat Scott! Ow!"

Arthur Augustus was collared by the indignant juniors. He had said that he would not be bumped; but he was bumped, and bumped all along the passage and back again, and finally bumped on the steps outside, and left there gasping. And Tom Merry & Co., somewhat relieved in their feelings, consulted as to what was best to be done.

CHAPTER 13.

Skimpole Asks a Favour!

"H A, ha, ha!"

That was the greeting Tom Merry & Co. received from Figgins & Co. when they went out into the quad. Figgins knew that D'Arcy had written, and he knew, of course, what the reply must be. And the downcast looks of the School House juniors sufficiently showed that the reply from Cousin Ethel had been duly received.

"Hear us smile!" said Figgins. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't make that row!" said Blake. "I should think you must be satisfied with having faces like that without going in for a cackle warranted to kill at a hundred yards! Go and bury yourselves!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The School House juniors marched off, followed by that irritating "Ha, ha, ha!" from Figgins & Co. The New House Co. was jubilant.

"We've done them this time," Figgins remarked. "Done them brown!"

"Done 'em to a turn!" said Kerr. "Caught them fairly napping!"

"All the same," said Fatty Wynn thoughtfully, "it might have been better in some respects to meet them half-way."

"How do you make that out?"

"Well, if they're thinking of giving a feed, it seems a pity that we shouldn't go to it."

"We're going to have a feed ourselves in the New House."

"Yes, I know. Still a feed is always a feed. No harm in having two."

"Oh, rats!" said Figgins.

Meanwhile, the School House chums were talking it over. There seemed to be no way out of the difficulty. Cousin Ethel had promised to attend the birthday celebration in the New House. D'Arcy was pretty certain to be asked, as he was Ethel's cousin. But would Figgins & Co. ask the rest? It was doubtful. And even then their presence at the feed in the New House would really only grace the triumph of Figgins & Co.

(Continued on page 19.)



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TAKE A LOOK AT—



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HALLO, chums! As a start to our pow-wow this week I simply must make mention of the colossal Free Gift Scheme which our companion papers, "Magnet," "Modern Boy," and "Ranger" are starting with their current issues. Briefly, these three topping boys' papers are offering to readers **SIX SUPER PICTURE STAMPS EVERY WEEK FOR SIXTEEN WEEKS**. These fine stamps, which are in colour, depict **EVERY BOY'S WORLD IN PICTURES**. The subjects selected are Rough Riders, Ships, Locomotives, Dogs, Aeroplanes, and the Art of Self Defence. The complete collection makes a formidable show, and all Genites are strongly urged to join in this Grand Free Gift Scheme. As a special concession, "Modern Boy" this week, in addition to the **SIX SUPER STAMPS**, presents to **EVERY** reader a wonderful 20-page Album, worth sixpence, to house the complete collection. Got that? Then look lively and get this week's "MODERN BOY"! It will cost you twopence—that's all!

"TOM MERRY & CO. AT THE ZOO!"

By Martin Clifford.

That's the title of next Wednesday's grand long complete story of the chums of St. Jim's. Don't miss it, whatever you do. The same applies to the coming chapters of

"THE WORLD WRECKERS!"

which simply abound in thrills. For a hearty laugh Potts the Office Boy duly obliges, while to round off the programme, so to speak, you will find some more "snappy" paragraphs of the news of the world.

WORLD'S RECORD CATCH.

Imagine a fish nine feet four inches long, with a girth of six feet six and a half inches, and you'll get some idea of the record catch that fell to the rod and line of Colonel E. T. Peel recently. Can you guess the weight of this monster?—seven hundred and ninety-eight pounds! In fact, a world's record for tunny fishing with rod and line. It took forty-eight minutes to land this monster—and mighty exciting minutes they were. The dinghy from which the colonel fished was towed for a mile and a half, and two hundred and fifty yards of line ran out as the giant tunny fought for freedom. Patience and skill won, however, and that tunny was eventually brought ashore at Scarborough. Some of you fellows may have seen the film featuring Zane Grey, the celebrated novelist, as a star turn in a fishing expedition. If so, you will

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remember he landed a tunny that looked as big as a house. But the Scarborough catch beats that fellow by many pounds.

A DANGEROUS SPORT!

Tunny fishing has always fascinated the really keen fisherman, but it is a dangerous sport. Hooking a giant is one thing—landing him is another. Just recently a Spanish angler exclaimed excitedly to his companions that he had got a "big 'un." Next moment the unfortunate fellow was jerked out of the boat. The Spanish angler has a habit of fastening the line round his waist when he fishes for tunny, and in this case it proved disastrous. The luckless man was towed off by the tunny at a terrific rate. One of his companions dived in after him in an endeavour to sever the line, but he became so exhausted that he eventually died. Of the man who was pulled into the water and towed away nothing more has been seen. Presumably the tunny dragged him below the surface. Tunny fishing is great sport—but it has its dangerous side.

HEARD THIS ONE?

Tommy: "Uncle, will you give me sixpence—"
Uncle (reprovingly): "If you . . . ?"
Tommy: "If you can't afford any more."

FLYING TO A FOOTER MATCH!

Vivian Gibbins, the famous footballer, is a school teacher in London, and recently he was confronted with the problem of getting to the Bristol ground in time for a match between Bristol Rovers and Southend, due to start at six-fifteen p.m. As Gibbins was carrying out his scholastic duties until four o'clock in the afternoon, some hustle was necessary. But Vivian Gibbins managed to overcome the difficulty. He flew to the ground, arrived in time and had the satisfaction of helping his side to victory, and contributing a goal into the bargain. Who says the aeroplane isn't useful?

ANNUALS FOR ALL TASTES!

Have you seen this year's edition of the "Holiday Annual"? It's really wonderful. Stories of your old favourites—Tom Merry & Co.—are to be found in it, to say nothing of specially selected yarns of adventure on land, at sea and in the air. Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars, Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood also "occupy" many pages of this bulky volume, and for the modest price of six shillings the "Holiday Annual" is a BOOK in a THOUSAND. Get your newsagent to show you a copy. If you have a leaning towards adventure yarns only the POPULAR BOOK OF BOYS' STORIES will suit you

down to the ground. The price of this bumper book is two shillings and sixpence and it is value unbeatable. If you are interested in Mechanical Marvels the "Modern Boy's" Book of MOTORS, SHIPS, AND ENGINES, priced at seven shillings and sixpence, will provide you with hours of entertainment. Have a look at it. By the way, if any of you desire to purchase your annuals through a Christmas Club, your newsagent will be happy to give you full details. Give him a look in to-day.

THE LADIES WON!

I know football has displaced King Cricket, but I must pass on to you the story of how eleven Public schoolboy cricketers met a team of women cricketers in their annual match at Colwell, Hertfordshire, and were soundly beaten. The boys scraped together fifty-five runs; but how many runs do you think the ladies knocked up? Two hundred and seventy-five for nine wickets declared. At this rate the day may dawn when our Test Selectors will include a sprinkling of the fair sex in the teams they send to Australia to collar those Ashes. Who knows?

THE FLYING FROG!

Strange things happen in Mexico, but one of the strangest lately concerns a species of frog. Apparently, in the process of evolution these frogs are learning to fly. A professor recently took one of these frogs to the top of a high water tower and dropped it. The frog fell like a stone, for twelve feet, then kicked out its feet, planed down at an angle, and touched ground in a perfect "three point" landing. I don't know whether our English frogs have caught this craze yet, but don't be too surprised if you should see one doing his parachute stuff!

ONE FOR THE CAR SNATCHERS!

So many owners of motor cars have made the discovery that their car has been pinched whilst their back has been turned for a few moments that they have clamoured for some device which will put a stop to this wholesale raiding. Now comes a contrivance which promises to put the kibosh on the car thief. It is in the form of a combination lock and is situated on the dashboard of the car. Nine buttons operate this lock, four of which form a code word known only to the owner of the car. When the car is locked it is impossible to turn on the flow of petrol unless the correct code word is used. The inventor of this device claims that forty thousand combinations can be formed with the four letters, so it will have to be a mighty lucky car thief who can hit on the correct word when he wants to turn on the petrol!

DO YOU KNOW . . .

That Willford J. Sarff of Saratoga, flew a kite for more than sixty-three hours? How's that for a record, chums?

That in Japan the horses wear straw shoes which have to be renewed about every ten miles?

That the highest tide in the world is in the Bay of Fundy? This Canadian bay sees a rise of fifty-three feet!

YOUR EDITOR.

COUSIN ETHEL'S BIRTHDAY!

(Continued from page 17.)

"It's a rotten go!" said Tom Merry. "If we could see Cousin Ethel we might be able to work it somehow. Gussy will have to tell us where she is."

"He's likely to after that bumping we gave him!" grinned Digby.

"Oh, I forgot that! Anyway, we'll try."

They tried. But Arthur Augustus was adamant. He had had to change his clothes after that bumping, being dusty and dishevelled from head to foot. He was fairly on his dignity now, and immovable.

"You have tweated me with gwoos diswespect," he said. "You have wumped my jacket, disawwanged my tie, and made my hair untidy. I wegard you as a set of wuff boundahs, and wefuse to speak to you!"

"Where is Cousin Ethel?"

Arthur Augustus turned on his heel.

"Where is Cousin Ethel?" roared Tom Merry.

"Wats!" said D'Arcy. And that was the only reply they could extract from him.

During afternoon school Tom Merry thought the matter out. He confided to Lowther, during the lessons, that it was absolutely necessary to see Cousin Ethel.

"I'm going over to Wayland," he said.

Monty Lowther stared.

"On spec?"

"Yes. I suppose Cousin Ethel is bound to go out sometimes, and you remember she is fond of walks in the afternoon. She may go out shopping. I'm going to buzz off to Wayland immediately after school, and chance it."

"Merry, you are talking," said Mr. Linton.

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"Take fifty lines!"

"Yes, sir," said Merry, with a grimace.

But when afternoon school was dismissed Tom Merry carried out his plan. Wayland was out of bounds, and Tom Merry presented himself with an ingratiating smile before Kildare to ask for a pass.

"Well, what do you want, Merry?" grinned Kildare, who knew that smile of old.

"Can you let me have a pass, Kildare? I want to go to Wayland."

"What for?"

"Important business."

"H'm! Wayland is a long way, and you won't be back by calling-over. I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to be a little more explicit, Merry."

"Well, you see, Kildare, Wednesday is Cousin Ethel's birthday," said Tom Merry glibly. "I want to see her to make the arrangements for a little celebration, if possible. Cousin Ethel is staying in Wayland now."

"Oh, I see! In that case you can have the pass. But, mind, don't be late!"

"I'll be jolly early, Kildare."

The Sixth Form prefect wrote out the pass, and Tom Merry pocketed it in great glee.

"Thanks awfully, Kildare! You're a trump!" he said.

And he hurried away to rejoin his chums.

"It's all right," he said. "You chaps can come as far as the station with me if you like. We've got good time to catch the five o'clock train if we don't stop for tea."

"But what are you going to do for tea?"

"I'll get a snack in Wayland."

And the chums of the Shell walked down to the gates and set out at a brisk walk for Rylcombe.

Tom Merry caught the train, and Manners and Lowther saw him off. Wayland was a good distance by road, but by train it was not a long journey, and ere long Tom Merry stepped out at the junction. Meanwhile the captain of St. Jim's had received a second application for a pass out of bounds—this time from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Where do you want to go?" demanded Kildare. "I've already given Tom Merry a pass for Wayland."

"Bai Jove, I wondah what he's gone to Wayland for? I want to go on important business, Kildare—extremely important business, deah boy."

Kildare laughed.

"So did Tom Merry. Come, out with it!"

"You see, Wednesday is my Cousin Ethel's birthday, and I want to go to Wayland to buy her a present."

"I suppose I must let you have a pass, then," said Kildare. And he wrote it out, and the swell of the School House thanked him effusively and retired.

Kildare settled down to work, and five minutes later there came another tap at his study door.

"Oh, come in!" said the captain of St. Jim's resignedly.

It was Skimpole who came in. He blinked at the senior.

"If you please, Kildare, can you give me a pass to go to Wayland?"

"How many more?" exclaimed Kildare.

"I do not understand you. I require a pass to go to Wayland on important business, and though I disapprove entirely of the system which requires boys to account for their ingoing and outcomings—I mean, their incomings and outgoing—still, to avoid trouble with the masters I have come to request you to give me a pass."

"You're jolly near getting a licking instead!" Kildare remarked.

"I fail to see anything provoking in a plain statement of my beliefs," said Skimpole. "I really must have the pass, you know, as I have important business in Wayland. What I want cannot be obtained at Rylcombe."

"And what do you want?"

"Wednesday is Miss Cleveland's birthday. You are acquainted with Cousin Ethel, of course, I have decided to purchase a book containing the famous works of Professor Balmeycrummet as a present for Cousin Ethel, and in this dull village such a book cannot be obtained, or even ordered with any certainty of receiving it. For that purpose I am going over to Wayland, and—"

"Oh, you are going over, are you?"

"Yes, certainly. I am asking you for a pass as a matter of form."

Kildare hesitated, but his good nature prevailed, and he wrote out the pass.

Skimpole took it.

"And now, Kildare, if you don't mind—"

"Well, what is it?"

"Would you mind lending me my fare to Wayland? I am, unfortunately, quite destitute of ready cash."

There was a very curious look on Kildare's face as he laid a shilling on the table.

"Thank you!" said Skimpole, putting the shilling in his pocket. "One more thing—"

"If you wouldn't mind getting out of my study, Skimpole, it would save me the trouble of slinging you out," suggested Kildare.

"There was one more thing I was going to ask you. The book I have mentioned costs three-and-six. Considering that it may open one's mind and make all the difference between darkness and light to the intellect of the reader, it must be admitted that it is dirt cheap at the price. But it unfortunately happens that I have no cash. Would you mind lending me the three-and-six, the amount to be repaid out of the profits of my forthcoming publication on Determinism?"

Kildare rose from his chair, took the freak of the Shell by his ear, and led him gently to the door of the study. There he gave him a gentle kick, which helped him out into the passage without the trouble of walking. Skimpole sat down on the linoleum and blinked at Kildare through his glasses.

"Cut!" said the captain of St. Jim's.

"Am I to take this as a hint, Kildare, that you do not wish to lend me the three-and-six?" asked Skimpole, blinking.

Kildare burst into a laugh and closed his door. Skimpole picked himself up and drifted disconsolately down the passage.

"It's no use going to Wayland unless I have the cash to pay for the book," he murmured. "The soulless book-sellers would not even order it for me without the cash. They would greet with ribald laughter any proposition to reimburse them out of the profits of my great book on Determinism. I suppose I had better take the shilling back to Kildare."

He returned to the captain's study. He tapped at the door, and opened it, and blinked into the room. Kildare looked up furiously from a Greek exercise.

"Kildare, as I— Oh!"

A Liddell and Scott dictionary came hurtling through the air, and crashed on the floor. Skimpole popped out of the study as the heavy lexicon plumped on the floor. He went rather hurriedly down the passage.

"Kildare seems to be annoyed about something," he murmured. "He's usually such a good-tempered fellow, too. Apparently, he does not wish me to return his shilling."

CHAPTER 14.

A Little Shopping!

"COUSIN ETHEL!"

Tom Merry uttered the exclamation as he raised his cap.

Fortune had favoured the hero of the Shell. In the old-fashioned High Street of the market town he

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had come almost face to face with Cousin Ethel, and his quest was almost over as soon as it had commenced. He hurried towards the girl with a look of delight that brought a smile to her lips.

"Tom!"

"I came over to see you," said Tom Merry, as they shook hands. "I wanted to see you so particularly that I came over on the chance."

"That was very venturesome of you," said Cousin Ethel, laughing. "You might have never met me. Why didn't you get my address from Arthur?"

Tom Merry laughed, too.

"Gussy isn't on speaking terms with any of us, at present," he explained.

"Dear me!"

"It's nothing serious, you know, only his dig."

Cousin Ethel smiled.

"I'm jolly glad I met you," said Tom Merry.

"And I am very pleased," said Cousin Ethel. "I am just going to do some shopping. Would you care to walk with me?"

"Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry promptly.

And he walked by Cousin Ethel's side.

"This is really fortunate. I didn't care to ask that rotter Figgins for you—I mean I—!" He broke off in confusion, but Cousin Ethel was looking straight ahead, and did not seem to have heard the unfortunate expression applied to Figgins, and Tom Merry quickly recovered himself. "I—I didn't ask Figgins, I mean. But it's all right now. I want to speak to you about Wednesday."

"Wednesday is my birthday," said Cousin Ethel.

"Yes, that's it. We're going to have a celebration in the School House, and we hoped you would come—"

"Yes, Arthur wrote and asked me. It was very, very kind of you all."

"It seems that that chap Figgins—"

"I promised Figgins."

"Rather unfortunate, isn't it?" said Tom Merry. "Of course, we should have had Figgins & Co. over to our feed—"

"And now it will be the other way."

"I—I don't know—"

"Surely you and your friends will not refuse to come?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Not much. But we may not be asked."

"Why, Figgins told me that all my friends will be present," said Cousin Ethel, looking puzzled. "Of course, I shall expect to see you all."

"The rotter!" muttered Tom Merry. "He was keeping it dark till the last moment, I suppose, to tantalise us."

"Did you speak?"

"Yes; Figgins has forgotten to ask us, but I suppose he will do so to-morrow. I—I suppose it wouldn't be possible to excuse yourself to Figgins, and—come to the School House instead? We'd ask Figgins over."

Cousin Ethel laughed.

"I'm afraid not, Tom. It would hardly be fair on Figgins, would it?"

"Well, after the rotter's stolen a march on us—I mean, perhaps not. Of course, you know best. If we're going to make a party of it, I suppose it doesn't matter whether it's held in the School House or the New House."

"Of course not," said Cousin Ethel brightly, "especially as you will make it—make it—what do you call it when you leave off fighting for a little while?"

Tom Merry coloured.

"Pax?" he suggested.

"Yes, that is it. You will make it pax."

"Oh, yes, of course, we should make it pax on Cousin Ethel's birthday!" said Tom Merry, rather reproachfully.

"Even Figgins—I mean, that will be all right. Are you going into this shop?"

Cousin Ethel had stopped outside a grocer's.

"Yes. I am doing some shopping, you know. I am making up some parcels of things to give to some poor people on my birthday."

"What a good idea, and just like you," said Tom Merry.

"Wait a few minutes for me."

"A few hours if you like."

Cousin Ethel laughed, and entered the shop. Tom Merry waited ten minutes, and when the girl came out she handed him three or four parcels. The junior received them willingly enough, and accompanied the girl cheerfully to the next shop.

It was a greengrocer's.

"Wait a couple of minutes," said Cousin Ethel brightly.

"Yes, rather, as long as you like."

Cousin Ethel kept him waiting only six or seven minutes this time. Then she bestowed her purchases upon him—a bag of potatoes, a bundle of carrots, and a cabbage, and a paper bag stuffed with apples.

Tom Merry began to look a little serious. It was not easy to dispose of his burdens, but he bore them gallantly.

"You are sure you don't mind carrying these things?" said Cousin Ethel anxiously.

"Of course not."

"I could carry some of them."

"That you won't."

"If you are tired—"

"My dear Ethel—"

"Very well; wait a few minutes while I go in here."

Miss Cleveland entered a draper's shop. Tom Merry stood up outside the shop window, and waited.

He waited for twenty minutes. Then came a light step behind him, and he gasped with relief as Miss Cleveland joined him.

"Have I kept you waiting long?" she asked.

"Oh, no, no!" gasped Tom Merry.

"There are only three more shops to go into," said Cousin Ethel. "Perhaps I had better carry this little box."

"Oh, no, give it to me, do, please! I can put it under my arm."

"If you would rather—"

"Please!"

The cardboard box from the draper's was added to Tom Merry's pile. They walked on, until they came to a stationer's.

"I shan't be a minute in here," said Cousin Ethel entering.

She was right. She was not one minute, but six. She brought out a couple of packages, and added them to those under Tom Merry's arms. The next visit was to a dairy, and a bag of new-laid eggs was added, Tom Merry gripping the top of the bag with his fingers, and announcing cheerfully that it was quite safe.

"Sure?" said Cousin Ethel, a little doubtfully.

"Safe as houses!" said Tom Merry.

The last place was a toyshop. Cousin Ethel came out with three little boxes in her hand, after keeping Tom waiting for only six minutes.

"I must carry these," she said.

"Oh, no!" said Tom Merry valiantly.

"Very well," said Cousin Ethel, with a charming smile.

Tom Merry received the rest of the burden, and, with Cousin Ethel, walked off homeward, almost staggering under his load.

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Kildare took the freak of the Shell and led him to the door. There he gave him a kick which helped him out into the passage without the trouble of walking. "Cut!" said the captain of St. Jim's.

Cousin Ethel looked round. The apples were dropping out of the bag, and already three big ones had rolled off the pavement.

"Look out!" yelled a voice.

Tom Merry stopped dead—and it was as well he did, for he was on the very point of stepping into an open manhole!

"Dear me!" said Cousin Ethel.

"It's all right," said Tom Merry hastily. "I'll save them!"

He jerked the bag of apples a little higher up under his arm, and the bag of eggs broke loose, the top of the paper bag tearing in his fingers.

Crash!

"Oh!" gasped Tom Merry.

The eggs were smashed to a pulp.

Cousin Ethel's face was a study.

"I—I am awfully sorry, Ethel!"

The girl laughed.

"Never mind; we must go back to the dairy and get some more."

Tom Merry shuddered. But back to the dairy they went, and a fresh bag of eggs was obtained. Tom Merry insisted upon carrying them, and somehow he managed it. But as he followed Cousin Ethel he almost regretted his gallantry.

"You will come in to tea, won't you?" said Cousin Ethel sweetly, as they stopped at a garden gate on the outskirts of Wayland.

Tom Merry would gladly have accepted the invitation. He had had no tea, and he was very hungry. But it was already dusk, and there was no time. It was a long walk back to the station.

"I—I'm sorry," he said. "I should like to awfully, but I shall have to cut back."

"You can't even spare a little while?"

"I'm afraid not. Thank you so much!"

"I must thank you," said Cousin Ethel, taking her parcels. "H'm! If you won't come in, I think you may put the parcels down here, and I'll send out for them. I shall see you to-morrow in the New House at St. Jim's."

Tom Merry shook hands with Cousin Ethel.

"Good-bye," he said; "or, rather, au revoir!"

"Au revoir!"

And Tom Merry raised his cap, and went down the street. There was a rather curious smile upon Cousin Ethel's face as she walked up the garden-path.

Tom Merry hurried to the station, and there he had the pleasure—or otherwise—of waiting ten minutes for a train to Rylcombe. But it came puffing in at last.

"I'm glad she didn't notice that I alluded to Figgins as a rotter!" he murmured, as he took his seat in a carriage.

"I—Hullo, Gussy!" he broke off in amazement as the elegant figure of the swell of St. Jim's came flying across the platform just in time to jump into the carriage.

Tom Merry held the door open, and gave D'Arcy a helping hand in.

The swell of St. Jim's sank breathless upon a seat.

"Bai Jove, just caught the beastly thing, you know!"

The train snorted out of the station.

CHAPTER 15.

A Night Alarm!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS laid a little parcel on the seat, and fanned himself with a cambric handkerchief.

Tom Merry looked at him curiously.

"I didn't know you were in Wayland," he remarked.

"And I didn't know you were," said D'Arcy. "Pway what have you got?"

"Eh?"

"What have you bought?"

"Bought! Did you see me, then?"

"No, deah boy, not till I saw you in this cawwiage."

"Then how did you know that I had been out shopping?"

"Guessed it, deah boy. What have you shopped?"

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"A jolly lot of things—stationery, and drapery, and grocery, and cabbages, and apples, and eggs—"
Arthur Augustus adjusted his eyeglass, and favoured Tom Merry with a stare.

"I pwesume you are not wottin'," he remarked.

"Certainly not! Cousin Ethel—"

"You haven't seen her?"

"Yes, I have!"

"Did that wottah Figgins give you her address?"

"No; it was by chance. I came over on spec."

"Oh, I see! And you say you have bought gwocery, and cabbages, and eggs, and things to give Cousin Ethel on her birthday?"

"Ha, ha, ha! No!"

"I asked what you had bought for a birthday pwesent—"

"Oh, I see! Nothing! My present's coming down from London; I sent a postal order for it last night," explained Tom Merry. "I've been shopping with Cousin Ethel, and she let me carry the parcels for her."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?"

"I wefuse to have my laugh chawactewised as a cackle!"

"Well, what are you laughing at, then?"

"I suppose there were a lot of parcels?" grinned Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, rather! I was glad I was there, because, really, I don't see how Miss Cleveland could possibly have carried half of them herself."

"Ha, ha, ha! I wathah think she wouldn't have bought so many if she hadn't had you with her to cawwy them, Tom Mewwy."

"Oh, yes; she's getting things to give to some poor people on her birthday."

"Yaas; but I suppose the shopkeepahs would have sent them home, wouldn't they?"

"I suppose she never thought of that—girls never think of things, you know."

"No; not when they don't want to, deah boy."

"What do you mean, ass?"

"Ha, ha, ha! She tweeked me the same way once!"

"The same way! What are you driving at?"

"I weally don't know how I had offended her," went on D'Arcy meditatively; "girls take offence at things, and you never know why; but on that occasion our conversation had been on the most indifferent subjects. I wemembah that I had just asked her if she did not think Figgins a long-legged fweak, and then she began shoppin'—"

"Began what?"

"Began shoppin', and loaded me up with boxes of sweets, and bundles of cawwots and turnips, and things. I nevah weally felt so awfully widiculous in my life, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The cuwious part of it was that I nevah could guess what I had said to offend her. Girls are cuwious cweatures."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The train snorted into Rylcombe. It was a sharp walk to St. Jim's to get in before the juniors' bed-time. Tom Merry rang a mighty peal on the bell, and Taggles came sniffing down to the gate. As both juniors had passes, Taggles had nothing to say, but he murmured things uncomplimentary to the two juniors as he closed the gate after them.

"Good-night, Taggy!" said Tom Merry genially. "I'm always pleased to give you a little exercise of an evening, you know."

The school porter grunted.

The juniors crossed to the School House, Arthur Augustus carrying his parcel very carefully.

Tom Merry glanced at it as they entered the lighted hall of the House.

"What have you got there, Gussy?"

"A nobby little watch-bwacelet," said Arthur Augustus. "I was afwaid I shouldn't be able to get one for three pounds twelve-and-six; but the jewellah chap knew me, you know, and I wewered him to my governah, so he took the three pounds twelve-and-six, and let me have the watch, leaving the west ovah."

"My hat! And how much do you owe him?"

"I forget whethah it's four-pounds-ten, or five-pounds-ten. It's on the bill, and I believe I've got it in my pocket somewhere."

And Arthur Augustus joined the Fourth Form, who were going up to bed. There was a great deal of curiosity expressed as to the contents of the precious little packet, and in the dormitory D'Arcy opened it to show his purchase to his admiring Form-fellows.

It was a very pretty little watch-bracelet, and Cousin Ethel's monogram had been cut on the back of the watch.

"My hat!" said Blake. "I wish I were a giddy billionaire! I'm stony, and all I can give is a fretwork letter-rack."

"I suppose that must have cost two or three pounds?" Mellish remarked.

Arthur Augustus smiled.

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"I suppose so," he assented.

"And I shouldn't wonder if you lost it before to-morrow, too."

"Wats, deah boy!"

The Fourth Form went to bed. Half an hour after "lights out" Mellish sat up in bed, his eyes glittering mischievously in the dark.

"Any of you fellows awake?" he whispered.

There was no reply, and the cad of the Fourth stepped out of bed.

Arthur Augustus was dreaming sweet dreams of a new and unmatched pattern of fancy waistcoats, when he stirred and awoke.

"I think I will have cwimson bars and black spots," he murmured. "I—er—ah, I have been dweamin'! I wondah what woke me up?"

There was a slight sound in the stillness of the dormitory. Arthur Augustus sat up in bed and peered to and fro in the gloom.

"Is that someone moving about?" he exclaimed.

There was no reply. Arthur Augustus shivered a little. He was certain that he had heard someone moving about, and as that someone had not answered, he naturally thought of burglars. The remembrance of how Tom Merry had been kidnapped on one occasion was fresh in his mind.

"I say, Blake, Dig, Hewwies! Wake up!"

"What's the matter, you image?" came a sleepy voice from Blake's bed.

"I wefuse to be called an image, and there is a burglah in the woom."

"Well, let him burgle, can't you, without bothering me?"

"I think it is extremely prob that he is goin' to cawwy me off and hold me to wansom."

"Oh, go to sleep!"

"I cannot go to sleep while there is a burglah in the woom," said D'Arcy, getting out of the bed. "I have a vewy valuable watch lyin' on a chair beside my bed, and the wottah may have twacked me fwom Wayland on purpose to steal it. Get up, old chap!"

He jerked the bedclothes off Blake.

The leader of Study No. 6 gave a roar and tumbled out of bed and groped for Arthur Augustus.

"Are you lookin' for some matches, Blake?"

"No; I'm looking for you!"

Arthur Augustus backed away in alarm.

"Pway, deah boy, don't be an ass, with a burglah in the woom!"

There was a flare of a match. Digby was sitting up in bed, with a match between his finger and thumb. Two or three heads were looking excitedly from the bedclothes.

"What's the matter?"

"Who's that up?"

"It's Gussy," said Blake. "Playing the giddy ox, as usual, too."

"There is a burglah in the woom, deah boys!"

"A burglar? My hat!"

Blake lighted a candle-end at Dig's match. Two or three other candle-ends were lighted, and several fellows looked up and down the dormitory. There was no sign of a burglar. D'Arcy's valuable parcel still lay on the chair beside his bed, tied up with string, and apparently quite safe.

"It's all rot!" said Mellish, who was in bed. "There isn't any burglar. It's only some more of Gussy's piffle!"

"If you make diswepetful allusions to me, Mellish, I shall thwash you!"

Mellish snored. Blake took the swell of St. Jim's by the back of the neck and ran him back to the bed he had left, and bumped him on it.

"Now get to bed," he said. "If you make any more row to-night we'll lock you out of the dormitory, and you can sleep in the passage."

"I should uttally wefuse to sleep in the passage, and I am quite certain that there was somebody movin' about in this woom."

"Oh, cheese it, and go to sleep!"

Blake got into bed again, and the candle-ends were blown out.

Arthur Augustus took his valuable parcel off the chair and stuffed it under the mattress of his bed.

"I am quite certain that there was somebody in the woom," he murmured. "That will be safah there, I think. Good-night, Blake, deah boy!"

Blake snored.

CHAPTER 16.

Wynn Purchases a Present!

COUSIN ETHEL'S birthday dawned fine and clear—a bright October day. There was a great deal of subdued excitement in the Shell and Fourth Forms at St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus, still quite convinced that there had been



"Hallo, Gussy!" exclaimed Tom Merry as the elegant form of the swell of St. Jim's came flying across the platform, just in time to jump into the carriage. "Better late than never!" Tom Merry gave D'Arcy a helping hand. "Bai Jove! Just caught the beastly thing, you know!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

a marauder in the dormitory overnight, took out his parcel from under the mattress as soon as he was dressed, and carried it down to Mr. Railton. He asked the Housemaster to lock it up in his desk until it should be wanted, which Mr. Railton willingly did. The swell of St. Jim's saw it locked up, and felt easier in his mind when he left the Housemaster's study.

"Is your parcel all right?" Mellish asked, meeting him in the passage.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "I have asked Mr. Waiton to mind it for me till Cousin Ethel comes this afternoon."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see anythin' funny in that, Mellish."

"There are lots of funny things you don't see," replied Mellish, walking away and leaving the swell of the School House considerably puzzled.

Just before morning school Figgins came over to see Tom Merry & Co.

They received him rather grimly. But Figgins was geniality itself.

"We've got a little celebration on in the New House this afternoon," he said. "We should be pleased if you fellows would come."

"Oh, we'll come!" said Jack Blake.

"I ought really to have asked you yesterday," said Figgins blandly. "It's curious how these little things slip one's memory."

"Yes, isn't it, you rotter?"

"Is this the way you accept invitations, Blake?"

"I wergad that wemark as somewhat wude of Blake. We shall all be vewy pleased to accept your wemarkably kind invitation, Figgins," said D'Arcy.

"Wemarkably so," assented Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"We're coming, of course," said Tom Merry. "As a matter of fact, Cousin Ethel told me yesterday that she expected us."

Figgins stared,

"Hallo! Have you seen Cousin Ethel, then?"

"Oh, yes! I helped her to do some shopping in Wayland yesterday," said Tom Merry carelessly.

"Oh, you did, did you?"

"I—"

"I don't suppose she'd come to a feed in the New House at all," Digby remarked, "unless there were some School House chaps there to make the meeting respectable."

"Yaas, wathah! We shall certainly give the gathewin' a tone."

"Well, you're all invited," said Figgins. "Of course, we expect you to behave yourself. I suppose that's rather sanguine of us, considering—"

"Weally, Figgins, I can only wergad that wemark as—"

"And, of course, Gussy will be expected to wear only one eyeglass at a time."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"And Lowther will be politely but firmly requested not to make any of his rotten jokes. That's about all. Good-bye!"

And Figgins walked away.

Arthur Augustus gave his broad shoulders a withering glance, and Monty Lowther turned pink.

"Figgie is right, you know," Digby remarked thoughtfully. "On an occasion like this Lowther ought to agree not to be funny."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry passed his arm through Lowther's, and walked him away before he could make any rejoinder.

The juniors went in to morning school. They were looking forward eagerly to the half-holiday—much more eagerly than usual. As Tom Merry remarked, football they always had with them—at least, during the season—but Cousin Ethel's birthday came only once a year.

The presents were beginning to arrive. Many of them came by post, and it really looked as though Cousin Ethel would require a special vehicle to carry them all away when she left St. Jim's.

After morning school Tom Merry went over the quad to ask Figgins what time Cousin Ethel was coming. He met Fatty Wynn near the New House door, his plump face wearing a slightly worried look.

"Hungry?" asked Tom Merry sympathetically.

"Well, no," said Fatty Wynn. "I've just had dinner. I had only four helpings; old Ratty looks at you so if you want much. He had his eye on our table, and I thought I'd better not have any more—and there wasn't much on the bone, anyway. But I've had some tarts at Dame Taggles' shop since then, and I'm not what you'd call hungry, though I'm not full. I get awfully sharp set in this October weather. I was thinking—"

"Then don't, Fatty, if it makes you look like that."

"But, seriously, Tom Merry, you know I told you I was thinking of getting a nice little brooch for twenty-two bob?"

"Yes. Haven't you got it yet?"

"Oh, it's all right! I've only got to walk down to Rylcombe for it. The trouble is that I've broken into the twenty-two bob. I suppose you couldn't let me have a couple of bob till Saturday?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"That's all right. Here you are."

"Good!" said Fatty Wynn, jingling the shillings into his pocket. "I'll let you have it on Saturday, as safe as houses. And I'll cut off to Rylcombe at once, before I bust it again. I can feel myself getting hungry."

"Buck up, Fatty, while there's time. Where's Figgins?"

"In his study. You'll find him there. He's making arrangements with Kerr. If he asks after me, tell him I'm gone to Rylcombe."

And Fatty Wynn hurried down to the gates. It was a fine October afternoon, and it was a pleasant walk to

Rylcombe through the lane. The leaves were browning in the autumn and fluttering from the trees in the wind.

Fatty Wynn had no eyes for trees or leaves or any of Nature's beauties just then. A walk always made him hungry, and he was pretty sharp set by the time he arrived in Rylcombe. He passed the tuckshop, and paused. For two whole minutes Fatty Wynn heroically struggled with himself, and then he slowly bent his steps towards the tuckshop.

Mrs. Murphy smiled benignly as Fatty Wynn entered. He was her best customer—as he was Dame Taggles' best customer in the school shop.

"We have some nice little veal pies to-day, Master Wynn," she said—"fresh made."

Fatty Wynn wavered. The sight of the crisp crusts of the veal pies settled him. He ordered them recklessly, and settled down to eat. He gave up the idea of immediately returning Tom Merry's loan. After all, that would do very well on Saturday. The veal pies were excellent, and so were the ham patties that followed, and a cold chicken was delicious. And, of course, eating made Fatty Wynn thirsty, and ginger-pop refreshed him and made him ready to eat again, and he started on tarts.

He was only brought to himself when he saw Mrs. Murphy totting up the account on her slate and caught sight of the figures.

"How much is it, Mrs. Murphy?" he asked, with a slight inward tremor.

"One-pound-and-fourpence, Master Wynn."

Master Wynn gasped. He had had no idea that the sum was mounting up like that. But he reflected that he had never reached his present ecstatic feeling of complete fullness under a pound.

What on earth was he to do? Mrs. Murphy did not believe in credit. Fatty Wynn paid up, and received one-and-eightpence change.

"I—I wish I hadn't passed the tuckshop," he murmured. "What can I get for one-and-eight? It will have to be a hair-slide row."

And a hair-slide it was!

CHAPTER 17.

Cousin Ethel Arrives!

TOM MERRY looked into Figgins' study in the New House at St. Jim's. Figgins and Kerr were very busy. There was a little heap of money on the table, and Kerr had a pencil and paper before him. Figgins had a wrinkle in his brow.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry. "Busy?"

"Yes," said Figgins without looking up. "Cut along."

"What time is Cousin Ethel coming?"

"She's motoring over from Wayland. She'll get here about five. Cut along."

"Where is the party going to be held?"

"In Study No. 3, on the ground floor; we've got permission. Cut along."

"What time shall we get here?"

"Soon after five as you like. Cut along!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"I've got some more to say."

"We haven't time to listen. Cut along!"

"You'll have to find time, Figgy. As this is a national occasion, as I may say—I mean as it concerns both Houses—we should like to have a look-in at providing the feed. We were thinking of standing one independently, and my idea is that we should all club together over this."

"Can't have you School House chaps running the show. Cut along!"

"We don't want to run the show," said Tom Merry, laughing—"at least, I don't. And most of the chaps are stony, too. But I've had a decent remittance from Miss Fawcett, and I want to stand the School House whack myself."

"And you don't want to run it?" asked Figgins suspiciously.

"My dear Figgy, I'll leave it all to you to muck up in your well-known style."

Figgins grinned.

"Well, in that case, Merry, we don't want to prevent you from taking a share if you like. We three have been saving up for it, and we've got two pounds."

"Then put this one along with them," said Tom Merry, laying a pound note on the table.

"Well, that's decent, Merry, if you mean it."

"Of course I mean it!" said Tom Merry. "As a matter of fact, if we're all coming, there will be more School House fellows than New House fellows at the feed."

"Yes, that's so. Well, I'll say we're much obliged, and—and if you like you can shove your oar in in making the arrangements," said Figgins with an effort.

Tom Merry shook his head.



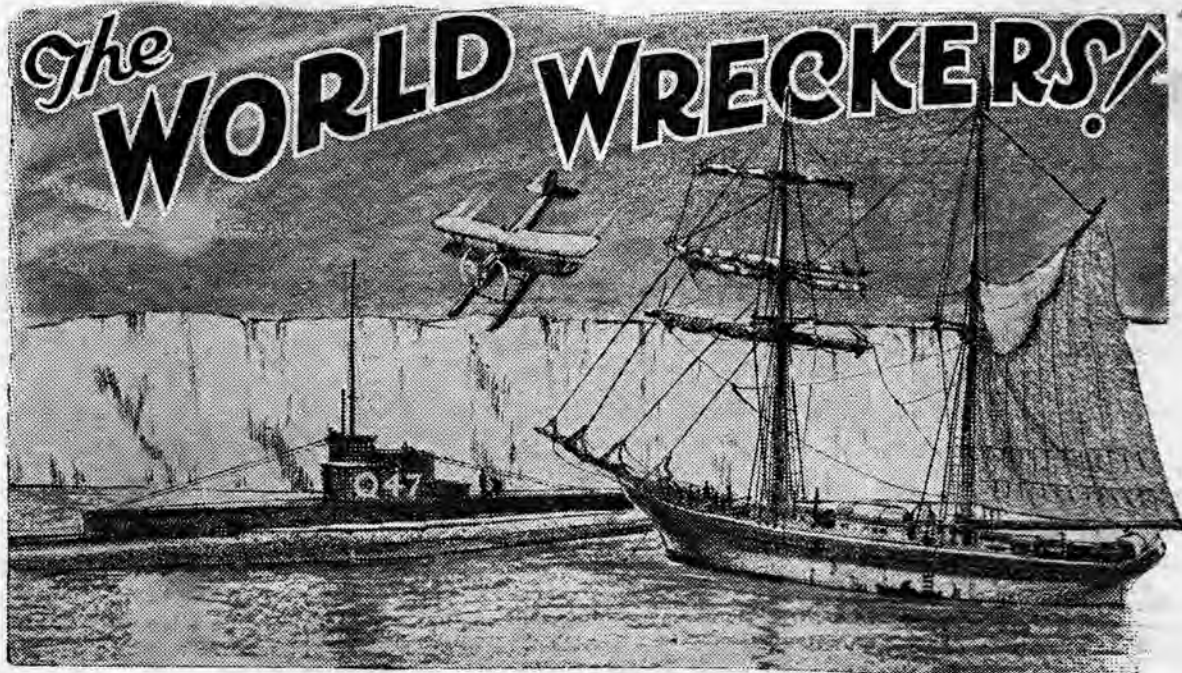
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THRILLS IN THE ANTARCTIC.



By J. E. GURDON.

The World Wreckers are a band of criminals who have discovered the secret of controlling the earth's weather. From their headquarters, somewhere in the Antarctic, they threaten to demolish the British Empire by floods and droughts, unless they are paid a vast sum of money. In reply, the British Government send out an expedition against them. After various encounters, Jim and Rex Tempest, the airmen of the expedition, capture Krughanger, one of the Wrecker chiefs. Later, they set out to rescue members of the expedition who have been captured. They are attacked in the air, but their guns jam, and Rex fights the attackers with a flame-thrower.

The Wreckers Trapped!

LEASHING the shrivelling blast again, Rex watched them as they sank like two falling stars, then tucked arm and leg more securely round their retaining wire, and resigned himself to endure a hideously uncomfortable hour or more.

For him to attempt the return journey backwards would have been nothing less than suicide. Jim realised this as clearly as Rex, and for some moments debated as to what he ought to do. But an anxious glance back convinced him that the boy was in no immediate danger, and he determined to carry on with the plan of campaign that had already been agreed between them.

Round swung the bomber and headed westward towards the mountain which housed the power plant of the World Wreckers.

"And now to bottle 'em up!" muttered Jim, as the big machine forged ahead, climbing steadily. "After that, home, sweet home— No, that won't work. We can't do a bunk and leave those five fellows in the tank to shift for themselves. The rest of the crew—poor chaps—are either dead or prisoners, but those five—I wonder—"

Still and silent he sat at his controls, his mind busy with problems that involved much mental arithmetic.

"Humph!" he grunted after a while. "We got a 600 horse-power engine, our juice will be running low, and if we drop all our bombs it might be done."

With that he shelved the problem of the men in the tank, and turned to the job in hand.

That success or failure had become a race against time he now felt sure, for the coppery veil had spread until the whole sky was covered. Against the dark southern horizon lurid flashes played and glimmered. There was a moaning in the air, and the machine was trembling like some creature alive and frightened.

Jim cast troubled eyes around, gritting his teeth, and signalled to Musson to pass him the two remaining flame-throwers from the back seat.

One of these he handed on to Stewart, the other to Osborne, still perched on the bottom plane close to the fuselage.

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"You understand the instructions in my note?" he called. "I'll give you the signal when to let loose."

The two nodded and began crawling outwards to the wing-tips.

Over the mountain of the power plant Jim circled twice to make sure of his bearings.

The entrance to the huge cavern of the World Wreckers opened half-way down the north-eastern face. Above it the mountain wall was almost vertical, but outside the mouth of the cave itself the cliff was broken by a broad, level shelf before continuing its downward swoop.

It was this combination of features which made possible the plan which Jim and Rex had evolved for blocking up the Wreckers in their underground den.

Unknown to the dwellers in the cave, doom hung over their heads in the form of 100,000 tons of snow, blown by the prevailing south-west winds to form one titanic, overhanging cornice along the mountain's crest.

Viewed from the mouth of the cave the snow was indistinguishable from the general face of rock and ice, but from the angle that Jim and Rex had seen it when scouting that morning the threatening mass could be distinctly seen, curving over like a wave about to break, and only held from breaking by the binding force of frost.

Once the grip of that force were relaxed the stupendous avalanche would fall.

Like burning water from a hose, fire spurted from Musson's flame-thrower, biting deep into the white surface. Back then along the same line Jim flew, while Stewart sent his flames into the ever-widening cut.

Four trips up and down sufficed.

To the watchers in the machine it seemed as though an incredible mouth suddenly opened in the face of the mountain, gaping ever wider until the top lip split from the lower, and the whole upper half of the face, crumbling and cracking, toppled over backwards.

The reverberating thunder of the fall all but stunned them. In its tumultuous wake the heavy bomber was tossed and buffeted like a feather.

Looking down when at last the snow clouds cleared, they saw that a new mountain had been formed, packed and plastered upon what had been the level shelf before the cavern.

The Wreckers were trapped in their burrow.

"With my compliments, professor!" chuckled Jim.

Well satisfied, he turned away, heading back to the aerodrome, where the last desperate venture of the day must be played.

Out of the copper sky snow was beginning to fall—not in soft flakes, but hard, angular, frozen pellets that cut like a driven shower of broken glass. As the gloom deepened, so every feature of sky and land became obliterated.

Soon Stewart and Osborne, clinging to the wings, and Rex, precariously clutching a fine bracing wire, were completely blinded and lost. Jim, however, being protected to some extent by the windscreen, was able to keep a general idea of distance and direction.

Quite mechanically he flew, for his mind was at war against itself.

Two courses were open to him—to steer out to sea and keep the rendezvous that had been fixed with Commander Sherwell, or to attempt the deadly hazardous relief of the men in the tank. Common prudence urged him to retreat; loyalty insisted upon the rescue.

Loyalty won.

There came a moment when he knew, by an instinct like that of the homing pigeon, that he had arrived back over the aerodrome.

That knowledge alone, however, was not enough. To land at random and then search for the tank in the blizzard on foot would mean risking the loss of the machine. For safety it was essential to locate the tank before alighting.

For a moment this seemed impossible; then sudden inspiration solved the problem.

He turned and shouted to Musson in the back seat.

"Let out the aerial. I'm going to drag the ground with it. Keep a hand on the wire, and yell as soon as it catches against anything."

At a height of under fifty feet the bomber flew up and down through the blinding storm, her wireless aerial trailing and systematically sweeping the invisible ground.

Good fortune favoured ingenuity, for suddenly the cable tautened and snapped as its plummet struck some massive obstacle.

On vertical wing-tip the machine wheeled into wind, side-slipped gently, sank, and flattened out. The shock absorbers grunted as she ran to a standstill.

Close by the tank's familiar diamond silhouette loomed dimly through the murk.

Jim leapt to the ground, raced to the tank, and pounded heavy fists on its steel side.

"O.K. in there?" he boomed.

A muffled voice responded.

"O.K., sir!"

"Then show a leg! We're going home!"

Eagerly five figures scrambled through the sliding doors.

First shift all those bombs from the racks, then climb on the bus—two on each side, and one on the centre section. Get back into the cockpit, Rex. Finished with the bombs? Right! Off we go!"

The moments that followed were worse than any nightmare that he had ever known.

Charging blindly into the storm, the bomber thundered over the ground. Again and again she bounced a foot into the air, only to fall back with a grinding crash and a groaning of wings.

Yet gradually speed rose as the 600 horse-power engine conquered the weight that it dragged. The bounces became longer and less frequent. Painfully and staggering, she clawed her way into the air and sullenly forged towards the sea and safety.

An hour later Jim was looking down at a searchlight that stabbed the sky with dots and dashes.

It was Q 47 signalling her position.

He throttled back.

"Now for tub and grub," he murmured. "It's been a busy sort of day!"

A Perilous Mission!

"WHEN in doubt, bag a prisoner," said Jim. "That's what we always used to do during the Great War, and that's what I suggest we set about doing now."

"Sound scheme," agreed Rex.

Commander Sherwell frowned thoughtfully.

"Undoubtedly a sound scheme," he murmured. "We've reached a deadlock in our own plans, and we're completely in the dark as to what devilry Professor Ockley Toreor and his precious gang may be brewing. Only by taking a prisoner can we obtain information. That's obvious. Unfortunately, the actual grabbing of a prisoner is not, in our case, the comparatively simple job it used to be in the bright and breezy days of trench warfare. We are boxed up in a submarine, and the enemy are boxed up inside the caverns of a mountain.

"During our last landing raid fifteen men were killed or taken, and we're abominably short-handed. In fact, without in any way wishing to damp your enthusiasm, Tempest, I honestly don't see how any prisoner-bagging show can be worked."

Jim laughed.

"Put that way, it does seem a bit hopeless," he admitted, "but, all the same, I think it might be wangled. You're forgetting, sir, that there's a perfectly good under-water route into the professor's lair. Rex and I have already used that route once to pop in and see him. True, we were very nearly drowned on that occasion, but that was because we weren't wearing proper diving equipment, and also because we got caught by the full strength of the flood tide racing through the tunnel. There would be very little danger if we tackled the job inside full suits and helmets, and chose our time carefully. You could take Q 47 up to the mouth of the tunnel and wait for us there. Rex and I can then go on ahead, carrying a spare suit with us, bob up inside the cavern, knock out the first lad we meet, cram him into the suit, and bring him home. That's all."

"It is at least a feasible plan," rasped a harsh voice, "and I urge you to put it into practice without a moment's delay."

Wilmot S. Krughanger it was who spoke.

Commander Sherwell, Jim, and Rex looked with interest at the white-haired, haggard man who had once been the financial genius behind the World Wreckers' all-conquering ambitions.

This fact, however, they no longer held against him, for, since falling into their hands, he had given ample proof of sincerely regretting ever having been drawn into that conspiracy, and had shown his willingness to help in every way.

"Without a moment's delay!" he repeated, beating the table with a thin and bony fist.

"You seem extraordinarily anxious!" remarked the commander, with some astonishment.

"I am!" was the emphatic reply. "If you knew as much as I do about Ockley Toreor's power for evil you would be extraordinarily anxious also."

"It is a pity," put in Jim, "that you do not know where he has hidden the most essential part of his apparatus."

Krughanger shrugged.

"My business was simply to provide the money," he answered. "Many a time I pressed him to tell me the secret, but he always refused. Only one other man shares his knowledge—Pirelli, an Italian of colossal size, a scientific genius, and a madman. That is what makes me so anxious. Ockley Toreor is avaricious, and only wants to use his power for bullying mankind into paying him enormous sums of money. But Pirelli is so fanatical and venomous that he would gladly lose his own life if every other living creature perished with him. And since they are both getting desperate under the pressure of your incessant attacks, I am terrified lest Pirelli should get his way."

In the long silence that followed Rex whistled expressively. "Then," he exclaimed, jumping to his feet, "let's get a move on."

Commander Sherwell also rose.

"While you two are getting ready," he said, "I will navigate to the mouth of the tunnel. Twenty minutes' slow cruising will take us there."

Although both Jim and Rex were no novices in deep-sea diving, neither enjoyed the experience. The open sky and an aeroplane were more to their liking than the oozy ocean bed, the cumbersome dresses of armoured rubber and canvas, and the stifling copper helmets.

However, since the job had to be done they made light of it and cracked jokes, while willing hands adjusted the air reservoirs and leaden weights. But when the scuttles in his helmet had been screwed up, and they were left alone in the darkness of the sub-compartment, with icy water flooding up around them, Rex found that he was feeling sick, and that his knees were wobbling.

"Rex Tempest, you poor fish, pull yourself together!" he grunted. "Crikey! What's that? Only Jim, you boob! Now then, off we go!"

A hand had touched him in the gloom as Jim seized his arm. Together they stepped through the door in the submarine's hull, their 500 candle-power lamps plunging dull green swords of light into the murky water.

Mud clung around their weighted boots.

"Like a Test match at Manchester!" muttered Rex. "We will now inspect the wicket, and—"

The sentence died on his lips, for something immensely heavy dropped crushingly upon his shoulders—something alive and murderous.

(Rex and Jim have taken on a hazardous mission which will be fraught with peril. Don't miss the thrill-packed chapters in next week's issue. Order your GEM early.)

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COUSIN ETHEL'S BIRTHDAY!

(Continued from page 25.)

Then she gave a start.
"Do you like it, Ethel?" said D'Arcy, beaming.
"Really, Arthur—"
"Wathah nobbay, isn't it?"
"I suppose you think so," said Miss Cleveland. "But I cannot say I think there is anything humorous in a joke of this sort, Arthur."
"I—I—I don't quite understand, Ethel," said D'Arcy.
"I—I thought you would like that for your birthday, you know. I—" D'Arcy broke off; for he had looked into the box, and what he saw there took his breath away.

Instead of a morocco case containing the watch-bracelet, a cake of soap was reposing in the cardboard box.

Arthur Augustus stared at it in stupefaction.
"You—you ass!" muttered Figgins fiercely. "Nice time this is for your little jokes, isn't it? You—"

Arthur Augustus found his voice at last.
"I—I—I do not understand this," he said feebly. "I—" "Better shut up!" whispered Blake. "You'll only make matters worse."

"I refuse to shut up! There was a watch-bracelet in that box when I gave it into Mr. Wailton's charge. Someone has played a trick on me—"

There was a tap at the half-open door. Mellish of the Fourth came in, with an ingratiating smile upon his face, and a morocco case in his hand.

"I say, D'Arcy, I found this in the dormitory—"

"Bai Jove! Thanks awfully, deah boy! I say, Ethel, this is what I weally meant to give you, you know. Some wotten cad has taken it out of the box, and put that wotten cake of soap in there instead!"

"I wish I knew who it was!" muttered Tom Merry.

Blake snapped his teeth.
"Mellish, of course!" he muttered. "It was he who was out of bed last night in the dorm, and that's what he was doing."

"Thank you so much!" said Cousin Ethel. "This is very beautiful, Arthur, and I am so pleased. The boy who played that trick on you must have been a mean and very foolish fellow indeed!"

Her eyes seemed to linger for a moment upon Mellish, who coloured uncomfortably. But Figgins, who saw nothing, was pressing the cad of the Fourth into a seat.

"You'll stop to tea, old fellow?" he said genially. "It was very lucky you found the watch and brought it over."

"Well, if you'd like me to stop, Figgins—" Mellish sat down.

The tea proceeded. It was a high tea, and there was something of almost every sort of eatable on the table. If Cousin Ethel had eaten a tenth part of what was pressed upon her from all sides, she would have exceeded the finest performance of Fatty Wynn.

The happy celebration was at its height when a junior in glasses peered into the room, and, discerning the company at the table, came right in.

It was Skimpole, the brainy man of the Shell.
"Ah, Miss Cleveland," he said, "you must excuse my not being here to greet you, but Figgins most unaccountably forgot to invite me!"

Figgins turned red, and Cousin Ethel smiled demurely.

"Oh, it's all right, Figgins!" said Skimpole, beaming through his glasses. "I don't mind at all. I dare say you've had many things to think of. But I'm glad to have the opportunity of wishing you many happy returns of the day, Miss Cleveland, and I hope you will deign to accept this copy of a poem by myself, written out in my own hand, inscribed to you."

"Thank you very much," murmured Cousin Ethel. Skimpole's poem was added to the pile, and Skimpole was invited to join the party, which he did.

The celebration proceeded amid much laughter, and all was gaiety. Figgins made a speech, rather hesitatingly, but it had a reception that encouraged him, and soon he found his depth, and as he voiced the sentiments of the whole party in his observations upon their friendship with Cousin Ethel, and his wishes concerning her future welfare, they were unanimously endorsed. And Cousin Ethel made a shy little reply that captivated every heart.

No one who was present is ever likely to forget that birthday celebration. Even Blake admitted that the New House had for once scored a success. Tom Merry acknowledged it freely, and congratulated Figgins in his cordial way, and Figgins gave him an expressive thump on the shoulder. And when it was all over, and the time had come to part, a crowd of fellows saw Cousin Ethel to her car.

Then the good-byes were said, and the presents stacked in the car, and Figgins—as founder of the feast and head of the affair—shook hands with Cousin Ethel, and if he squeezed that little hand the merest trifle, no one made any remark upon it.

The juniors stood, hat in hand, while the car drove off, and Cousin Ethel waved her hand. And so she went—to join in another party that evening, but not one that she would enjoy half as much as that celebration in the New House at St. Jim's.

(For sheer fun and lively adventure you won't beat next Wednesday's long complete yarn, "Tom Merry & Co. at the Zoo!" There's a laugh in every line, so don't miss reading it.)

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