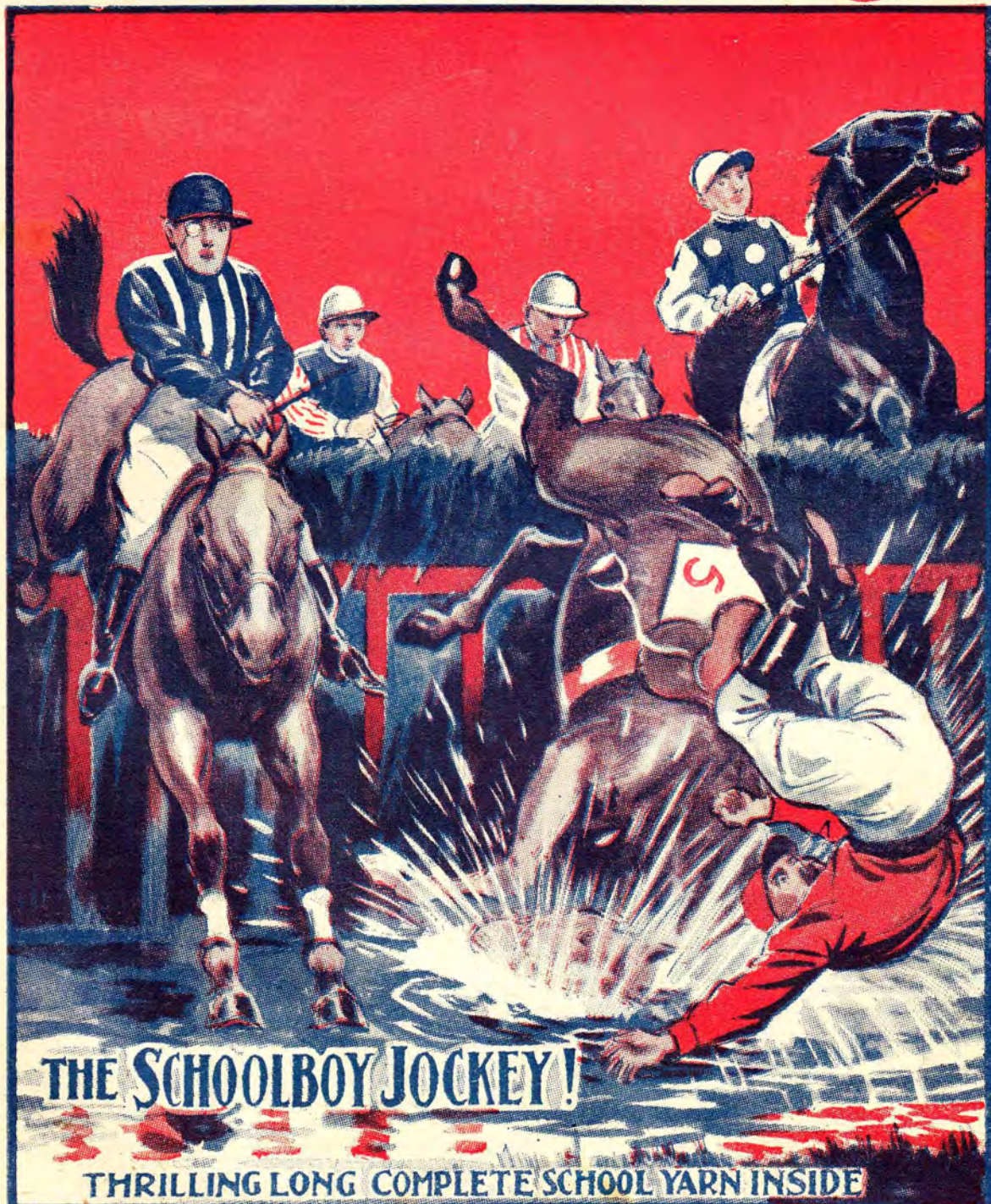


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Looking at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy you wouldn't think he could ride a clothes-horse—let alone a rogue horse across dangerous country. But Gussy was always a surprise packet, and this week he proves a bigger surprise than ever!

CHAPTER 1.

D'Arcy Surprises His Chums!

"LOOK!"

"Who is it?"

"Why is it?"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"My only hat! It's Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Gussy, by Jupiter!"

Blake, Herries, and Digby knew perfectly well that it was Arthur Augustus all the time. But, really, there was some cause for their astonishment as D'Arcy presented himself at the open door of Study No. 6 in the School House at St. Jim's. For they had never seen the swell of St. Jim's quite like this before.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was always elegant, and his clothes and his hats were the wonder and despair of the dandies of St. Jim's. It was nothing unusual for him to come out with novelties in ties, surprises in waistcoats, and the very latest thing in silk toppers. But this time—

Blake stared, and Herries stared, and Digby stared.

"Do I sleep, do I dream, do I wonder and doubt?" murmured Jack Blake, in the famous words of Truthful James.

"Are things what they seem, or is visions about?"

"Weally, Blake—"

And they stared at him as if they would stare holes in him. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy adjusted his eyeglass and

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gave them a look, and then crossed to the big glass on the study wall—an extensive mirror, that gave reflection of the full-length figure, and which the swell of the School House had had placed there at his own expense.

D'Arcy surveyed his reflection with considerable satisfaction. And, indeed, he did look very handsome and elegant.

He was dressed in riding-clothes that fitted him like a glove. His riding-boots shone more brightly than the mirror by which they were reflected. His coat was a triumph of colour. He flicked his boots with a nobby little whip. He took a leisurely survey of himself, turning round slowly and looking over his shoulder to get the full effect.

His chums watched him silently.

"Bai Jove," said D'Arcy, at last, "I think I shall do!"

Jack Blake assumed a thoughtful expression.

"That depends," he remarked. "What are you going in for? If you have booked yourself for Tussauds' show, you will do rippingly!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"But what's the game?" demanded Blake. "We've come out from morning lessons for exactly twenty minutes, and ten of them are gone. In ten minutes you've got to bunk back into the class-room and grind Latin. What do you mean by springing this coat and those tops on us all of a sudden? What's the wheeze?"

"That's it," said Herries. "What are you up to? Jolly

By Martin Clifford.

lucky thing for you my bulldog isn't in the study! He would be bound to go for that coat!"

"If your wotten bulldog did anythin' of the sort, I should stwike him with my whip!" said D'Arcy, with dignity.

Herries chuckled. D'Arcy's nobby riding-whip would probably not have troubled Towser very much.

"I suppose," said Blake reflectively—"I suppose the duffer's off his rocker. That's the only possible explanation."

"My word," said Digby, "if he's not clean off!"

"Weally, Blake, I am not off my beastlay wockah, and if you would kindly give me time to explain—"

"Go ahead! If you're not balmy in the crumpet, what's the matter?"

"I'm not goin' to change back into Etons to-day, deah boy."

Jack Blake grinned.

"Are you going into the class-room to grind Latin in hunting-tops, ass?"

"I am not goin' to gwind Latin to-day."

"How's that?"

"Out!" said D'Arcy. "I mean, I am goin' out!"

"You—are going—out!" repeated Jack Blake, in measured tones.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Where?"

"To the Tytchley Meet."

"Eh?"

"The fact is, deah boys, I am goin' huntin'!"

"You are going hunting!" said Jack Blake faintly. "Oh, I knew it would come out! I knew that his waistcoats were a certain indication of insanity in the family! I had a feeling all along that we should lose Gussy—that he would be snatched from us in the bloom of his youth and shut up in a lunatic asylum!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"And now it's come! Right off his rocker! Absolutely babbling!"

"I wufese to be wegarded as absolutely babblin'!" said Arthur Augustus, with some heat. "I suppose a gentleman has a wight to go huntin' on a mornin' in the season, without a lot of wottahs cacklin' at him."

"My dear duffer, you're not going hunting—you're coming into the class-room in seven minutes to grind Latin," said Blake pityingly.

"I am goin' to do nothin' of the sort. I have dwessed to go huntin', and if you fellows like to come down to the gates you can see me off!"

"We can do that here, Gussy! I've seen you off for a long time—fairly off! Poor old Gus! Fancy strait waistcoats instead of fancy ditto, and—"

"I wufese to wemain here and listen to these wibald remarks!" said D'Arcy, going to the door. "If you chaps like to come and see me off, I shall be vewy glad of your company as fah as the gates of the coll."

Blake, Herries, and Digby looked at one another. They had been engaged in making a new cage for white mice, and they left it where it was, and followed Arthur Augustus out into the passage.

There was a yell from the corner where the Shell passage branched off. Three sturdy juniors were coming along with linked arms, and they stopped in blank amazement at the sight of Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther—the chums of the Shell Form—stopped, and Monty Lowther reeled against the wall, and Manners hung on to Tom Merry, and Tom Merry gasped. The Terrible Three seemed absolutely flabbergasted.

"What is it?" sobbed Monty Lowther, in solemn Shakesperian strain. "What may this mean, that thou, dread spook, revisit'st thus the glimpse of the moon?"

"My only Aunt Matilda!" gasped Tom Merry. "It is Gus—it's the one and only! Are you fellows starting a circus?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"It's all right, you chaps," said Blake resignedly.

"Gussy's mad, but he's not dangerous; you can come quite near him. He won't bite, or anything!"

"Is this a new jape?" asked Tom Merry, as the Terrible

Three came nearer on receiving Blake's assurance. "Is Gussy dressed up like this to go hunting for deponent verbs or Greek roots?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am goin' huntin'," said D'Arcy, with dignity; "and I decline to listen to these exceedingly disrespeful and wibald wemarks!"

And he walked down the passage with his elegant walk. Tom Merry stared at Jack Blake.

"What's the little game?" he demanded.

"Blessed if I know!" said Blake. "He says he's going hunting!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He doesn't look mad," Manners remarked, laying stress on the word "look."

"Appearances are deceptive," said Lowther, with a shake of the head.

"I suppose it's a sudden attack," said Tom Merry. "Better follow him and see that he comes to no harm."

And the juniors followed the swell of the School out of the House. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's appearance in the quadrangle was hailed with wonder and delight by the juniors of St. Jim's. There was a crowd round him immediately.

It was a cold, clear winter day, with a gleam of frost on windows and trees. The boys were enjoying the brief respite from morning lessons, and nearly everybody was in the quad.

There was a yell as D'Arcy appeared, and walked steadily down to the gates.

"Look!"

"My hat!"

"It's Gussy!"

"Or his ghost!"

"Beau Brummel in pink!"

"Chesterfield in tops!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus walked on, apparently unconscious of these remarks, which he would doubtless have characterised as disrespectful and ribald. The juniors stared, and the seniors stared, and the fags of the Third Form marched after the swell of the School House, apparently under the impression that D'Arcy had got up the show wholly and solely for their amusement.

It was quite an ovation. When Arthur Augustus arrived at the gates he had an escort of fifty or sixty fellows, all delighted and curious. The swell of St. Jim's took up his stand in the gateway and looked anxiously down the road towards Rylcombe, flicking his boots with his whip the while.

CHAPTER 2.

Not a Thoroughbred!

TOM MERRY & CO. pushed through the crowd at the gate, and Arthur Augustus turned his head to glance at them. Then he glanced down the road.

Some of the fags behind struck up a chorus:

"A-hunting we will go,
And a-hunting we will go!
A-hunting, hunting we will go,
A-hunting we will go!"

"Young wascals!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Wally, I am weally ashamed to see you shoutin' among those disrespeful young wottahs!"

D'Arcy minor—more commonly known as Wally—grinned.

"What's the game, then?" he demanded rather aggressively. "What do you mean by coming out in this rig, when you've got to get into the class-room in five minutes?"

"I am havin' a day out!"

"My only Aunt Jane!"

"As a mattah of fact, Wally, Cousin Ethel and her eldah bwothah, Captain Cleveland, are at the Tyachley Meet to-day, and the Head has given me his permish to join them there," D'Arcy condescended to explain.

The juniors stared.

"Then you're not off your rocker?" exclaimed Tom Merry, in tones of astonishment.

"No, Tom Mewwy," said D'Arcy, with hauteur, "I am not off my wockah!"

"And you're really going hunting?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The Tytchley Meet is at twelve," said Wally, who was of the horstiest of horsty tastes, and knew all about these matters. "You'll have to bu:z to get there. How are you going?"

"I am goin' to wide."

"Where's your mount, then?"

"Jones is sendin' me a nag up fwm Wylcombe."

"My only Aunt Jane!" repeated Wally. "Fancy you going, and me being left here! Didn't they mention me—?"

"No, they didn't; and a kid of your age wouldn't be allowed, anyway!"

"They'd allow it fast enough if I could get a mount and get there!" chuckled Wally. "Do you remember how I took the ditch at home at Eastwood, Gus, when you funk'd it because you were afraid of spoiling your clothes?"

"That statement is absolutely untrue! You pushed past me in the most wude mannah," said D'Arcy warmly. "I am afraid that you are what would be chawactewised as a thwustin' scoundwel, Wally!"

"Ha, ha, ha! I say, Gus, suppose I go instead of you?" D'Arcy's only reply to this suggestion was a glare through his eyeglass. Then he looked up the road again.

"Bai Jove, there's the groom!"
Two horses had come into sight from the direction of the village, one ridden by a groom, who was leading the other. Arthur Augustus smiled with satisfaction.

"Bai Jove! I shall get off now!"

"I would get on, if I were you," said Blake, who was scrutinising the approaching horses. "I wouldn't ride that lump of catsmeat for anything!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
As the groom came nearer D'Arcy's face changed. The led horse was certainly not what could be called a picture. Jones, the livery-stableman at Rylcombe, had some good horseflesh in his stable, but perhaps he had not taken D'Arcy's note, asking for a mount, with due seriousness. Perhaps he thought anything was good enough for a schoolboy.

At all events, the horse brought a frown to D'Arcy's face, and a grin to every other.

He was probably an old bus horse, sent to linger out his last days at easy work in the country, and probably Mr. Jones did not think he was worth feeding too plentifully. He did not look like it.

The groom halted. There was a half-grin on his horsey visage as he touched his cap.

"Master D'Arcy!" he said.

"Yaas, I am heah," said D'Arcy, fixing his eyeglass upon the man. "I pwesume that you do not mean to say that you have brought that—th t thing for me?"

"This is the mount, sir."

"You weally mean to state that Mr. Jones has sent that wotten bag of old bones for me to widge in the hunting field?" exclaimed D'Arcy, with growing indignation.

"Yes, sir! Fine horse, sir! Not too restive!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "He'll have to have a few oats inside him before he gets restive, I think."

"Westive!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy indignantly. "I should think the poor bwute wasn't westive. I don't want a horse that is not westive—I want a horse I can widge."

"You can ride that horse, sir."

"I could sit upon the bwute, I suppose?" said D'Arcy.

"I would just as soon widge a beastly clothes-horse!"

"It's a safe mount, Gussy," remarked Blake.

"I pwesume that you doubt my powahs as a widah, Blake?"

"Not at all. I believe you could ride that horse."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wefuse to widge that animal," said Arthur Augustus. "Take the poor bwute back, and tell Mr. Jones that I wefuse to touch him with a pair of beastlay tongs, and that I will pay for him to have a feed if the shock isn't likely to kill him!"

"Then you don't want a horse, sir?"

"Yaas, wathah; I want a horse, not a thing like that!"

A bell rang across the Close, and the grinning juniors began to turn away. It was time to return to the classrooms. The chums of the School House swell were yelling with laughter at the sight of the mount sent for him, but the distress in his face made them take a more serious view of the matter.

"It's too bad," said Tom Merry. "I haven't seen Gussy on a hunter, but certainly he couldn't go to the meet on that wreck."

"Good boss, sir—very quiet."

"But I don't want a quiet horse," said D'Arcy. "Bai Jove, I shall be late for the meet if I don't huvwly like anythin'! What shall I do, deah boys? Advise me!"

"Better go on a bicycle," said Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah!"

"Borrow Taggles' pony!" said Gore.

"Pway shut up, Gore!"

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"Time we were in the class-room," said Lowther. "Come on, Manners! Tom, you ass, you'll get lined!"

"I'm coming!"

Most of the fellows were hurrying in. Manners and Lowther hurried on. Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, was not to be argued with. Wally was already gone. Herries and Digby walked away with the Fourth-Formers.

Arthur Augustus was not left alone in his glory. At the risk of "lines," Blake and Tom Merry lingered at the gate.

"Bai Jove! I have nevah been in such a wotten pickle before!" said D'Arcy. "I know Jones has some good stuff in his stables, and I welied on him."

"It's hard cheese," said Blake, taking the matter seriously at last. "If you're really going to the meet—"

"Of course I'm goin'!"

"You can't go on that old crock," said Tom Merry.

"You don't want to be late, either. Supposed you buzz along and see if Jones has anything else in his stable."

The groom touched his cap.

"Nothing else, sir!" he said. "There's been a run on the stables for the meet. Good many gone from Rylcombe, sir. There's nothing left but Badger. I dessay you've seen Badger; a lively rip, he is, and the grooms don't dare to mount him."

D'Arcy's eye sparkled behind his monocle.

"Yaas, he's a wippah!"

"Mr. Jones is sorry he couldn't send anything better than this, but—"

"I wegard Mr. Jones as havin' failed to tweek me with pwopah wespert, my man," said D'Arcy. "Why didn't he send Badger?"

"He'd kill you, sir."

"I should be quite willin' to take the wisks of that."

"Begging your pardon, sir, but Badger's a vicious brute, and a boy couldn't sit him nohow, sir."

"I wathah fancy I know my own business best," said D'Arcy. "I am goin' to have Badger. You fellows had bettah wun in. The bell's stopped wingin', and you'll be lined for bein' late."

Tom Merry laughed.

"We're late already," he remarked. "May as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. It will mean fifty lines, in any case, now."

"I am sowwy, Mewwy."

"That's all right, Gussy. I'd rather be late for class than have you late for the meet," said Tom Merry good-naturedly.

"I wish I could help you out. But you can't ride Badger, you know."

"Wats, deah boy!"

"Don't be an ass, Gussy!" said Blake anxiously. "I've seen the brute at Jones' place, and he's savage. The grooms can't ride him."

"I twust I can widge bettah than a groom."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake!"

"Look here, Gussy, I shouldn't care to mount Badger, and I'm a Yorkshireman!" said Blake, with the air of one propounding a clincher.

"Vewy poss," said D'Arcy. "But I am goin' to mount him. I know the countwy, luckily, and can take the short cut to the Tytchley Meet. Get back with that wotten cwock, my man, and tell Mr. Jones I'm comin' to take out Badger!"

"I am afraid he won't let you have him, sir."

"I shall not argue about the mattah," said D'Arcy. "I am goin' to have Badger. I wegard Mr. Jones as havin' failed to play the game."

"But—but it's beastly hard work even getting the saddle on the brute, sir," said the groom.

"Yaas, I dare say it is," assented D'Arcy. "Pway have him saddled and bwidled weady for me when I awrive. I shall be there as quickly as I can walk. Take this tenshillin' note, my man, and pway do your best!"

"Certainly, sir," said the groom, touching his cap.

He cantered off with the led horse.

Arthur Augustus turned to his companions.

"Good-bye, deah boys!"

"Look here, Gussy—"

But Arthur Augustus was already walking swiftly down the road towards Rylcombe.

CHAPTER 3.

Arthur Augustus in a New Light!

TOM MERRY and Jack Blake looked at one another in doubt and dismay. What was to be done? They were already late for third lesson, and lines awaited them when they went into their respective classes.

But to let D'Arcy go and get his neck broken—for that was what they expected would be the result of his visit to the stables if they allowed him to have his way—was not to be thought of.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "What's to be done?"
 "We can't let him go."
 "Lot of good arguing with Gussy when he's made up his mind."
 "We could yank him in by his ears," said Blake thoughtfully. "I really think that's the best thing we could do, under the circumstances."
 Tom Merry laughed.
 "But he's going to meet Cousin Ethel, and it's rough on him not to go. I shouldn't wonder if Jones could find him a better horse, if he liked. Suppose we go down with him and see."
 "What about lessons?"
 "Well, we're late already. I'm game, if you are."

"I'm glad to have you with me," said D'Arcy. "You can help me to persuade old Jones, in case he pwoves wecaleitwant."
 "But, really, Gussy—"
 "You haven't seen me wide?" said D'Arcy.
 "Oh, yes; I've seen you wide at cricket!" said Blake.
 "Very wide sometimes, Gussy, when you are bowling!"
 "Oh, pway don't wot at a sewious moment, Blake! I am a weally wippin' widah, you know, and I have widden in steeplechases at home at Eastwood. I should like you fellows to come there some vac and see me in the Eastwood colours, bai Jove!"
 "But about Badger?"
 "I have widden wuffer horses than Badgah," said D'Arcy,



Badger's hind legs came down with a crash that struck sparks from the cobbles, and then his forelegs went up. He staggered backwards on his hind legs, as if he were going to fall over on his rider, but Arthur Augustus sat tight. "My only hat!" gasped Mr. Jones. "He's—he's riding Badger!"

"Oh, I'm game!" said Blake, grinning. "Come on! We can't let the one and only Gus get his neck broken. If he can't find a safe mount, we'll stop him."
 "That's right!"
 And the two juniors hurried down the road after D'Arcy. The swell of the School House was walking at a rapid pace. He was not distinguished as a pedestrian, but on the present occasion he put his best foot foremost. He usually declared that he found walking "exhausting," but just now he was in deadly earnest.
 Tom Merry and Blake had to run to catch him.
 D'Arcy glanced back at them as they came up without stopping.
 "Bai Jove, you fellows, you're late for lessons already!"
 "That's all right, Gussy! We're coming back to Rylcombe with you!"
 "But, weally—"
 "We're going to look after you."
 "Wats!"
 "If you say rats to me, your lawful lord and master, I shall probably interrupt this walk by dotting you on the nose," said Blake severely.
 "Pway, don't wot, Blake! Can't you see I'm worried?"
 "That's all right, old son!"

with a superior smile. "He will just suit me, you know! Ah, here's Wylcombe!"
 "But suppose you break your neck?"
 "I wefuse to suppose an impossibility, Tom Mewwy."
 "What will D'Arcy minor do without you—without anybody to tell him to wash his inky fingers and put on a clean collar?"
 "Weally, Tom Mewwy— Ah, here is Jones!"
 A strong smell of horses announced when they were near the establishment of Mr. Jones. D'Arcy led the way into the mews, and in the cobbled yard he found the groom who had come to the school, speaking to a stout, florid-faced man, who was immediately recognised as Mr. Jones.
 "Good-morning, young gents!" said Mr. Jones. "I'm sorry you didn't like the hoss, Master D'Arcy. Nice quiet animal. Just suited to a lad of your years."
 "I wegard you as havin' failed to play the game, Mr. Jones. Pway let your man twot out Badgah!"
 Mr. Jones grinned.
 "He'll kill you, young gentleman."
 "Pway, twot him out! I have to wide across country to the meet, and I have no time to waste."
 Mr. Jones winked at the groom.

"Bring him out, Dick!"

"Yes, sir!"

The groom disappeared into the stables. There was a sound of clattering hoofs against a box, as a horse was taken out of it. Dick, the groom, reappeared, leading a horse, saddled and bridled as D'Arcy had directed. The ten-shilling note had done its work, though both Mr. Jones and his man had not the slightest belief that Mr. D'Arcy would venture to mount the horse when he saw him at close quarters.

It was a handsome animal—clean-limbed, well-proportioned, with a fine head, well set. But there was a lurking demon in his eyes, and Dick, the groom, was keeping a tight grip and an alert eye as he led it out.

"Here he is, young gentleman!"

Jack Blake gave a whistle. At home in Yorkshire he had ridden all kinds of horseflesh, but he would not have cared to mount Badger for a ride. As he put it to Tom Merry, he could have done it but he did not hanker after it. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy surveyed Badger with supreme satisfaction.

In fact, a change seemed to have come over D'Arcy with the change into his riding-clothes. There was a quickness, an alertness in his manner which his chums had never noticed there before, and an expression of determination on his face which gave it quite a new look. It was evident that the swell of St. Jim's was not soft all through, after all.

"Bai Jove, what a wippah!" he exclaimed.

"He'll rip you to rags," said Tom Merry. "Keep off him!"

"Wats, deah boy!"

"You can't handle him!"

"Bai Jove, I'm goin' to try!"

"Gussy, keep off the grass!" exclaimed Blake. "The brute will roll you over on the cobbles!"

"Wats!"

"He'll spoil your clothes," said Tom Merry.

That ought to have been a clincher. Such an appeal had never been lost on D'Arcy. But, to the amazement of the juniors, he simply replied:

"Blow my clothes!"

Tom Merry stared at Blake, who stared at him in return. What had come over Arthur Augustus? If he no longer cared for his clothes, for what did he care?

While they were lost in amazement, Arthur Augustus walked towards the horse. There was not the slightest trace of nervousness in the junior's manner. Perhaps it was for that reason that Badger stopped pawing the cobbles, and ceased to lay back his ears.

"Keep off him!" exclaimed Dick, the groom, in alarm, as he saw that D'Arcy really intended to mount the brute.

"Wats, my man!"

"Master D'Arcy, don't get near him!" shouted Mr. Jones.

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus walked up to the horse with perfect calmness. He patted him on the nose with his gloved hand, and Badger did not sheer off his hand with his sharp, white teeth, as Dick and Mr. Jones fully expected. The horse seemed to like it rather than otherwise. D'Arcy put his hand to the saddle.

"Heaven's sake, sir!" gasped Dick, the groom.

"Stand back!"

D'Arcy rapped out the words, and Dick stood back, letting go the horse in sheer amazement. The next moment the swell of St. Jim's was in the saddle.

"Out of the way!" yelled Mr. Jones, dodging behind a heap of refuse swept from the stables. "He'll start now."

Dick, the groom, swung himself behind the door. Tom Merry and Jack Blake crowded back to give the horse room.

For the moment Badger seemed astounded at finding somebody on his back. Then he gave a squeal, and suddenly his hind legs went up into the air.

"My hat!" gasped Blake. "Poor old Gus!"

The juniors sprang forward, ready at any risk to save D'Arcy from the fury of the horse when he crashed down on the cobbles.

But, to their amazement, D'Arcy was sitting tight, and though his eyeglass fell off and fluttered at the end of its cord over the ears of Badger, the swell of St. Jim's showed no sign whatever of falling off.

"My hat! He can ride!"

"Good old Gussy!"

Tom Merry and Blake receded again, and leaned against the brick wall and watched. Their astonishment was great, but not so great as their admiration, for D'Arcy's horsemanship was a revelation.

Badger's hind heels came down with a crash that struck sparks from the cobbles, and then his forelegs went up.

He staggered backwards on his hind legs, as if he were

going to fall over his rider, and D'Arcy sat tight, only his lips setting in a hard, determined line.

Down came Badger again on his forefeet with a clatter, and then he seemed to go in for a display of equine fireworks, clattering up and down, and round and round, with endless, restless, tireless motion.

And through it all D'Arcy was like a rock.

The struggle ended as suddenly as it began. Badger stopped still, and with a sort of shake, and then stood like a lamb, quite subdued.

Mr. Jones stared at the horse blankly.

"My only hat!" he gasped. "He's—he's riding Badger!"

"Good-bye, deah boys!" said D'Arcy. "I'm goin'!"

"Bravo!" yelled Tom Merry.

"Hurrah!" shouted Blake.

Arthur Augustus, with his reins in his left hand, lifted his hat with his right hand, and bowed in response to the cheer as he rode out of the stable-yard. He clattered through the cobbly mews, and out into the old High Street of Rylcombe, Tom Merry and Blake following, and Mr. Jones and the groom, and the stableman following them, all excited and astonished.

And a really handsome figure the swell of St. Jim's made as he cantered up the street on his spirited mount.

"Well, my word!" said Mr. Jones. It was all he could say.

"My word!" said Dick, the groom.

"My word!" said Bob, the stableman.

Jack Blake looked at them with the smile of superiority.

"Jolly lot of Doubting Thomases you were, weren't you?" he said. "Perhaps you'll believe next time that a fellow from St. Jim's can ride."

And the horsey gentleman had nothing to say.

Tom Merry and Jack Blake strolled away towards St. Jim's. Tom Merry was laughing.

"I say, Blake, that was pretty cool, you know," he remarked. "You didn't believe that Gussy could do it."

Jack Blake chuckled.

"Never mind; they had no right to disbelieve that Gussy could do it."

"I never thought it of him!"

"Nor I. By Jove, it was worth getting lined to come here and see Gussy start!"

"Yes, rather!"

Twenty minutes later the two juniors presented themselves at their respective class-rooms at St. Jim's. Fourth lessons were nearly over.

Jack Blake marched into the Fourth Form meekly enough, and little Mr. Lathom blinked at him over his glasses.

"Blake, I have marked you absent."

"I'm sorry, sir!"

"Have you any excuse to offer?"

"Yes, if you please, sir. I thought I ought to go with D'Arcy to Rylcombe, sir," said Blake meekly. "He was going to mount a dangerous horse, sir, and I thought I ought to see that he came to no harm."

The Fourth Form master blinked dubiously at Blake.

"You should have asked permission, Blake."

"Yes, sir, only I had to run after D'Arcy to catch him, as it was."

"Very well, under the circumstances I will excuse you, Blake."

"Thank you, sir!"

And Blake took his place in the class with much satisfaction. Tom Merry was not so fortunate. He entered the Shell class-room, and Mr. Linton's eyes fixed him immediately like a pair of gimlets.

"Merry, you are late. You have missed a lesson without permission."

"Yes, sir. I—"

"Where have you been?"

"To Rylcombe, sir. I—"

"You will take two hundred lines, Merry."

"If you please, sir—"

"That is enough. Go to your place!"

And Tom Merry made a grimace and went to his place.

CHAPTER 4.

The Meet!

"ARTHUR!" It was Ethel Cleveland—better known to the boys of St. Jim's as Cousin Ethel—who uttered the exclamation.

The girl, looking very charming in her riding-habit, was sitting a handsome roan horse at the covert side, next to a muscular Guardsman, with a good-natured, ruddy face.

Cousin Ethel gave a bright smile as her cousin came up.

Arthur Augustus raised his hat with a grace that was all his own. The big Guardsman looked at him.

"It's Arthur," said Cousin Ethel.

"Begad, so it is!" said Captain Cleveland. "How do do, Arthur? That's a decent mount you're on, begad!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Cold day for waiting," said the captain. "I don't believe they will ever find, begad—I don't really."

And the captain listlessly watched the distant huntsmen, and chewed his underlip, while the hounds were patiently drawing.

"I was so glad you were able to come, Arthur," said Cousin Ethel.

"Yaas, bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "It was awfully kind of you to think of me, Ethel. I know that the captain's note to Dr. Holmes was your ideah."

Cousin Ethel smiled.

"I thought you would like the chance of a run, Arthur."

"Bai Jove, and you were wight!" said D'Arcy. "Though I was near bein' pwevented ffrom comin'. The wotten man sent me a wotten old cwock, you know, to wide. I nevah felt so insulted in my life."

"That's a handsome mount you have, though."

"An Italian, I believe," said Cousin Ethel.

Captain Cleveland looked round.

"Algarotti!" he said. "Yes, he's the son of an Italian banker in London. A young puppy, I think, begad! Rides well, though."

The young Italian pushed his horse nearer to Miss Cleveland, as if wishing to push between the young lady and her cousin.

Arthur Augustus' eyes glinted.

He shifted Badger a little, so that the Italian could not possibly carry out his purpose without making a scene, and Algarotti bit his lip and desisted.

Captain Cleveland, who was watching anxiously for the start, had no eyes for this little incident, but it did not escape Cousin Ethel, whose fair cheeks grew a little deeper in colour.

She glanced round involuntarily, and Algarotti took the opportunity of raising his hat.

"It is a pleasure to see you again, Miss Cleveland," he said.



Tom Merry struck a match so that Mr. Lathom could read Blake's pass. There was a flare, and the paper caught alight and was consumed in a few seconds. Blake stared at the hero of the Shell. "Well, you clumsy ass!" he said. "You've burnt my pass!"

"Yaas, I insisted on havin' him. He is a good beast, weally, and I like him. I am glad I was in time, Ethel. I am goin' to wide with you and keep an eye on you, you know."

Miss Cleveland smiled again. She was a fearless horsewoman, and she mentally resolved that Arthur Augustus would have all his work cut out to keep an eye on her.

"By the way, who is that wottah stawin' at?" went on D'Arcy. "I vegard his stare as bein' both wude and impertinent."

Cousin Ethel coloured a little.

A young man on a black horse was watching the swell of St. Jim's with a far from amiable expression, and it was evident that D'Arcy's proximity to Miss Cleveland was not agreeable to the onlooker.

That young man—or, rather, boy, for he was only a few years older than D'Arcy—was well mounted, and he sat his steed like a good rider. His face was dark, almost swarthy, and his eyes black and scintillating. He looked like a foreigner, but he seemed to know a great many people at the meet.

"That man," said Ethel, without looking round. "I believe his name is Algarotti."

"Bai Jove! I don't like the way he looked at me," said D'Arcy. "I wondah'whom he may happen to be?"

He spoke perfect English, and as D'Arcy learned afterwards, he had been born in England, and brought up at an English school, his father, the banker, being a permanent resident in London.

Arthur Augustus was to be brought into very close contact with young Algarotti, though he did not guess that just then.

Cousin Ethel nodded distantly to the Italian. Then she fixed her gaze steadily ahead of her, watching the coverts. Algarotti bit his lip.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was no fool, in some matters, at least, and he saw at a glance how matters stood between Ethel and the Italian, as it was natural they should stand between a sensitive girl instinctively disliking a character she half-understood, and the passionate foreigner who was determined to force his acquaintance upon her whether she liked it or not.

The swell of St. Jim's inwardly resolved that he would keep close by Cousin Ethel's side that morning, and see that the swarthy rider was kept at a distance.

Captain Cleveland uttered a sudden exclamation of satisfaction.

"They're off!"

The hounds had found at last.

There was a stir and a drawing of breaths; the wait at the covert-side had been impatiently borne. The huntsman's horn rang a note through the crisp air, and the whole line moved on.

In the first field Algarotti made an attempt to range up beside Ethel.

Captain Cleveland was well ahead; he evidently did not regard it as a brotherly duty to stick by his sister's side during the hunt, and his powerful horse was carrying him on with great strides.

Cousin Ethel was riding well. She took hedge and ditch with fearless precision; and Arthur Augustus rode by her side in a way that would have made the St. Jim's fellows open their eyes if they could have seen him.

Algarotti ranged up on the other side of the girl, but the nature of the ground kept him at a certain distance.

And the swell of St. Jim's was soon giving him a lead, which he strove in vain to make up.

Away ahead of him, and of half the hunt, went the swell of St. Jim's and his fair companion, and Algarotti pounded after them on his big black.

Then the savage, passionate nature of the Italian showed itself, and he lashed his horse and jammed the spurs against its flanks.

It was not to urge it to greater efforts so much as to wreak his own rage upon some living object that made Algarotti use whip and spur.

The horse thus tormented, bounded on furiously, but Algarotti was under the disadvantage of not knowing the country, while both Cousin Ethel and Arthur Augustus had hunted it before.

Well ahead the two kept, and many a glance was thrown towards them, for they made a really handsome pair.

The chums of Study No. 6 in the School House at St. Jim's would have been proud of Arthur Augustus if they could have seen him.

"Tally-ho!"

Two notes on the horn rang over the woodlands.

"Bwavo!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "Bai Jove, half of them are behind!"

The hunt was indeed dwindling down; a good half of the riders were hopelessly behind, or had taken to the roads, for the country was heavy, and the going extremely difficult in the best of places.

Cousin Ethel nodded, with a bright smile.

The colour was flushing her cheeks, and her eyes were sparkling; the excitement of the dash across country was in her blood, as it was in D'Arcy's.

"Look out, deah boy—I mean gal," sang out Arthur Augustus. "Bettah wind wound that beastly bullfinch!"

Cousin Ethel shook her head.

Right at it she went, and her roan rose to the leap splendidly, and the hedge—which had stopped two or three bold riders and turned them along to a safer spot—flashed beneath her horse's hoofs.

A second later Arthur Augustus rose to the leap and clattered down on the safe side of the bullfinch, but Algarotti was not so lucky.

The big black came thundering up, but the savage punishment his master had given him had had its natural effect in throwing him into a state of nerves.

The black balked at the leap, and swung aside, and Algarotti was dragged along, with his coat tearing on the shaggy brambles of the bullfinch hedge.

The Italian ground his teeth furiously.

In justice it must be said that he had pluck, and he would have taken the leap at the risk of a broken neck, but his horse's action had given him no choice in the matter.

He lashed the unfortunate animal savagely, and drove it on to the nearest gap, where the big black pounded through, and Algarotti spurred him forward again.

But the huntsman and the hounds were far ahead now, and riding close behind the pack Algarotti could discern two figures through the openings of the woodland—the figures of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Cousin Ethel—a good quarter-mile ahead of him.

CHAPTER 5.

A Challenge!

ALGAROTTI rode his hardest and best, but he did not come near D'Arcy for the rest of the run.

The fox got away at the finish, and there was no kill, and after vain casting for the scent, huntsmen and pack gave it up. But the run had been hard and long, and there were not more than five or six riders at the finish, among them Arthur Augustus, Cousin Ethel, and her brother.

Algarotti joined them as they gave up waiting and turned their horses homewards.

D'Arcy put up his eyeglass, and gave the Italian a look

which he considered quite sufficient to send him on his travels, but it had no effect upon Algarotti. The Italian had had a fall, and was splashed with mud, and although he kept his temper well in hand, it was simmering furiously. His black eyes glinted whenever he looked at D'Arcy, and but for the presence of Ethel Cleveland he would probably have proceeded to something more than words.

"You had bad luck, Algarotti," Captain Cleveland remarked.

"Yes," said the Italian; "my beast refused the hedge. He was startled by a boy taking a clumsy leap in front of him, instead of keeping clear."

Arthur Augustus turned his head, with a flush in his cheeks.

"If you are speaking of me, sir—" he began.

The Italian laughed unpleasantly.

"Come, then, you must be aware that you jumped sideways!" he exclaimed.

"Nothin' of the sort! I jumped as stwaight as a die. Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I wathah think I can jump stwaight at a fence! Besides, you were a good minute behind!"

"I was close behind, and you balked me by your clumsiness!" said the Italian coolly. "I excuse you. It comes of the master allowing boys in the hunting-field."

D'Arcy went crimson.

"Weally—" he began. Then he caught an imploring look from Cousin Ethel, and stopped. "Vewy well, have your own way," he said.

Captain Cleveland looked at them, and then rode on beside his sister. Cousin Ethel was looking troubled. She foresaw bitter blood, and she felt that she was herself inadvertently the cause of it. She tried to keep D'Arcy close to her, fearing a quarrel with the Italian if he left her side. D'Arcy was only too glad to keep close, and the Italian had to drop behind in the lane they were following home.

"Hard cheese to lose the brush, after all!" Captain Cleveland growled discontentedly.

Cousin Ethel smiled at D'Arcy.

"I'm rather glad!" she murmured. "It is so ripping to ride across country, but—I am sorry for the poor, dear fox!"

Arthur Augustus chuckled.

"What pwice the poor, deah poultry he gobbles of a night?" he asked. "I am thinkin' of joinin' a society for the prevention of cruelty to chickens, and then it will be necessary to hunt foxes from a sense of humanity."

Cousin Ethel laughed.

"You are growing quite witty, Arthur."

"Well, as a maffah of fact, I heard young Wally say that," said D'Arcy. "He's an awfully sarcastic little beggah, you know."

The lane had narrowed to a mere track. Captain Cleveland was taking a short cut, partly to save time getting home, partly because it would get rid of Algarotti the sooner. As soon as he came to his own road the Italian would have to leave them. In the narrow track Arthur Augustus was compelled to drop behind, and found himself riding with Algarotti.

The Italian gave him an unpleasant look, his lips curling up into a sneer of contempt. D'Arcy felt his temper rising. He was the best-tempered fellow in the world, as a rule, but any insult to his horsemanship touched him on the raw, so to speak.

"Now that we can speak without bein' ovahheard by a lady," said Arthur Augustus, "I wish to remark that your statement just now was absolutely incowwect. I did not take the leap sideways; a D'Arcy takes his fences stwaight."

The Italian shrugged his shoulders.

"I repeat what I said," he replied. "Your utter clumsiness spoiled my leap, and nearly gaye me a fall. I shall complain to the master about allowing clumsy and inexperienced boys in the field!"

D'Arcy's eyes glinted.

"I wathah think that the mastah will not listen to a wank outsidah!" he exclaimed. "Captain Cleveland's uncle is mastah of the Tytchley, and he is hardly likely to pay any attention to a wottah like yourself, I think!"

"Eh? What did you call me?"

"A wottah!" said D'Arcy. "You have made a statement that is absolutely untwue. I did not jump sideways, as you know perfectly well; but you wanted to make me look widiculous in Miss Cleveland's eyes. Your mount wefused the hedge, I firmly believe, because you had been ill-using it, like the bwute you are—there's the twuth in plain English, if you want it!"

The Italian gritted his teeth.

"You are a relation of Miss Cleveland's?" he asked.

"I have the honah to be her cousin."

"Ah! For that reason I pardon you, and let you off from the chastisement I should otherwise inflict for your insolence!"

Arthur Augustus smiled contemptuously.

"You need not twouble to pardon me," he said; "I don't want to be let off! Miss Cleveland is out of sight now, and I am quite willin' to dismount and give you a sample of how we box at St. Jim's!"

"I am not likely to fight with a schoolboy——"

"Then keep your beastlay tongue between your wotten teeth," said D'Arcy, "or I warn you that you won't have any choice about the mattah!"

The Italian gave him a dangerous look, but did not reply. "Yaas, wathah!" resumed D'Arcy. "Your horse looks a likely beast, and he wouldn't have balked at the bullfinch if you had known how to wide him!"

"Would you compare your riding with mine, you insolent cub?"

"Yaas, wathah! I would wide with you on any course in

"You will probably find some means of eluding the test."

"Bai Jove, I will teach you to know me bettah, you wottah! I will wide against you if I have to wun away fwom school to do it!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, with sparkling eyes. "I can get permish, if my governah helps me, too. I would ride this animal against your black any time."

"That—that hack——"

"Bai Jove, I'll wide him, and show you whethah he is a hack or not," said the swell of St. Jim's. "He left you behind to-day, at all events!"

"Because you were a clumsy——"

"That is not twue!"

"You call me a liar?"

"Yaas, wathah!"



"Stick to him!" shouted Lowther. "Sit tight!" Fatty Wynn sat tight—but not for long. Right up to the gate went Nicodemus with a rush, but he refused to leap. His head went down, and Fatty Wynn, with a wild yell, went up over the gate. "Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Monty Lowther.

England—flat, hurdle, or steeplechase—and undahtake to leave you stwanded!" said D'Arcy instantly.

The Italian's eyes glittered.

"I accept your challenge!" he exclaimed.

"Yaas, but——"

"Ah, you withdraw, and eat your words!" exclaimed Algarotti scornfully. "You are but a braggart boy, after all!"

D'Arcy coloured.

"I should be only too glad to wide against you, and take some of the feahful cheek out of you, Mr. Algawotti; but, as a mattah of fact, I am, as you have politely remarked, a schoolboy, and——"

"And therefore it would befit you to hold your tongue in the presence of your elders!"

"You are not vewy much oldah, I pwesume, and you are a wude beast!" said D'Arcy. "All the same, a match can be awwanged, and I will get my governah to wite to the Head of St. Jim's and get me leave to wide!"

Algarotti grasped his riding-whip. It seemed for a moment that he would slash the English boy across the face. It would have cost him dear, for at that moment Captain Cleveland came riding back.

"Hallo, you two!" he exclaimed. "My sister has gone in, Arthur. I suppose you are coming in to lunch before you go back to the college?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The Italian gritted his teeth. He would gladly have accepted an invitation to lunch at Cleveland Lodge.

"Then good-day!" he exclaimed, raising his hat. "You will not forget our compact, Mr. D'Arcy?"

"Wathah not!"

And the Italian rode on his homeward way. Arthur Augustus and Captain Cleveland turned their horses towards the lodge. The captain looked at his young cousin curiously.

"Were you quarrelling with that bounder?" he asked. "He is a bounder, begad!"

"Yaas, I suppose so," assented D'Arcy. "He actually had the fearful cheek to ewitice my widin', you know."

The captain grinned.

"Did he, begad! He came a purler, and I believe it was through spurring too hard," he remarked. "He's a good rider, I've noticed that, but a cruel brute to his mount."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What did he mean about a compact?"

"We have awwanged to wide my Badgah against his black in a crows-country wide—a point-to-point steeplechase, you know!"

The captain whistled.

"That's rather a serious undertaking for a schoolboy, Arthur."

"All the bettah for being a schoolboy; I'm as light as many a jockey, and you know that I can wide."

"Yes, I know you can ride," assented Cleveland. "But that mount of yours—is he up to Algarotti's black?"

"I think so."

"Can you get permission?"

"Well, as a mattah of fact, I was welvin' on you to help me," said Arthur Augustus. "I shouldn't like the foweign ead to think that an English boy was afwaid of him, you know, and if I didn't meet him he would think so. I want you to put it to my governah, as an old sport, you know!"

The Guardsman grinned.

"I don't exactly know how Lord Eastwood will play up to the character of an old sport," he remarked. "But certainly I will do my best for you. You must lick the cad."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And with Captain Cleveland's influence on his side, Arthur Augustus had little doubt of getting Lord Eastwood's influence, too, and then all would be right at St. Jim's. And he was already looking forward to the steeplechase.

CHAPTER 6.

A Pass for Six!

HALF-PAST four rang out from the clock tower of St. Jim's, and the Fourth Form and the Shell poured out from their class-rooms into the wide flagged passage.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther looked out at once for

the chums of Study No. 6, and found them. Tom Merry slapped Blake on the shoulder.

"Gussy hasn't come back yet?" he remarked.

Blake shook his head.

"No. I was thinking that we might run down to Rylcombe and meet him at Jones' mews," he said. "He's bound to go back there to take Badger."

"I was just thinking the same."

"Good! We'll go together!"

Tom Merry made a grimace.

"I've got lines from Linton for being late."

"Hard cheese," said Blake sympathetically. "I got off with Lathom. But I'll tell you what, we'll lend a hand at your lines, and get 'em knocked off, and risk Linton spotting the writing."

"Good! Many thanks!"

"We're going down to the village, kids," said Blake, "and we're going to do Tom Merry's lines first."

"I think I'd better go and get my dog," said Herries. "I want to give him a run as often as possible for his health."

"Herries had a little dog," said Lowther, "as ugly as a crow, and everywhere that Herries went that dog was sure to go!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Herries marched off without deigning to reply. Herries' motto was: "Love me, love my dog"—and he lived up to it.

The Terrible Three, with Blake and Digby, adjourned to Tom Merry's study, and the lines were knocked off. Five willing hands made short work of them. Then Tom Merry took them to Mr. Linton's study, and Jack Blake went in search of a prefect to get a pass down to the village.

Jack Blake was a diplomat in these matters. There were good-tempered prefects in the School House at St. Jim's, and bad-tempered prefects. Blake ran over the good-tempered prefects in his mind, and considered which one he should ask. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, was out, unfortunately, and the next best was Darrell. And so Blake tapped at the door of Darrell's study, the light under the door telling him that the Sixth-Former was in his quarters.

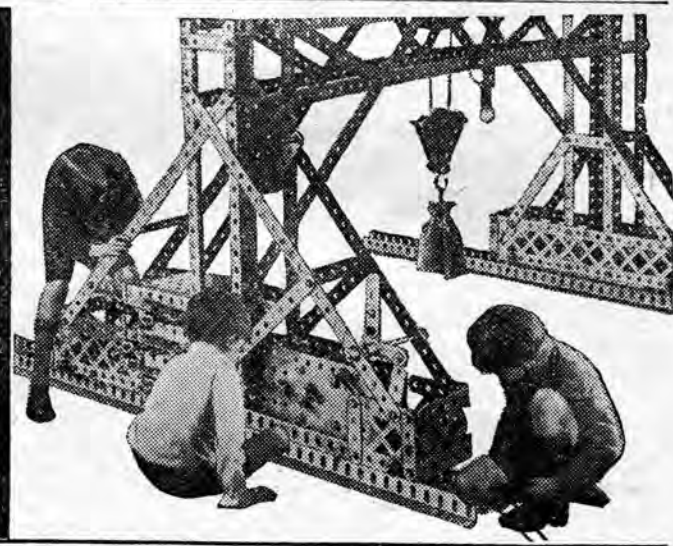
There was no reply, and Blake opened the door. Darrell of the Sixth was sitting at the table. There was a letter in his hand, and an envelope with an American postmark lying on the table. The Sixth-Former's handsome face was very

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set and miserable. Blake looked at him, and wondered. Darrell glanced up.

"Blake, what do you want?"

His tone was harsh, his look angry. Blake backed away.

"It's all right, Darrell," he said hastily. "I—I didn't know you were busy."

The prefect's face changed. He laid down the letter.

"It's all right, Blake, I'm not busy. You can come in."

"I don't want to bother you—"

"Come in!"

Blake came in. The prefect looked at him.

"What do you want?"

"Well, I was going to ask you for a pass, Darrell. It's an important matter, and—"

The prefect smiled faintly.

"I shall have to know a little more about it before I give you a pass to go alone out of bounds after dark, Blake."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Blake eagerly. "I—I thought you wouldn't like me to go alone, so I've arranged to take Herries and Dig, and Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther with me, and—"

"And the rest of the Shell and the Fourth?" asked Darrell pleasantly.

"No; that's the lot, Darrell. You see, Gussy has been away to-day—gone a-hunting you know—and we want to meet him in Rylcombe to see if he's still alive."

"Nothing else?"

"Honour bright!"

"Good! I'll give you the pass!"

And the prefect wrote it out. Blake took it joyfully, thanked Darrell effusively, and bolted out of the study. He met his comrades in the hall.

"Got it?" asked Manners.

"Yes; Darrell's a brick—a real brick—"

"That's no news."

"No; but he is a brick, and no mistake!" said Blake warmly. "He was worried about something, and he spoke rather sharply; and then he melted, you know, and I verily believe he let me have the pass partly because he was snappy at first. I only hope he isn't in any trouble. Hallo, Merry! Is it all right?"

Tom Merry laughed as he came up.

"Yes; Mr. Linton was out, and I've left them on his table. If he spots a variety of hands, he won't do it till we're gone, so it's all serene."

"Good! Let's get off! I've got the pass."

"Where's Herries?"

"Blow Herries! If he likes to go cavorting around with a dog instead of coming along with us to Rylcombe, let him!"

"Right-ho!" exclaimed Manners. "We shan't miss him!"

Blake gave the Shell boy a glare. He wasn't inclined to allow his own chum to be run down by anybody but himself.

"Talking out of your hat?" he asked unpleasantly. "If you think we're going to start before old Herries is ready, you're offside, Manners!"

"Why, you were saying—"

"Never mind what I was saying. No need for you to repeat what I was saying. Blessed if I know why you can't think of something to say for yourself."

"Here's Herries!" exclaimed Digby.

"Yes, here he is; he hasn't kept us waiting a minute," said Blake in an aggrieved tone. "I don't see what Manners wants to keep on grumbling for, for one."

"I wasn't grumbling—"

"Well, don't argue about it. Let's get off!"

"But it was you who said—"

"Are we going to the village, or is this a conversation?" asked Blake, in a tone of hopeless resignation.

"Look here," began Manners wrathfully. "You said—"

"Oh, come on!" exclaimed Tom Merry, laughing.

"But Blake said—"

"Ain't you ready to start?" asked Herries. "Towser's tugging at his chain, you know; he doesn't like to be kept waiting."

"Oh, if his majesty Towser is ready we must be off," said Lowther sarcastically. "When Towser says turn we all turn!"

"Oh, come on!"

"I wonder where that young rascal Wally is?" Blake remarked, as they crossed towards the gate. "He would like to come down with us and meet Gussy."

"He can never be found when he's wanted, and we can't hang about for him," said Manners.

"Oh, all right! Hallo, Figgins!"

Three juniors met the School House chums on their way to the gate; they were Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, the chums of the New House.

"Going out?" asked Figgins.

"Well, we look like it, don't we?"

"Yes, ass! What's on?"

"My overcoat, likewise my hat and my boots."

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Fatty Wynn. "Is it a feed? If it is, I don't mind coming with you—I'm peckish!"

"I've never met you when you were not," Tom Merry remarked.

"Well, I get so hungry this time of the year," said Fatty Wynn pathetically. "I've always got a pretty good appetite—"

"Ha, ha, ha! I've noticed that!"

"But I get fearfully peckish in this November weather. As I was saying, if it's a feed you can count on us."

"But it isn't!"

"Oh!"

"We've got a pass to go down to Jones' stables to meet Gussy coming home."

"Ah, I hear he's been going forth as a bold huntsman!" chuckled Figgins. "I want to see him in pink and tops. We'll come with you."

"What about a pass?"

"Oh, your pass will be enough for the lot of us!"

"Ha, ha, ha! We'll try if you like."

"You see, if I ask Ratty he would refuse; and Monteith, our prefect, mightn't think it was necessary for us to go and meet Gussy."

"Possibly not! Come on and chance it," said Blake. "My pass is made out for 'J. Blake, of the Fourth, and five others'—names not mentioned. Darrell was in a hurry. I dare say we can scrape through on it."

And the whole party marched out of the gates—New House and School House juniors together, on the best of terms for once.

It was a brisk walk through the winter dusk to the village. Blake grinned as they came within sight of the lamp that glimmered over the entrance to the mews.

"You always know you're near Jones' by the niff," he remarked. "I must say I like the scent of horses about the place—it's so homely."

"I like a doggy scent myself," said Herries.

"Yes, you would! Keep a hold on that brute. If he does any damage there'll be a row!"

"Towser is not likely to do any damage."

"H'm! I rather think otherwise. The brute is trying to get loose now."

The bulldog was indeed tugging at the chain, and Herries had all his work cut out to hold him in.

"Some of you have been looking at him, or something," he said wrathfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't like people to annoy my Towser. He doesn't like being looked at."

"He wants to go for the horses, more likely," said Monty Lowther.

"Towser never goes for horses—he's too well brought up."

"Perhaps there's another dog in the yard," said Blake.

"The brute is excited about something. Shall I help you with that chain?"

"I can manage it."

The juniors plunged into the dusky mews. From the cobbled stable yard came the sound of a voice they knew well.

"Let go!"

"D'Arcy minor!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Then the young rascal's here?"

"Looks like it! I wonder what mischief he's up to now?"

And the juniors hurried on to see what the redoubtable Wally was "up to."

CHAPTER 7.

The Return of the Hunter!

WALLY was stooping behind a big wire cage in the stable yard. Dick, the groom, was seated upon an upturned pail, holding back Pongo, who was trying to get loose.

Bob, the stableman, was standing by, and at a distance was Mr. Jones, looking on with a good-humoured grin. It was evident that the scamp of the Third Form at St. Jim's was in high favour at the stables.

"Let go!" rapped out Wally.

He had just slipped the door of the cage and let a large rat out. The rodent, its little black eyes glittering with mingled fear and savagery, bounded out of the cage, and Dick, the groom, let the dog go.

"Pongo! Fetch him!"

Pongo was after the rat like a shot.

The ragged, shaggy-looking brute that was Wally's dearly-beloved pet at St. Jim's had many qualities that endeared him to his master, though his looks could not be said to count much in his favour.

He was a good ratter and a good rabbit—qualities of

which Wally was proud in his pet, but which had frequently got the Third-Former into trouble on Pongo's account.

"Fetch him, Pongo!"

The terrified rat raced up the stable yard, and Pongo raced after him, and the stablemen and the young rascal from St. Jim's watched the contest with breathless interest.

But all of a sudden there was a late entry into the race, for Towser, who never could be held in when his fighting instincts were aroused, had broken away from Herries and was tearing into the stable yard.

He was on Pongo's track in a flash.

"Look out, there!" yelled Wally. "Here, keep that brute off!"

The juniors from St. Jim's came hurrying up.

"He's got loose," said Herries—a piece of rather superfluous information under the circumstances.

"He looks like it!" agreed Figgins.

"Perhaps he's hungry?" said Fatty Wynn. "I can understand him being a bit keener if he's hungry, you know."

The race was short. Pongo would certainly have had the rat, but before he could have him Towser had flung himself at Pongo. The bulldog, with a ferocious growl, flung himself upon the mongrel, and the next moment they were rolling on the cobbles in furious combat.

The rat whisked off into a corner and vanished.

Wally rushed forward with a howl.

"Get that brute off, Herries, you dummy! He'll scrag Pongo!"

"Well, he likes scrapping mongrels," said Herries.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Let Towser alone, Wally—he likes it!"

Wally seized a stable broom and rushed to the rescue of his favourite. Towser, with the stiff head of the broom biting on his ribs, decided to let go Pongo. Herries called him off, and got hold of the chain again. Towser was licking his chops, and Pongo was licking a stream of claret that flowed from his shaggy coat.

"Not much hurt, I hope?" said Blake, looking at Pongo.

"Not serious," said Wally. "Pongo's too jolly artful to let a dog get a good grip on him. What he lacks in size he makes up in artfulness. Don't you, Pongo, old boy?"

And "Pongo, old boy" whimpered.

"Lend me your handkerchief, Figgins, will you?"

"What for?"

"To wipe the blood off his coat."

"Yes, rather—I don't think!"

"Here you are, sir," said Dick, the groom, handing Wally a stable duster. "He ain't much hurt, sir; he's too tough."

"You're right, Dicky. Blessed if I know what these silly duffers wanted to come in with that clumsy great brute of a bulldog for. These kids are always getting on the grass somehow."

"Well, I like that!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "We ought to have waited to receive orders from a grave and reverend signor of the Third Form."

"Oh, don't be funny!"

"I don't know what the fags of our school are coming to," said Monty Lowther, addressing space. "My belief is that they want a good licking every morning, to remind them that they are only inky little microbes!"

"Yes, rather!" said Figgins. "When I was in the Third I was kept in my place."

"You would be!" said Wally. "Things have changed since your time. You won't catch the Third Form of our days taking much notice of you fogies."

Before Figgins could think of a suitable reply to this remark there was a clatter of hoofs on the cobbles, and Badger came in, with D'Arcy in the saddle.

The swell of St. Jim's lifted his hat gracefully to the crowd of juniors and the admiring stablemen.

Mr. Jones came forward with a grin.

"Had a good day, sir?" he said.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, as he slipped from the horse. "Badger has given me a wippin' time, Mr. Jones. We didn't kill, but I was in the first flight all the time, and there were only four with me at the finish, and it was all Badger's doing!" And D'Arcy patted the horse's neck, and Badger, to the amazement of the stable hands, snuggled against the junior's sleeve.

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "Badger seems to be in a good temper."

"He's all wight," said D'Arcy—"all wight; only he wants a firm hand and a good widah. I weally wish the Head would let me keep him at St. Jim's, and I would try to purchase him of Mr. Jones. I am afwaid Dr. Holmes would make a fuss, howevah."

"Ha, ha, ha! I'm afraid he would!"

"I shall be widin' Badger again next Wednesday, Mr. Jones," said D'Arcy. "You will let me have him; and if you want to make some money, deah boy, I can put you on to it."

"Hallo! Don't leave your old friends out!" said Figgins. "We're all on when it comes to making money."

"Yes, rather!"

"You youngstabs are out of it, as bettin' is not allowed at St. Jim's," said D'Arcy. "But I think it probable that Mr. Jones's pawents allow him to make bets."

Mr. Jones grinned. As he was on the shady side of fifty-five it was indeed probable that his parents had left off guiding his conduct in these little matters.

"Very likely," said Monty Lowther. "Are you of age, Mr. Jones?"

"Haw-haw!" said Mr. Jones.

"Give Badger a wub down, my man," said D'Arcy anxiously. "Let him have some oats, only not too much at present, you know. And mind he has a dwink before you give him the oats, and don't give him both togethah."

"Yes, sir."

After riding Badger, D'Arcy was emperor of the stable-yard, and the men would have done anything for him. Even Wally, for once in his life, looked up to his elder brother with something like respect.

"But what are you going to do next Wednesday?" said Tom Merry. "You're not going to another meet, surely? And you can't bet on a hunting run, anyway."

"Not at all, deah boy. I'm widin' in a steeplechase on Wednesday."

"A what?"

"A which?"

"Gammon!"

"Rats!"

Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle into his eye, and surveyed the incredulous juniors with perfect calmness.

"I have stated the exact facts," he replied. "Pway don't gas it all ovah the coll, howevah, as I have not obtained the Head's permish yet, and he would think it a cheek if it came to his yabs."

"Yes; very likely."

"But it's all wight. Captain Cleveland has undahtaken

Potts, the Office Boy!



to make my governah play the game, you know, and Lord Eastwood will see the Head about it."

"But what on earth have you to do with steeplechasing?" demanded Blake, in wonder and doubt. "You must be off your rocker, after all!"

"I am not off my wockah!"

"Then what—who—which—"

"You see, it happened in this way. There was a thwustin' scoundwel in the field, and I left him miles behind—well, a quartah of a mile, at least, to be absolutely cowwest—and he was wathah wotten about it. He is an Italian, a foweign wottah, named Algawotti, and he had the feahful cheek to speak to my Cousin Ethel, though I looked at him!"

"And he spoke after you looked at him?" asked Monty Lowther gravely.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"My hat! He must either be blind, or else have a constitution of iron!"

"Pway don't wot, Lowthah! As we rode home we had a little argument. I was perfectly polite to him, and told him he was a wottah and a wude beast—"

"Ha, ha, ha! What would you have said if you had been impolite?"

"He pwovoked me. He actually had the feahful impudence to owitocise my widin', and wanted to make out that it was my fault his mount refused a bullfinch!" said D'Arcy indignantly. "We had an argument, and the long and the short of it is that he challenged me—or I challenged him—well, we challenged each othah—and I am to wide Badgah against his black in a point-to-point wace acownty."

"My hat!"

"I have left all the awwagements in the hands of Captain Cleveland. We talked it ovah before I left him, and it seems that there will be some more entwies, as the captain is thinkin' of gettin' up a sweep, and powwaps my governah will make the purse. If I win a purse, I shall stand a wippin' feed at St. Jim's!"

"Good!" said Fatty Wynn heartily. "Now you're talking!"

"But—" said Blake.

"It's all wight, Blake. I shall win."

"I've no doubt Lord Eastwood will be able to fix it with the Head, as he's one of the governors of the school," remarked Tom Merry; "but where do we come in?"

"I have thought of you, deah boys!" said D'Arcy, with a beaming smile. "That's why I fixed Wednesday, because it's a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and you fellows will be able to get ovah to the course on your jiggahs and see the finish, though you won't be able to see the beginnin'."

Jack Blake slapped the swell of St. Jim's heartily on the back—so heartily that he staggered and nearly fell on the cobbles.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Gussy, I've felt inclined to have you painlessly suffocated lots of times," said Blake, "but I'm glad now that I didn't go to that expense!"

"Weally, deah boy—"

"You're a good little ass! I don't care what anybody says—I'll maintain anywhere that you're a good little ass!"

"I wefuse to be wogarded as an ass—"

"Let me slap him on the back," said Lowther. "I can't express my feelings any other way. Let me—"

"Pway keep off, Lowthah! I uttally wefuse to be

slapped on the back! Mr. Jones, I had no time to consult you before accepting the challenge, but I pwesume you will let me have Badgah?"

"Will I?" said Mr. Jones enthusiastically. "Why, if you can break him into steeplechasing, he'll be worth a cool hundred to me, Master D'Arcy."

"Bai Jove! Then you can count on the hundwed."

"He's a ripping hoss!" said Mr. Jones. "Half-bred, as you can see; but look at his bone! He could stand any amount of jumping, only he won't. Why, my word," said Mr. Jones, growing eloquent, "that 'oss could win the Grand National if he liked!"

"Bai Jove, I'd like to twy him there!" said D'Arcy. "But I haven't the least doubt that he can beat Mr. Algawotti's black, though that's a good beast. I want you to let me have him for twainin' all the time I can get away from lessons, Mr. Jones—of course, at your usual wates!"

Mr. Jones shook his head decidedly.

"You can have the hoss, Master D'Arcy," he said "any time, and as long as you like; and if you win a steeplechase on him, that will be payment enough for me. Why, I'd have taken twenty quid for him yesterday. Since you've crossed him, I wouldn't take fifty. Win next Wednesday, and I wouldn't take a hundred! You have him just when you like, and as long as you like; and if you say a word about paying you and me will quarrel."

"Bai Jove! I can't afford to quawwel with you, Mr. Jones, so I won't say a word about payin'," said D'Arcy. "But I weally think I shall win, with a fair field and no favour, and there's a chance for somebody to scoop in some tin. I almost wish I was a bettin' fellow, but I pwomised my governah nevah to bet. I say, it's vewy good of you fellows to come down here and meet me like this. Let's get off. I'm hungwy!"

And the juniors said "Good-night!" to Mr. Jones, and left the place. And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had the somewhat unusual experience of being the hero of the party during the walk home.

CHAPTER 8.

The Pass!

"MY only Aunt Jane!" ejaculated D'Arcy minor.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Cave! It's Lathom!"

A little gentleman in spectacles was coming from the direction of the school. The juniors stopped in the shadows of the trees. The December night was dim, but there was no doubt that Mr. Lathom had sighted at least some of them—at the same time that they caught the glimmer of his spectacles in the lane.

"Rotten!" said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah, if you haven't a pass," said Arthur Augustus.

"The School House chaps have passes," said Figgins. "We three are out on our own responsibility."

"Bai Jove! Then I wathah think you will get impots on Mr. Lathom's responsibility."

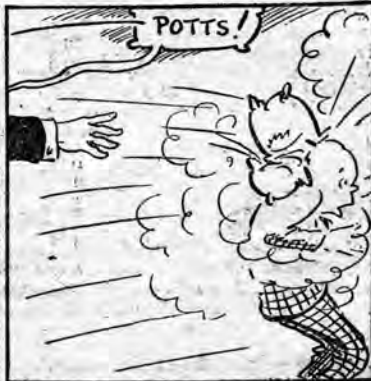
"What price me?" grunted Wally. "I haven't a pass."

"Get out of sight!" muttered Tom Merry hastily. "He's only seen some of us, you know; and if he doesn't spot you New House kids—"

"Right-ho! Keep him off the scent."

Figgins & Co. plunged into a gap in the hedge, and

FLOWERY LANGUAGE!



Wally followed them, dragging Pongo after him. Little Mr. Lathom came up and blinked at the juniors.

"Ah, you are out late, boys!" he said. "I hope you have permission to stay out of bounds after locking up?"

"Oh, sir!" said Blake, as if shocked by the possibility of the suspicion that he could stay out without permission.

"Oh, sir!" said Tom Merry, in an equally aggrieved tone.

"Oh, sir!" said Digby and Herries, Manners and Lowther.

"Weally, Mr. Lathom!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Well, well," said the master of the Fourth, "I should be the last man, I hope, to judge you hastily, but really I must see your permit before I allow the matter to drop. Pray show me yours, Merry."

"I—er—haven't one, sir."

"Ah! I feared as much. I really——"

"Blake has mine, sir."

"Ah, indeed! I should be glad to see it, Blake."

"Here it is, sir," said Blake meekly.

Mr. Lathom took the pass, and Blake obligingly struck a match for him to read.

Tom Merry, with a curious twinkle in his eyes, struck another and held it close to the paper.

"Ah!" said Mr. Lathom. "I see this is a pass signed by a School House prefect, to permit—er—Blake and five others to go to the village."

"Yes, sir."

"I think there are seven of you here."

"Yaas, wathah, sir. But I have only just returned from the Tytchley Meet, and I had the Head's permish to go there, sir," said D'Arcy.

"Oh, yes, I remember! Yes, this is quite in order, boys," said Mr. Lathom having not the faintest suspicion that three juniors and a dog were hiding behind the hedge within six paces of him.

"Thank you, sir," said Tom Merry. "Dear me!"

There was a flare, and the paper caught light from Tom Merry's match, and was consumed in a few seconds.

Blake stared at the hero of the Shell.

"Well, you clumsy ass!" he exclaimed.

"Blake!"

"I beg your pardon, sir, but he's burnt up my pass, and now I shan't be let in without being reported to the Head by Taggles."

"Dear me! It was very unfortunate!"

"It's all right," said Tom Merry. "Don't be a duffer, Blake. Mr. Lathom saw the pass, and knows it was all right, and he won't mind writing another—will you, sir?"

"Er—no—er—of course not."

"Oh, of course not! That's all right," said Blake. "But it's giving Mr. Lathom a lot of trouble over your clumsiness, Merry."

"Yaas, wathah! I considah that an apology is due to Mr. Lathom."

"It's all right, boys; but—but I really do—st see how I am to write in the dark; nor have I either pencil or paper with me," said the master of the Fourth.

"I can manage it, sir," said Tom Merry, nudging Blake in the dark, to let him know that a scheme was on; and all of a sudden it dawned on Blake that the burning of the pass was no accident. "I have a pocket-book here, and I'll scrawl the note, sir, and you can just sign it after reading it."

"Er—very—er—good!"

Blake struck a match, and Tom Merry scrawled a permit on a leaf of his pocket-book before Mr. Lathom had time to think it out:

"J. Blake and his friends have permission to remain out of gates till 7 p.m."

"There you are, sir," said Tom Merry. "If you sign that, sir, we shall get in all right, and it will be as good as Darrell's pass."

Mr. Lathom glanced over the paper in the light of a match and signed it unobtrusively.

"We shall have just time to get in by seven if we hurry," said Tom Merry. "Of course, you know we would go straight back, sir?"

"Yes, I am sure you would, Merry. But as it is ten minutes to seven now, the pass will make it quite certain," said Mr. Lathom. "Good-night, my boys!"

"Good-night, sir!"

The juniors made a show of walking on, and Mr. Lathom disappeared in the gloom towards the village.

As soon as he was safely gone, Tom Merry ran back and called to Figgins, and the New House juniors and Wally and Pongo came out in the lane.

"Narrow shave," said Figgins; "but I don't see how we're to dodge Taggles at the gate."

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"We could get in over the wall," Kerr remarked.

"Blessed if I don't feel too hungry to climb!" murmured Fatty Wynn.

"We shall be late for calling-over, anyway!" growled Wally. "Lathom has delayed us long enough for that."

"It's all right," said Tom Merry.

"How is it all right?"

"We've got a pass."

"You had a pass before."

"Yes; but that one was only for six."

Monty Lowther gave an excited whoop.

"My only hat! And I never saw what you were driving at, you artful bouncer!"

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"This pass is for Blake and his friends," he remarked.



"Shoulder high!" roared Tom Merry. And up went the swell of lending a hand. A perfect stranger had his right leg and Tom Merry juniors were mingling.

"We're all friends—for the present. The number isn't specified. Lathom would have shoved it in if he had known that there was a gang of hooligans hiding behind the hedge, of course. But he didn't know it, though I was afraid that some of Figgins' feet would show over the top of the hedge."

But Figgins only laughed.

"Good egg!" he said. "This saves our bacon, rather."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's all right if we get in by seven. Come on!"

"Weally, deah boys, I wegard Tom Mewwy as havin' acted in a weally cweditable and intelligent mannah on this occasion."

"Good! If Gussy approves, the thing is passed and adopted. Tom Merry, go up one!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Hurry up!" said Tom Merry.

The juniors arrived at the gate of St. Jim's, and Tom

Merry rang a formidable peal on the bell, which brought Taggles out of his lodge in the worst of tempers. The school porter grinned at the sight of the juniors on the other side of the bars.

"Which you'll catch it!" he remarked grimly. "Your mistake, Taggy," said Blake coolly. "Look at this pass, my son."

Taggles looked at the pass that Blake thrust through the bars of the gate, by the light of his lantern. The signature of the Fourth Form master was enough, and Taggles gave a grunt.

"All right, Taggy?" grinned Tom Merry. The porter only grunted again. The gates swung open, and the juniors marched in. Taggles closed the gates with

CHAPTER 9.

D'Arcy's Friends Rally Round!

TOM MERRY was looking very thoughtful when he came down the following morning. He was thinking. He had had time to consider his little trick on Mr. Latham over the burnt pass, and he was not quite clear in his mind if he had played the game or not.

"I'll have to explain to Latham!" he muttered. "Hallo!" he added, as D'Arcy came along the passage. "Feeling pretty fit?"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy! Fit as a fiddle!"

"Now, I've been thinking, Gussy—"

"Have you weally? Bai Jove!"

"I've been thinking," repeated Tom Merry severely, "that under the circumstances, if you're feeling at all nervous about the race—"

"But I'm not."

"Oh, some fellows are conceited enough for anything, I think. I was thinking that I should be quite willing to take your place and ride for St. Jim's."

Arthur Augustus jammed his eyeglass into his right eye, and took a leisurely survey of Tom Merry, commencing at the toes of his boots, and finishing at his curly hair.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, of all the feahful cheek—"

"It could be fixed easily enough," said Tom Merry. "The horse goes, you know, with another jockey up. It won't make any difference to the steeplechase, except that Badger would be more likely to win."

"I wegard the mere suggestion as uttably widiculous!"

"Now, be reasonable—"

"I wefuse to be weasonable—I mean, I wefuse to entah-tain any such wposition for a fwaction of a second."

"I suppose it's no good arguing with an obstinate duffer," said Tom Merry, in a tone of resignation. "I thought that, at a moment like this, it was a time for your friends to rally round you. You don't seem even grateful."

"I assuah you, Tom Mewwy, that I don't feel in the least gwateful for such a widiculous offah."

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus went on his way. Blake met him in the Hall as he was going out to get a niff of the morning air before breakfast, and gave him a nudge.

"I was just wanting to speak to you, Gussy."

"Go ahead, deah boy!"

"This race on Wednesday will be a bit of a tough nut for you to crack."

"Not at all. I shall be all wight."

"But I'm rather anxious about you, Gussy," said Blake. "You remember when we were staying at the Quarry Farm only a few days ago, you told us you were on the verge of a serious illness."

"My stay in the country quite cured me."

Jack Blake shook his head solemnly.

"That's all very well, Gussy. I know it's a good wheeze for an invalid to take an optimistic view of his condition; but I can't feel so easy about it as you do."

"My deah fellow," said D'Arcy, rather flattered by Blake's unusual solicitude for his health, "I assuah you that I am as wight as wain!"

"I know you're game, Gussy; but think what we should feel like if anything happened to you," said Blake pathetically. "It won't do, Gussy. I've got a feeling that you're not up to this ride on Wednesday."

"But I am committed to it now, deah boy!"

"Not at all."

"My deah Blake, I am bound to wide or eat my words, and it is absolutely imposs for a D'Arcy evah to do anythin' like that."

"Oh, there's an alternative, of course!" said Blake. "You could find a substitute."

Arthur Augustus caught his chum's drift, and he began to glare. Jack Blake went on, unheeding.

"You see, Gussy, as a Yorkshireman, I know all there is to be known about horses, or a little more, and I've ridden cross-country at home in Yorkshire in places that would make your head swim—"

"I wefuse to believe anythin' of the sort!"

"It's the horse that counts in a steeplechase, of course. It's Badger against Algarotti's black. The jockey up doesn't matter."

"I assuah you that it mattahs vewy much. Algawotti had the feahful impertinence to hint that I was not a good widah!"

"I'll put him in his place."

"No, you won't, Blake."

"I'll make him sing small."

"You will do nothin' of the sort!"

"Now, look here, Gussy—"

"I am goin' to wide on Wednesday, deah boy, and it's not the slightest use your talkin'," said the swell of the School House placidly.



St. Jim's. Men he had never seen before fought for the honour of his left. Round him country folk and friends and St. Jim's in a cheering crowd!

a clang that rang across the quadrangle, and showed the depth of his feelings.

Calling-over had just finished in the school hall when the juniors walked in. Kildare, who was taking the roll, looked at them grimly. Blake marched up to him with perfect calmness, and presented his pass.

"That all right, Kildare?" he said.

The captain of St. Jim's glanced at it.

"All right," he said quietly.

And the delinquents walked off.

Figgins slapped Tom Merry on the back in the quadrangle.

"Jolly good wheeze, Merry. You've saved us lines or a licking, and no mistake. Good-night!"

"Good-night!"

And the juniors separated to go to their respective houses. Arthur Augustus to receive quite an ovation from the School House fellows as he went in

"I suppose that's what you call playing the game?" said Blake, more in sorrow than in anger. "You're not fit to ride cross-country, and I thought that this was a time for your friends to rally round you, and— What are you grinning at, you image?"

"Oh, nothin', deah boy! My fwriends can wally wound and see me win if they like."

"See you get your neck broken more likely."

"Well, I'm goin' to wisk it."

And Arthur Augustus strolled out of the School House, leaving Blake looking after him very expressively.

Reilly of the Fourth was sitting on the stone balustrade of the School House steps, kicking his heels against the pillars; but he jumped down as the swell of the Fourth came out.

"The top of the morning to ye!" he said agreeably.

Arthur Augustus surveyed him a little doubtfully. There was a certain antagonism between the swell of St. Jim's and the boy from Belfast.

"Good-mornin', deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Sure, and I wanted to speak to you," said Reilly. "I hear that you're riding in a steeplechase next Wednesday?"

"Perfectly cowwest."

"Sure it will be a tough nut for you to crack entoirely."

"Yaas, wathah; but I hope I shall pull it off, you know."

"Now, look here, D'Arcy," said Reilly confidentially, "at home, in ould Ireland, I do a lot of riding. I've got an uncle in Galway, and we ride to hounds, and go the devil's own pace over a country that would make an English fox-hunter weep."

"Do you weally?" said D'Arcy, with polite interest.

"Faith, we do! Now, I was thinking, Gussy, that it would be a good idea if you sent a substitute to this steeplechase, and sure you couldn't find a better one than— Faith, and what are ye cackling at entoirely?"

"Nothin', deah boy; only I don't want a substitute on Wednesday."

"Now, don't be after refusing out of sheer obstinacy, Gussy darling!" said Reilly persuasively. "Sure, I shouldn't like to see you brought home with a broken neck, and though we haven't been always on the best of terms—"

"As a mattah of fact, you have nevah weally tweated me with pwopah respect," said Arthur Augustus, in his stateliest manner.

"Sure, and that was nothing but an oversight on my part; and in truth, Gussy, I respect you very highly—faith, and I do."

"I am glad to hear it, Weilly."

"When I heard about this steeplechase," went on Reilly, "I said to myself, said I, 'I've never really treated D'Arcy with proper respect; but I'll turn over a new leaf entoirely, and show him how fond I am of him by carrying his colours to the last flag.' I said to myself, 'This is a time for all D'Arcy's true friends to show themselves and rally round him.' Faith, and what are ye cackling at again?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ye blathering gossoon—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Faith, and I tell ye—"

"Weally, deah boy, I am not lookin' for a substitute, and I weally beg of you to drop the subject," said Arthur Augustus, with a wave of the hand. And he walked down the steps and strode across the quadrangle.

Figgins & Co. were taking a morning stroll, too, and D'Arcy gave them a polite greeting. There was pax for the time being between School House and New House. The New House Co. had been discussing something very seriously, and Figgins coughed a little as he greeted D'Arcy.

"Fine morning, Gussy," he said slowly.

"Yaas, wathah; but the gwound is too wet for footah. There was wain in the night."

"Yes, that's unfortunate," said Figgins absently.

Arthur Augustus looked slightly surprised. He was expecting Figgins to be indulging in anathemas both loud and deep against the climate. Snow had banished football for a long time, and now, after a spell of fine weather, there had been a rainfall. It was enough to exasperate the keenest footballer in the New House; but Figgins appeared just now to be thinking of something else.

"You're riding against that chap Algarotti on Wednesday," Figgins remarked thoughtfully, coughing again.

"Yaas, wathah! Widin' with him, anyway. I shan't wide against him unless he gets in the way," said Arthur Augustus.

Figgins laughed. The joke was a feeble one, and was of old standing, but Figgins laughed as though it was the finest bon mot that had ever been uttered within the walls of St. Jim's.

D'Arcy looked pleased. His little efforts at humour were generally greeted with groans, or sometimes with flying boots and books.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins.

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"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the Co., backing their leader up loyally.

"Oh, you funny dog!" gasped Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Kerr again.

"My hat!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, I wegard that wemark as wathah funnay," said D'Arcy modestly. "I am vewy glad to see that you duffahs are cultivatin' a sense of humah."

"Ha, ha, ha! But as I was saying, Gussy, you are riding in a steeplechase on Wednesday."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Do you feel quite fit, after the attack of influenza you had the other day?" asked Figgins anxiously.

"It wasn't influenza affah all, deah boy, and I am as wight as wain," said D'Arcy, beginning to see Figgy's little game.

"But suppose you have a fall," said Figgins. "You may come a purler at the water-jump, for instance."

"I am goin' to wisk that."

"Oh, I know you have lots of pluck, Gussy, but what about your clothes? You would simply ruin them."

"Yaas, that would certainly be vewy howwid, but I must wisk it."

"Now, Gussy, I was saying to Kerr as you came up that the rows between the two Houses at this school are often carried too far. I was saying that, on a special occasion like this, the New House ought to play up, and show the School House that it regards St. Jim's as—as a harmonious whole."

"That's it," said Kerr gravely.

"I was saying to Kerr—or was it to you, Fatty?—I was saying, anyway, that a fellow like you has so many friends in the New House and in the School House, that this is a time for those friends to let the facts be seen, and to rally round you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?"

"My deah Figgy, you are the fourth duffah that has offered to wally wound me."

"The fourth what?"

"The fourth duffah," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "Tom Merry was the first, and then Blake, and then Weilly, and now—"

"Of course, you were quite right in refusing them. You were quite right in waiting till a really good rider offered to—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I say, really, Gussy—"

"Bai Jove, there's the bwekkah bell! So long, deah boys. When I am lookin' out for any substitutes, I will let you know."

And Arthur Augustus strolled off to the School House, leaving Figgins & Co. looking at one another expressively.

During morning school, Arthur Augustus received a hundred lines for inattention in class, as well as a German imposition from Herr Schneider. But he cared little. He was thinking of the steeplechase, and of carrying the D'Arcy colours in triumph to the final flag. Immediately after morning school he walked to Rylcombe, to take Badger out for a trot, leaving his lines unwritten, and indeed forgotten.

He had more important matters to think of.

CHAPTER 10.

Nicodemus Declines!

"JUMP on!" "Wait a minute, Lowther, I'm quite out of breath."

"Oh, get on!"

"Are you sure he's quiet?"

"He's as quiet as Mary's little lamb."

"He seems to have rather a gleam in his eye."

"That's only a gleam of good-nature."

"Is it?" said Fatty Wynn doubtfully. And he looked at Farmer Hodges' donkey with a dubious eye.

Nicodemus, the donkey, was a well-known figure in the fields round St. Jim's, and more than one fellow had tried to ride him, with painful results to the would-be rider. Nicodemus looked very quiet and sedate, but when he felt anyone on his back, his manners and customs underwent a great change.

The ground was not fit for football that afternoon, and the Terrible Three had gone for a stroll instead, and as they had passed the old barn, they had come upon the donkey, looking for thistles with a thoughtful expression on his face.

Fatty Wynn had just come out of the barn, with a self-conscious look and a smear of jam upon his plump countenance. It was Monty Lowther who suggested that the fat Fourth-Former might like a ride. Fatty Wynn liked the idea well enough, but he did not quite like the look of Nicodemus.

"Why don't you ride him?" he asked suddenly.

Lowther yawned.

"Oh, I don't want to ride this afternoon. Besides, you're just the weight. Nicky would be frisky under a light weight like me, but I'd defy a rhinoceros to be frisky if he got your weight across him."

"I say, wait a minute till I get my camera," exclaimed Manners.

"Bosh! Jump on, Fatty, and I'll hold his head."

"Well, I should like a canter, to give me an appetite for tea," Fatty Wynn remarked. "I haven't had anything to eat since three o'clock, and I'm getting pretty peckish, but—"

"Are you going to jump on?"

"Here he is!" exclaimed a lively voice, and three youthful figures rushed round the barn—D'Arcy minor, Jameson, and Gibson of the Third Form.

"Run along, kids," said Tom Merry; "no room for fags."

"Rats!" said Wally cheerfully. "We came here to look for one donkey, and we've found five. Four of you can bunk; we want Nicodemus."

And Jameson and Gibson grinned gleefully. They always enjoyed Wally's cool "cheek" to fellows in higher Forms, though they seldom quite ventured to imitate it themselves.

The chums of the Shell turned pink. Monty Lowther gave the hero of the Third a warning look.

"Nuff said!" he remarked. "Stand out of the way, you kids. Fatty is going to give us an exhibition of riding, and watch the world with noble horsemanship, as Shakespeare remarked. Go ahead, Fatty!"

"Sure you've got his head?"

"Yes, rather, safe as houses!"

"Give me a bunk up, Merry."

"Right you are."

Tom Merry gave the required bunk, and Fatty Wynn clambered on the back of the donkey. The Third-Formers stood by grinning. Wally picked up a stick from the grass, and winked at Jameson, who nearly exploded.

"Still safe?" asked Lowther.

"Ye-es. Don't let's go for a minute, though," said Fatty Wynn anxiously. "Wait till I get hold of the rope. Blessed if I know how a chap's to ride without reins. I can manage in a minute, though. I'll have a canter round the field."

"Better jump the gate."

"I don't know how this mope shapes as a jumper."

"Now, look here, Fatty, don't funk it," said Lowther. "There's Gussy, a Fourth-Former belonging to our House, who is riding in a steeplechase. I should think even a New House fellow could take a gate."

"Bosh!" said Fatty Wynn, on his mettle at once. "I'll take the gate!"

"That's right! Good old Fatty! Ready?"

"Ye-e-es!"

Lowther let go, and Fatty Wynn was left alone on Nicodemus.

Nicodemus had a wicked look in his eyes, but he seemed very quiet. Fatty, gaining courage, gave him a punch on the neck.

"Here, get on, you brute!" he exclaimed. "Buck up!"

The donkey trotted off. Fatty Wynn dragged on the rope to drag him round towards the gate, and Nicodemus obeyed with the gentleness of the cooing dove.

The chums of the Shell looked on in amazement.

"My only hat!" murmured Lowther. "I never believed Fatty could handle the mope! Why, he's as quiet as Badger was after Gussy rode him!"

D'Arcy minor gave a chuckle.

"Nicky is looking wicked about the eyes," he murmured. "He only wants to be woke up. I'm going to wake him."

And Wally gave the donkey a smack across the flank; not enough to hurt him, but enough to make him lively. Wally knew Nicodemus. The donkey suddenly broke into a burst of speed and dashed towards the gate helter-skelter.

"Oh!" yelled Fatty Wynn. "Help!"

"Stick to him!" shouted Lowther. "Sit tight!"

Wynn had heaps of pluck. He sat tight on the back of the careering donkey.

Right up to the gate went Nicodemus with a rush. But there, unfortunately, he refused to leap. His head went down and his hind legs went up, and Fatty Wynn, with a wild yell, shot forward over his ears.

"Look out!" shouted Tom Merry.

But it wasn't of much use warning Fatty Wynn to look out. He was flying over the head of the donkey and over the gate. He bumped down in a sitting posture in a bed of ferns and gasped.

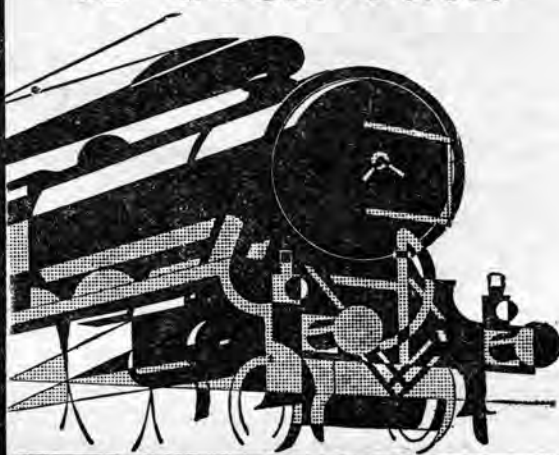
Nicodemus looked at him through the gate with a benignant expression, as if quite unconscious of having done anything amiss.

The juniors were roaring with laughter as much at the expression of Fatty Wynn's plump face as anything else.

"My word!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "The—the beast! I think I've broken my back!"

(Continued on page 19.)

BOYS, START A RAILWAY OF YOUR OWN!

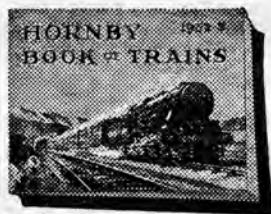


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HALLO, chums! Next Wednesday's long complete story of Tom Merry & Co. is a regular wow! Make a note of the title:

"TOM MERRY & CO. AT THE FAIR!"

and stand by for thrills, fun, and a hundred per cent entertainment. Look out, too, for more stirring chapters of

"THE LOST LEGION!"

and another laughter-raising "comic strip" starring Potts, the one and only office-boy. While I have this opportunity I would like to rub home the point that the best way to make sure of your copy of the GEM is to order it in advance. This method assists the newsagent and it also ensures that you get your copy regularly. Surely that's much better than leaving it to chance, and being told sometimes by your newsagent that he is "sold out." 'Nuff said!

THE MENDING KNOT

He was a large size in snakes, but he seemed of little use to the collector who had marked him down for a life of captivity in a local zoo, for his back was broken. But this snake knew a thing or two. He looped his broken back into a knot, just where the fracture was, slept the sleep of the weary in a specially warmed box, and when, later, he was taken out, his fractured back had mended. That snake wasn't loopy—he was mighty sensible, for he's as fit as a snake now!

THIS WEEK'S STRANGE STORY!

They were a hard-working couple, and in the course of many years had saved a comfortable sum of money. Then came the time for them to retire. They sold their business, prepared to leave Paris for Switzerland, and on the strength of their near departure, went for a boat trip up the River Marne. It was an unlucky venture, for the boat overturned. The couple were rescued, but the savings of a lifetime went to the bottom of the river in the unfortunate lady's handbag! So dispirited were the luckless couple that they even contemplated putting an end to their existence, but fate decreed that a relative should arrive at the critical moment. He talked to them strongly on the subject, and the couple began to think about starting a working life all over again. Fate still had a trump card up its sleeve, however, for the following morning a fisherman arrived at the house with the handbag containing their precious savings, which he had hooked up from the mud at the bottom of the river!

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A CHEAP DISCOVERY!

Fred Entwistle, of Norfolk, asks me how much Columbus got for discovering America. The answer is twelve pounds! Not a fortune exactly, what? But the expenses of the whole trip, including salaries to all who participated in it, reached the low limit of fourteen hundred pounds! Those were the days of economy.

HEARD THIS ONE?

Magistrate: "And what were you doing in the house?"

Prisoner (a locksmith) accused of burglary: "Making a bolt for the door, sir!"

TRY THIS ONE ON YOUR PAL!

Ask him to describe how a horse rises from the ground. If he replies hind legs first, tell him he is wrong, for a horse always props itself on its fore legs first and then drags its hind legs up afterwards. In the case of a cow the movements are reversed—the cow rises on its hind legs. Next time you are in a meadow where cows and horses are grazing test this out.

HISTORY UP TO DATE!

Scientists are dabbling with a theory these days that all sounds made since the world began go round and round interminably in a headachy wave circle, and consequently are never lost. It is prophesied that one of these days an instrument will be perfected which will be able to pick up these sounds, words, and music, so to speak, of bygone days. Thus, the mighty Caesar's voice might suddenly jump through the ether: or we might hear what really happened when King Alfred burnt the cakes, and so on. A pleasant thought. But wait a moment! That same instrument would be capable of picking up the exact words you used about that heavy-handed master of yours, when he had caught you out over something, last year or the year before! Let's hope that instrument won't be invented. It has its bright side, but it bristles with snags as well!

SNOW IN THE DESERT!

Oh, yes, they do have snow in the Sahara Desert, Tom Rawlings, of Hampshire, so you will have to apologise to your pal, for he was right. The snow, by the way, falls only in the centre of the Sahara, in the vicinity of the Hoggar plateau.

THE BRIGHTEST BOOK OF THE YEAR!

That, of course, is the "Greyfriars' Holiday Annual." Two hundred and

eighty pages of first-class fiction, pictures, colour and photogravure plates—all for the reasonable price of six shillings. There are plenty of stories of the St. Jim's favourites in this year's bumper edition of the "Holiday Annual," besides fascinating yarns of Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars, and Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood. Gemites are strongly urged to visit their newsagents and have a look at this wonderful budget of stories. Better still, ask your newsagents for details of their Christmas clubs. But don't leave that visit too late. Remember, there's always a rum on a good thing—and a good thing the "Holiday Annual" most assuredly is!

MR. TWO HATS!

He's a Korean man of the "strict" order. He doesn't believe in going about bareheaded. Indoors he wears a type of skull cap, with long tapes, which are tied under the chin. When he trots outside the house he dons a miniature top hat, which he wears over the skull cap. Quaint, isn't it?

SHE DOESN'T NEED A DENTIST!

New York is a city of stunts. They are always doing amazing things there which the average Britisher can see little sense in. The "latest" concerns the daring journey of a young woman who slid along a cable stretched across Broadway at a height of six hundred feet from the ground hanging on to a pulley attachment by her teeth! When I mention that the length of the cable was four hundred yards you will realise the big thrill the staring populace got in the street below. But a dutiful policeman lost no time in arresting the fair stunter. Apparently she had broken a by-law of the city. But it might have been worse. For instance, she might have broken her neck!

THE CART BEFORE THE HORSE!

The people of California are naturally very proud of their beautiful scenery, and so that visitors using the "sight-seeing" trolley-car from Mount Lowe should have an uninterrupted view of the scenery, the horse, or to be more precise, the mule which shoves the rail trolley-car on its three mile journey is placed behind the car. It's a novel idea, as not only does it allow the passengers to see everything before them, without obstruction, but it saves them from being half-choked by the dust which the hard-working mule kicks up as it goes along.

THE TUNEFUL MECHANIC!

Alec Moseley is a tuner. What of? Well, it's this way. During the speedway season Alec tunes the motors of the Wembley "Lions," and if you want to get an idea as to how good a tuner Alec is, let me tell you: that this last season the "Lions" won the National League Trophy, the London Cup, and the National Trophy—in fact, all the team honours that there are! But now, when there is no speedway racing, Alec has got a job tuning—pianos! He certainly seems to be a rather versatile young man, but let us hope that he won't forget himself and tune people's pianos so that they make noises like his speedway motors!

YOUR EDITOR.

THE SCHOOLBOY JOCKEY!

(Continued from page 17.)

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Lowther. "You would be sitting up and talking if you had broken your back, of course!"

"I—I feel jarred all over."

Tom Merry vaulted over the gate and gave Fatty a hand up. On examination, the fat Fourth-Former found that nothing was broken. He gasped for breath, and gave Lowther a reproachful look.

"I believe you knew the beast was going to act like that, Lowther."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It has made me quite hungry. A shock to the system always makes me hungry, and tea won't be ready for nearly half an hour yet," said Fatty Wynn pathetically.

Tom Merry slipped his arm through that of the fat Fourth-Former.

"Come and have a look-in at the tuckshop," he said.

The New House Falstaff beamed at once.

"Right you are, Merry! Of course, it was only Lowther's little joke, and I'm not the fellow to bear a grudge for a joke."

"Not to the extent of refusing a feed," grinned Lowther. And the chums of the Shell marched Fatty Wynn off to solace him in the best possible way for his fall.

Wally chuckled gleefully.

"Now we can have a ride," he remarked. "Come on, Nicky! Hold on to his back legs, Jimmy!"

"No fear!" said Jameson promptly.

"Oh, don't be an ass! Come on, Nicky, old son! Come here, you obstinate beast!"

Nicodemus was dodging. But Wally soon caught him, and vaulted on his back. Wally could ride anything that went on four legs, and Nicodemus in vain attempted to play on him the same trick that had unseated Fatty Wynn.

In a few minutes Wally was careering round and round the field, with Jameson and Gibson yelling to urge the moke to greater efforts. The entertainment ended all of a sudden when a stout farmer with a big stick was observed making his way to the scene.

CHAPTER 11.

D'Arcy Doesn't Forget!

"D'ARCY!"

"Yaas, sir?" said Arthur Augustus, stopping as Mr. Railton spoke to him in the passage in the School House on Monday morning.

"Dr. Holmes wishes to see you in his study."

"Yaas, sir!"

On most occasions such a summons would have been received with a sinking of the heart. It did not usually end pleasantly for a junior to be called into the Head's study. But D'Arcy guessed that the present summons had to do with the steeplechase fixed for Wednesday, and he went to the dread sanctum with a light heart and a sprightly step.

"Come in, D'Arcy," said the Head kindly. "I have a few words to say to you before school. I have had a letter from Lord Eastwood making a somewhat unusual request, which, however, I fully intend to grant."

D'Arcy's eyes danced with pleasure and relief.

"Thank you vewy much, sir!"

"It appears that his lordship wishes you to ride in a steeplechase on Wednesday," went on the Head, looking curiously at Arthur Augustus. "I did not know you were a rider, D'Arcy."

"I have widden evah since I was a little nippah, sir."

"Very good. I presume that Lord Eastwood knows your capabilities in the matter, and he takes all responsibility. You will require to leave here early on Wednesday morning and go to Cleveland Lodge, as Lord Eastwood tells me that the course has been marked out in the Tytchley country. You have my permission to go, D'Arcy, and I wish you every success."

"You are vewy kind, sir. I felt sure I could depend upon your genewosity," said the junior gratefully.

"Indeed, I am glad to encourage anything of the kind," said the Head. "Riding is a healthy and manly exercise, and it is very pleasant to see a boy fond of horses. Of course, I need not say that I rely upon you not to get mixed up in any betting transactions."

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

"I think that is all, D'Arcy."

"Pway excuse me, sir, but—but—" Arthur Augustus hesitated, and the Head looked at him inquiringly.

"Go on, D'Arcy. Have you something to ask of me?"

"I don't know wethah I ought to twespas furthah on your kindness, sir," said the swell of St. Jim's diffidently. "I don't want you to think me a gwaspin' sort of boundah, sir."

Dr. Holmes smiled.

"You may be sure that I shall not think that, D'Arcy, whether I grant your request or not. What is it?"

"I awwanged the wace for Wednesday, sir, because it is a half-holiday, and I wished my fwienids to come ovah and see the finish."

"Very good. They shall have passes out of bounds for the purpose, certainly."

"Thank you vewy much, sir. But could you manage to let them get off a little earliah on Wednesday, so that they could see the start, sir?"

Dr. Holmes looked grave.

"I am afraid that is asking a great deal, D'Arcy."

"I know it is, sir, and I feel wathah like a boundah in askin' so much; but they would like to come awfully, and so—"

"Well, well, we will see. I suppose you are alluding to Blake, Herries, and Digby, who share your study?"

"Yaas, sir. But in ordah to give the Shell a show, pewwaps you could let Tom Mewwy and Mannahs and Lowthah come as well?"

"I will think about it."

"And—in and in case the New House feel wathah wotten about it, sir, pewwaps you could give your permish to Figgins & Co.—I mean, Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, sir."

"Anyone else?" asked the Head slightly sarcastically.

D'Arcy, who did not notice the sarcasm, brightened up, and went on cheerfully:

"Yaas, sir, now you speak of it, I should like to take my young bwothah, D'Arcy minah, you know. He's a young scallawag, but he'd like to come."

"I really hope that is the whole list, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, sir. If they left St. Jim's at eleven in the morning, they would be in time for the start, comin' over to Tytchley by twain."

"As a matter of fact, Lord Eastwood made some reference to your friends in his letter," said the Head. "It happens that all the juniors you name have very good reputations as workers in class—with, perhaps, the exception of D'Arcy minor. Upon the whole, I think I can grant your request, D'Arcy."

"Bai Jove, sir, I am awfully obliged, yon know! I weally wish I could show my gwatitude in some way."

"Never mind that," said the Head, smiling. "Impress upon the others to keep on their good behaviour all the day, and tell them I rely upon them."

"I shall certainly do so, sir; and, as far as poss, I will keep an eye on them personally," said Arthur Augustus. And he wondered why the Head smiled as he went out of the study.

The Fourth were already in the class-room, and Arthur Augustus joined them there. His chums looked at him curiously. Arthur Augustus was beaming, and they guessed that he had received permission from the Head. But it was impossible to question him till after morning lessons. The moment the class was dismissed, and the Fourth Form poured out of the class-room, Blake, Herries, and Digby pounced upon the swell of the School House.

"Well, what's the giddy news?" demanded Blake.

"It's all wight, deah boy. I've got the permish of our respected Head to go to Tytchley for the steeplechase."

"Good! Did you mention about us being allowed out of bounds to see the event?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And what said the oracle?"

"He has given permish for that, too. And you can leave St. Jim's in the mornin' weccas at eleven o'clock, so as to be at the start," said Arthur Augustus, beaming.

Blake stared at him for a moment, and then seized him and fairly hugged him. He waltzed him round the passage to the great danger of passers-by. Arthur Augustus struggled in vain in the muscular grip of the Yorkshire boy.

"Blake, pway welease me! You are wuffin' my waistcoat, and disawwagin' my beastlay tie!" he gasped.

"Come to my arms," said Blake. "Let me weep on your bosom!"

"I uttably wefuse to let you do anythin' of the sort! Welease me! Oh!"

The "Oh!" was caused by Arthur Augustus crashing into a Shell fellow who was coming from his class-room. It was Gore, and Gore gave a yell as he staggered against the wall.

"You clumsy ass!" he roared.

"Weally, Gore, I am sowwy! It was the fault of this uttah ass!" panted D'Arcy. "He wefuses to welease me, and he is as stwong as a beastlay horse!"

"You dummy!"

"I wefuse to be called a dummay! Blake, pway welease me, so that I can give Gore a thwashin' for his cheek!"

"Here, don't fill up the gangway!" exclaimed Figgins. "Moderate your transports, you duffers! What's the giddy row?"

"Oh, it's ripping!" said Blake, stopping his impromptu waltz at last, and setting the breathless D'Arcy against the wall with a bump. "Gussy has played up nobly, and I was showing my gratitude."

"I weally wish you would find a less wuff and wotten way of showin' your gwatitude, deah boy."

"We've got permission to go and see the start of the steeplechase," grinned Blake. "What do you think of that, Figgins? And Gussy did it—alone he did it, as Coriolanus remarks."

"Yaas, wathah! I put it to the Head as an old sport, you know."

"Good!" said Figgins. "I'm glad! But I wish Gussy had thought of us."

"So I did, Figgy. I've got permish for you, too—you and the Co."

"My hat!" yelled Figgins. "That's ripping! I must waltz you round again."

"I wefuse to be waltzed wound again, and if you appowch me I shall stwike you with violence, Figgins. I am quite out of breath, as it is."

"All of us?" grinned Figgins. "Gussy, you're a little genius! I'll never knock your silk topper off again as long as I live—perhaps."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Jolly for you," broke in Tom Merry's voice; "but what about us? Gussy, have you forgotten your uncle?"

"You are not my uncle, Tom Mewwy, and I wegard the expression as wiculous. But I have not forgotten you."

"You don't mean to say that you have permission for the lot of us?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come to my arms—"

"Wats! I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort, and if you wowwy me like that ass Blake, I shall lose my tempah and stwike you!"

"We'll make a giddy party of it!" said Tom Merry gleefully. "Why, it will be ripping! We'll see you have fair play, Gussy!"

"I am goin' to take young Wally, too," said D'Arcy. "I twust you fellows will behave yourselves. I have, in fact, practically given my word for you to Doctah Holmes. I have promised him to keep an eye on you personally as far as poss, but, of course, you will be out of my sight duwin' the steeplechase. I wely on you to keep ordah just as if I were with you."

And the juniors, with solemn and serious faces, refrained from bumping D'Arcy down on his neck, and promised, almost with tears in their eyes, that they would keep "ordah."

CHAPTER 12.

The Steeplechase!

WEDNESDAY was looked forward to keenly by all the juniors concerned. On every possible occasion in the interval Arthur Augustus took Badger out for a gallop, putting him to the roughest ground and the stiffest fences he could find in the neighbourhood of St. Jim's.

Badger answered all his expectations fully. He was amenable to the lightest touch of D'Arcy's hand, and he took fences, hedges, and ditches with equal unconcern.

The steeplechase at Tytchley was to be over a four-mile course, and Captain Cleveland had written to his cousin to say that it was marked over a rough hunting country. But Arthur Augustus was in good condition, and so was Badger, and the schoolboy jockey was confident. So was Mr. Jones, in Rylcombe, and Dick, the groom, and Bob, the stableman.

The horsy trio intended to be on the ground for the steeplechase, to see the performance of Badger with a schoolboy up, and they had no doubt that Badger would pull off the purse. They had not seen his adversaries, but they had confidence in the horse and its rider.

The original contest between D'Arcy and young Algarotti was extended. Three other horses were entered, and a sweep of a guinea apiece was arranged, to which Lord Eastwood had added ten guineas. D'Arcy was glad to hear of the other entries. As he confided to Blake, he regarded Algarotti as a "wank wottah," and thought it was beneath his dig to ride with him. The presence of other contestants made it a less personal affair.

"All the same, I am goin' to give him a feahful lickin'," said D'Arcy. "I weally don't want to bwag, deah boys, but when it comes to winnin' a cwooss-country wace, I weally think I know the pwopah thing to do. Yaas, wathah!"

One of the most gratifying features of the affair, for

Arthur Augustus, was the new respect he received from Wally. Wally listened to lessons on inky fingers and untidy neckties on several occasions, without even saying "rats!" And he was really grateful for the permission obtained for him to attend the steeplechase. He even went so far as to promise to put on a clean collar for the occasion, and keep it clean.

"I have hopes of that young scallawag yet," Arthur Augustus confided to Tom Merry. "I have seen him twice this week with his necktie stwaight."

"Who said the age of miracles was past," asked Tom Merry solemnly.

"It is a gweat change for Wally, you know, and I am weally glad to see it. I hope, in the course of time, to imbue the young wascal with a pwopah wegard for dwess."

Wednesday dawned at last, and Jack Blake was the first to hop out of bed in the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House and look out of the window at the weather.

"Ripping morning!" he announced. "Cold, if you like, but hard and dry. There won't be any rain, and that's a stroke of luck."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy, as he turned out. "I should weally be extwemely disappointed if it wains. Of course, it wouldn't make any difference to me, only I want to win if poss without spoiling my clothes."

"Are you going to put your colours on here?" asked Digby, without interest.

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"No; I shall change at my cousin's house. The wace starts a hundred yards fwom Cleveland Lodge. Pway be there as early as you can, deah boys, and you'll see me at the startin' flag in the D'Arcy colours. You'll know me by the blue-and-white sleeves. Bai Jove! You know, I am feelin' quite in a fluttah!"

Jack Blake looked at him anxiously.

"Not feeling fit, old son?"

"Oh, yaas, I'm fit enough, Blake!"

"It's not too late for carrying out that suggestion, you know. You could send a substitute, and I should be only too willing—"

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus.

After breakfast Arthur Augustus took leave of his chums. They went down to the gate with him and gave him a cheer as he departed. The swell of St. Jim's walked down to Rylcombe, where he found Mr. Jones, Dick, and Bob already at the railway station to catch the same train to Tytchley. Badger had been taken over the previous evening and left in Captain Cleveland's stable.

There was nothing snobbish about D'Arcy, and he was glad of the company of the horsy three on the way to Tytchley. He talked horses with them all the way, and, incidentally, showed a knowledge of the ways and qualities of the noble animal that raised him still further in their estimation. Meanwhile, the morning hours were passing slowly enough at St. Jim's.

It was a glorious day for a steeplechase, and the juniors were looking forward keenly to their holiday. Early lessons were over at last, and when the Forms came out for the morning respite Tom Merry & Co. did not go in again with the rest. They donned coats and caps, and made for the gates. Herries, of course, wanted to take his bulldog, but Towser was vetoed unanimously as being too much trouble. The juniors wanted to get as close to the course as possible and see all they could of the race, and for once Herries consented to leave his favourite behind. But D'Arcy minor was made of sterner stuff. He came along to the gates with Pongo yapping at his heels.

"Well, of all the cheek!" exclaimed Herries. "I'm not taking Towser, and now this kid trots out his rotten mongrel."

"Rotten!" said Figgins. "I've left Spot behind, too. Take that brute back, Wally! He won't be allowed anywhere near the course!"

"Can't help that!" said Wally. "I'm not going to leave old Pongo behind!"

"Cheeky young beggar!"

"Look here! I don't see what you want to be down on a nice, quiet, harmless animal like this for," growled Wally. "I'll tie him up at Cleveland Lodge, and what more can you want?"

"Well, if you tie him up there it's all right," said Tom Merry. "Let him have the brute, kids! After all, they're a pair, and it would be cruelty to separate them."

And Wally triumphantly brought his dog along.

It was a short journey to Tytchley Station, in the heart of the hunting country. Tom Merry & Co. walked from the station. Some of them knew the ground, and, anyway, they would not long have been in doubt, for great numbers of country people were going to see the steeplechase, and the lanes seemed to be full of them. Not only at the starting-point, but here and there along the course the folks from the countryside had assembled, and at the finish, where



"Duck him!" "Scrag the welsher!" Algarotti struggled in wild terror in the grasp of the angry crowd. Dick, the groom, propelled him towards the water, and Bob helped him from behind with liberal applications of a huge and heavy stable boot!

a water-jump lay in wait for the bold riders that was likely to tax all their nerve, the crowd was greater than at the starting-point, on foot, on horseback, and in all kinds of vehicles. Tom Merry & Co. caught the prevailing excitement as they came along, and they arrived in sight of Cleveland Lodge at last. The crowd at the start caught their eyes, and they hastened thither.

"Bai Jove! Here you are, then, deah boys!"

Arthur Augustus, looking very handsome in a covert coat that, like everything else he wore, was a triumph of the sartorial, was standing beside Cousin Ethel's horse, holding Badger by the bridle while he chatted with his cousin.

Captain Cleveland was there on horseback also. He gave the boys a grin and a genial nod, and Cousin Ethel bestowed her sweetest smile upon them.

Figgins coloured as he raised his cap. He always coloured, somehow, when he met Cousin Ethel.

"I am so glad to see you all here," said Cousin Ethel.

"I thought Wally was coming, too."

"Well, he's here," said Tom Merry. "Wally! Why, he's gone!"

"It's that mongrel of his," said Kerr. "He bolted after a bird in the last wood."

Cousin Ethel looked anxious.

"I hope he will not get into any trouble," she said. "The preserves in this district are very carefully watched."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Oh, Pongo will take care of himself," he said; "and as for young Wally, he always falls on his feet. What a ripping day for a ride, Cousin Ethel!"

"Yes, isn't it?"

"I wish we could have come mounted. But we haven't any steeds, except Wynn—and he left his behind."

Fatty Wynn coloured at the allusion to Nicodemus.

Captain Cleveland uttered an exclamation.

"Here they come!"

Algarotti walked his horse to the starting-point. The big black was looking in splendid condition, and Algarotti, with a coat over his colours, looked very fit. There came a flash into his dark eyes as he saw D'Arcy, but he nodded, and lifted his hat politely to Miss Cleveland.

Three other contestants came up, one of them a young farmer of the neighbourhood, one a young man from London, and the third a gentleman rider, well-known in the neighbourhood, and whose appearance was greeted by a murmur of cheering.

There was a stir in the crowd now. Arthur Augustus greeted his rivals cheerily enough, but he did not speak to Algarotti. The Italian was in a morose mood. Perhaps he was not so certain of winning now as he had been when he made the match. The small sum at stake was nothing to him. But the Italian had set his heart on lowering D'Arcy's colours, and victory or defeat meant everything to him; and a keen judge of physiognomy would not have doubted, after a close look at Algarotti's face, that he would rather have won by foul play than have lost.

He was not the fellow to allow scruples to stand in the way of winning, and sport in the English sense of the word was an unknown quantity to him.

Arthur Augustus slipped off his coat and threw it to Tom Merry, and the chums of St. Jim's looked in great admiration at the School House swell. He made the finest possible figure in the D'Arcy racing colours—blue and white, with blue cap. His riding-breeches were of the shapeliest cut, and his boots seemed to fit him like gloves.

"My word!" said Digby. "He ought to be shoved into a glass case just as he stands."

"Oh, weally, Dig!"

"Hold on a minute!" said Manners, producing a mysterious-looking case from under his coat. "I want to snap you!"

And before Arthur Augustus could speak he was snapped, and the image of him reposed safely on the film in Manners' camera. And he was snapped thrice again, the last time when he was mounted on Badger ready for the start. Manners closed his pocket camera, and put it away with much satisfaction.

"We'll have 'em framed, and you chaps shall have one to hang up in Study No. 6," he said, in a burst of generosity.

"What-ho!" said Blake. "Look out! They're starting!"

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Every eye was fixed on the steeplechasers. A fine set they looked, too, and as the flag fell they got away in good style, and the race began!

"Go it, Gussy!"

"Buck up for St. Jim's!"

But Arthur Augustus did not hear. He was off like a shot, and all his attention was given to his steed and the country before him.

The course was a four-mile one, over a fair hunting country, but hunting country of a rough and difficult description. The ground was partly pasture and partly under plough. The hedges were high and frequent, the ditches deep and ditto, and here and there stone walls, which added to the difficulty of the course. It was no ride for dandy horsemen—only the real stuff could hope to pull through. The water-jump at the end was a tough one, with hedge, rail, and wide water, and after that was the winning-post.

The course being arranged in three parts of a circle, the winning-post was a very short distance across country from the starting-point, and as soon as the horsemen were fairly off, most of the crowd streamed across to see the finish.

Cousin Ethel and her brother, and many friends on horseback, rode over, while the juniors of St. Jim's mostly dispersed to see the race from various points.

CHAPTER 13.

How Pongo Saved the Race!

"PONGO! Good doggie! Pongo!"

Wally called out the name of his favourite entreatingly. But Pongo refused to listen to the voice of the charmer.

D'Arcy minor was growing exasperated with his favourite. He was keenly anxious to see the race, and Pongo was delaying him.

Worse than that, the dog had bolted into the preserves near the lodge, and was evidently stalking game when Wally pursued him. He escaped in the underbush, and when Wally caught sight of him again he was sneaking off with a fat bird between his jaws.

Wally called and whistled in vain, and he was afraid to call and whistle too loudly, lest he should bring a keeper to the spot. He was in forbidden ground, and he knew how a keeper would be likely to regard the presence of a boy and a dog in one of the strictest preserves in the country. Pongo was liable to be shot at sight, and, doubtless, would have deserved it, too; but that would be very little consolation to Wally, especially if he himself were arrested into the bargain.

"Pongo! Good doggie! You rotten little beast, I'll have the hide off you for this! I'll skin you! Come on, old dog! Pongo, dear, I'll cut you into little bits when I catch you! Come on, old Pongo!"

But entreaty and threat alike were in vain. Wally made a sudden rush, and Pongo skipped out of the wood and ran down the bank of a stream with his prize. Wally, fearing that he would take to the water, ran faster, and Pongo plunged in.

"Pongo, come back!"

Wally heard a rustle in the wood behind him, and guessed that it was made by a gamekeeper. He hurried after the dog. The water in the woodland stream was shallow enough for wading. It was cold, but it was no time to think of that. Wally waded in, and followed the poacher across the rocky bed of the stream.

Pongo kept the corner of one eye on his master. Wally called to him in a subdued voice; but the mongrel waded on, and Wally waded after him.

Pongo dragged himself out of the water on the opposite side, and gave himself a shake. He seemed surprised to see Wally close at hand, and set off again, squirming under a fence. Wally was over the top of the fence in a twinkling, accelerated by the sound of a gruff voice shouting to him from the wood. He knew that he had had a narrow escape, but the vagaries of Pongo were not finished yet. The dog crept on, dodged through a hedge, and broke into a run across a field as Wally quickened his pace. He disappeared at a gap in a fence on the edge of the plantation, and Wally was at fault. The dog was very quiet, and

whether he had run on, or dodged among the ditches and hedges, Wally was not sure.

The junior snapped his teeth. His wet trousers were clinging about his legs, and he was shivering from the contact, and more than half inclined to give up the chase of Pongo, and get off to the starting-point of the steeplechase. He knew that the time of starting must be close, if it had not already passed.

Faintly, in the distance, he could hear the shouting of a crowd, but could not make out what it implied.

"Pongo!" he whispered. "Old Pongo!"

But the dog gave no sound. Wally knew him of old, and he knew that the mongrel was probably lying hidden in the ferns, almost within reach of his hand, and as still as a mouse.

The junior became silent. He crept cautiously along beside a hedge, keeping as much in cover as possible, and making no sound. His only chance was to spot Pongo and catch him napping, devouring the poached bird. He breathed dire threats of what he would do when he caught him.

"My only Aunt Jane!" murmured Wally suddenly.

He had caught sight of something as he crept along the ditch. It was a flag, fluttering within a dozen yards of him. He stopped short, with a whistle. He knew that he had inadvertently crept close to the course followed by the steeplechasers.

He glanced at his watch. It was time for the start, unless there had been delay. He remained where he was, resolved to see the steeplechase from this favourable spot, and attend to Pongo afterwards. Round him the woods and fields were silent and still. Close at hand the fields intersected by hedges and ditches; farther off, the woods and the hills. A murmur of a great crowd in the distance only broke the silence. Wally wondered when the horsemen would come thundering by. Already he thought he could hear the thud of hoofs on the soil.

He gave a sudden start. A nearer sound had come to his ears. It was a human voice, within a dozen yards of him in the dusk of the hedges.

"They've started!"

Another sightseer on the same spot. Wally wondered what had made him so quiet. But the next words he heard made his heart leap. It was no mere sightseer who was crouching there unseen among the ferns of the dry ditch.

"Are yer ready, Rusty? Mind, it's the bloke with the blue and white."

"I know 'im, Dodger—young D'Arcy."

"That's 'im!"

"I s'pose," said Rusty, with a slight chuckle, "that if some of the others get it, it won't matter to our man?"

"Mind you don't hinder Algarotti, that's all."

"Phew! No!"

Wally's teeth came together hard, and his eyes blazed. Arthur Augustus had told him something of his opinion of Algarotti; and, anyway, the words of the two men hidden in the ditch could not be mistaken. They were there to foul D'Arcy—to make him lose the race! Algarotti was not trusting to his steed or to his luck. Like the coward and villain he was, he wanted to make all sure.

"My only Aunt Jane!"

Silently, cautiously, Wally crept closer to the speakers. His training in stalking the elusive Pongo stood him in good stead now. The scoundrels were there to balk his brother in the ride, and Wally would have allowed himself to be cut to pieces rather than allow them to succeed.

The rascals had well chosen the spot for their ambush. It was more than half-way along the course, in the most difficult bit of country the riders had to cross, and no other sightseers were at hand.

A thick hedge of the bullfinch variety barred the course, with a ditch on the farther side. There was only one spot where the horsemen could leap, and at that spot two scoundrels were crouching up close to the hedge. The horses might leap right over them, but could not land close enough to hurt them. After the villainous deed they contemplated was accomplished, an easy way of escape lay by creeping along the ditch and scuttling into the neighbouring plantation.

Wally, peering through the masses of ferns that grew up close to the hedge, spotted the two rascals, who were listening intently for the beat of approaching hoofs. They could see the course leading up to the hedge through an interstice in the thicket, and Wally caught a glimpse of it, too, through the opening. There was a flash of hoofs and coloured silk in the sun.

"They're coming!"

They certainly were coming. The thud of the horses' hoofs rang on the ground, and through the narrow slit in the hedge could be seen five riders coming on in gallant style—Algarotti in the lead, a sturdy young farmer next, D'Arcy third, and two more riders behind.

"He's third, Dodger!"

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"I see 'im, Rusty."

"Our man's leading. Wait till he's past, and the next, and then—"

"Right you is!"

The scoundrels crouched close and waited. Wally's heart was beating wildly. He saw that they held something in their hands, and there was the sputter of a fuse in the deep ditch. He guessed what it was with almost whirling brain. Each of the scoundrels had a cracker in his hand—an explosive of the kind used in Fifth of November celebrations, but very much larger and of the repeating variety. Such an explosive, hurled at a horse suddenly from the ditch, would be certain to scare it almost out of its wits, and would render the rider's chance of winning the race nil. If those crackers were flung at Badger, Arthur Augustus was done for, so far as winning the steeplechase was concerned, even if he were not thrown and injured, as might very possibly be the case.

Wally's heart was thumping like a hammer. What was he to do? He had less than a minute to decide in—time was counted in seconds now. What was he to do?

To spring up and show himself, right in the path of the horses, would be useless. Even if he were not ridden down, his action would not be understood. The race would be delayed, but the outrage would not be prevented.

There was only one thing to do, and Wally did it. He waited with beating heart till the horsemen were close up to the hedge, and the crouching scoundrels were preparing for the foul deed. Then, with a sharp, almost hysterical cry the youngster threw himself upon them.

The attack came wholly unexpectedly to the two ruffians. Wally threw an arm round each of them, and the three rolled into the bottom of the ditch, into beds of nettles and thistles, together. Wally was scratched and torn, but he was too excited to feel the pain. If only he saved the race for D'Arcy!

The two ruffians were gasping out amazed curses, utterly astounded by the attack. They squirmed in the nettles at the bottom of the ditch, and Wally clutched them frantically, furiously. A horseman rode into view from the other side of the hedge and crossed hedge and ditch, thundering down on the turf clear of the obstruction. It was Algarotti on the big black.

After him came the farmer and D'Arcy, riding almost neck and neck, and they thundered down on the turf and dashed on without a pause.

Each of the riders was vaguely conscious of some kind of a struggle going on in the ditch under the shadow of the hedge, but it was no time to look round. They were riding to win.

Fast behind came the last two riders. They cleared hedge and ditch and dashed on, a couple of lengths behind the swell of St. Jim's.

It had all lasted only a couple of seconds. The ruffians in the ditch were still struggling with Wally, with one another, and the nettles, hardly knowing yet what was happening. There was a sudden explosion in the nettles.

Bang!

It was followed by a shriek of agony from Rusty. The firework had exploded in his hand. In the scramble he had unconsciously tightened his grip on it, and the explosion had severely burnt his hand. The wretch crawled out of the ditch, moaning with pain, and sank down on the grass.

Wally tore himself loose. The fireworks were cracking away like pistol-shots in the nettles. Dodger squirmed out of the ditch and glared at the junior, and Wally dodged quickly enough out of his reach.

"You hound!" cried the boy. "I've stopped you this time!"

He had stopped them, indeed! The steeplechasers were already a field's-length away, and the dastards had no further chance of interfering with the race.

Rusty was sitting in the grass, nursing his injured hand and moaning. Dodger glared at Wally with a face convulsed with rage. But the explosions were drawing people to the spot, and the ruffian dared not attempt vengeance. He slunk away and made his escape, and Rusty, in mortal fear of being seized, followed him more slowly, still moaning with the pain in his hand.

A dog crawled out of the ditch and licked Wally's hand.

"Pongo, you young rip! I've a good mind— But, by Jove, it was you who saved the race! Good dog!"

CHAPTER 14.

The Winner!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS was riding well—riding to win. For the first two or three fields Algarotti had kept well ahead of him, and the young farmer just behind Algarotti. D'Arcy was third, but D'Arcy knew what he was about.

Badger was eager, keener on the run than his master,

even, and D'Arcy had rather to hold him in than urge him on.

Algarotti was taking more out of the big black than the circumstances of the race justified at so early a stage. Right up to the hedge where the ruffians had been baffled by Wally, Algarotti held an easy lead. But that hedge once behind, D'Arcy gave Badger a little more rope.

He passed the farmer inch by inch, and was soon seen to be an easy second, the farmer pounding on behind on his roan.

The two last were still riding hard, but a disinterested onlooker would not have given them much of a chance in the race.

Algarotti was only two lengths ahead of Badger now, and D'Arcy's look was calm and confident.

He meant to win!

The hardest part of the struggle was ahead, and D'Arcy was saving his horse for it.

Badger crept closer and closer to the big black, but without the slightest sign of strain.

The Italian felt rather than heard the English lad drawing closer, and he brought the whip into play.

The lash drove on the big black to harder efforts, and he leaped away from Badger; but D'Arcy's pace never varied. He knew that the spurt was no good to his adversary at that point, and he did not trouble to reply to it.

The black slackened again, as he was bound to do, though the pace was still hot and thundering.

From various points on the course spectators watched the progress of the race, and loud cheers came on the wind.

"Buck up, Gussy!"

It was a yell from Jack Blake. But D'Arcy never heard it. His whole mind was wrapped up in horsemanship at that moment; he was in that mood when a man becomes, as it were, a part of his horse, and both creatures are moved by the same volition—the mood of the winner.

On, on, over stubble and grass, hedge and ditch, fence and wall! On, on, with the wind singing in his ears, his teeth hard set, his eyes agleam. Closer and closer to the black.

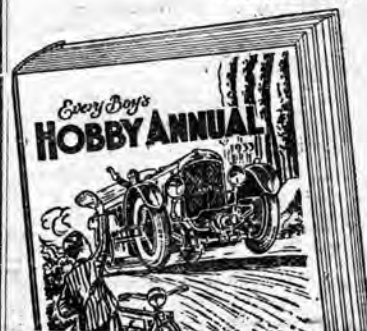
Badger's muzzle was level with the black's girths now, and still Arthur Augustus was not letting his mount make the

(Continued on next page.)

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burst he longed to make. But it was pretty plain that the black could never do much better than he was doing now.

Algarotti's face was black with rage and hate. He had heard the explosions, and had had little doubts that his hirelings had carried out his instructions, and that D'Arcy's mount had been scared off the course, or, at least, startled so much that it would be out of the running.

But the steed creeping up behind him told a different tale. Something had gone wrong with the plot; it had failed. What had happened was of no moment; it was enough to know that it had failed. And Algarotti set his teeth savagely. He would win yet, he inwardly swore. He would win by fair means, since foul had failed him, and cruelty should not be wanting to drive the gallant black to greater efforts.

On, on, on! Nearly neck and neck now; and Algarotti out of the corner of his eye, without looking back, could see the blue-and-white of the D'Arcy racing colours.

But still the red silk was in the lead—only by inches, but still in the lead. And those on the higher ground at the finish could see them now, and were shouting.

"Go it, St. Jim's!"

"Red wins!"

"Buck up, blue-and-white!"

Algarotti ground his teeth. The black and Badger took the same fence at the same moment; they were level now. Algarotti lashed his steed savagely. The black bounded on, and the Italian, with reckless unfairness, strove to edge D'Arcy off at the risk of a purler for himself. But Arthur Augustus was quite aware of his little game, and on the watch for it.

The last obstacle was in sight now—a thick-set hedge with

a guard-rail, and beyond a wide water-jump. Beyond that, at a short distance, the finish, with a huge crowd waiting.

"They're level!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Neck and neck, by Jove!"

"Hurrah!"

"Buck up, St. Jim's!"

Cousin Ethel was watching from the back of her horse with shining eyes. She keenly wished for her cousin's victory. The way Algarotti was using the lash was enough to rouse the girl's bitter indignation, and was alone enough to deprive him of any sympathy.

Captain Cleveland snapped his teeth on his cigar.

"Begad, the boy's winning!"

Badger was a nose ahead! The juniors of St. Jim's were in ecstasies. D'Arcy—old Gus—was winning; and when Blake gave Figgins a terrific thump on the back, Figgins only gasped and grinned, and passed it on to Lowther. Even Fatty Wynn forgot that he was hungry in the intense excitement.

Blue-and-white was winning! But was he, though? Not if a brute in human form could help it. With whip and spur Algarotti drove on his maddened horse; but with all of it he could not keep level. At the water-jump D'Arcy had the lead.

"The last lap!" chuckled Blake. "Oh, my hat! Fancy old Gus! I wouldn't have missed this for ten years' pocket-money in a lump!"

D'Arcy was putting his beef into it now. The time had come for the grand effort he had been saving up. And he came to the water-jump a streak of blue-and-white, and Badger, with scarcely a diminution of his pace, rose into the air in a grand leap.

"Ovah!"

And over rail and hedge and wide water went Badger—over, in a grand jump; and a second behind came Algarotti, with white face and glinting eyes, and his spurs cruelly scoring the flanks of his steed.

Right over, and D'Arcy dashed on, amid cheers. And then there was a yell, as Algarotti and his big black floundered into the water. The savage spurring had done it: the maddened horse had failed at the leap, and Algarotti's chance had gone.

Splash went the Italian and his horse, and over them leaped the others in turn, each making the jump successfully, though far behind the swell of St. Jim's.

There was a shout, swelling to a roar.

"Blue-and-white wins!"

And Arthur Augustus, ten lengths ahead of the nearest competitor, dashed up to the last flag.

"Hurrah!"

"Blue-and-white wins!"

"Good old Gussy!"

"What-ho, St. Jim's!"

"Bai Jove, you know, that was quite a wun!" said Arthur Augustus with perfect coolness. "Do you know, deah boys, I wathah thought I should win!"

CHAPTER 15.

D'Arcy's Triumph!

THEY dragged him from his steed, they slipped on his coat, and then they seized him forcibly and raised him on their shoulders.

The swell of St. Jim's viewed the proceedings with some alarm at first. But he reflected that his clothes were pretty thoroughly splashed with mire already, and that a little more rumpling could not do much harm, and he resigned himself gracefully to his fate.

"Shoulder-high!" roared Tom Merry.

"Shoulder-high!" shrieked Mr. Jones.

And up went the swell of St. Jim's, more than shoulder-high. Men he had never seen before fought for the honour of lending a hand. A perfect stranger to him had his right leg and Tom Merry's left. Dick, the groom, and Bob, the stableman, were bumping him behind. Mr. Jones clutched at his coat, and Jack Blake and Figgins were supporting him elsewhere.

Round him country folk and friends and St. Jim's juniors were mingled in a cheering crowd.

The steeplechase had been one of the hardest ridden for a long time in the Tytchley district, and it had been won by the youngest contestant, a mere boy, a schoolboy jockey.

More than that, it had been won by fair and splendid horsemanship. D'Arcy had hardly flicked his steed once from start to finish.

Algarotti met with little sympathy. He crawled out of the water, drenched to the skin and looking a good deal like a drowned rat, as the crowd marched past with Arthur Augustus.

D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his right eye and looked at the miserable, baffled Italian. The swell of St. Jim's was a true sportsman, and there was nothing like malice in him.

(Continued on page 28.)



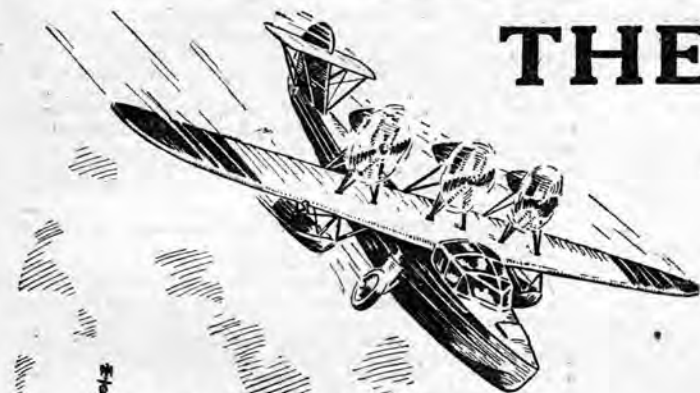
ALL sorts of new boys have entered Greyfriars School, but none so strange as Jim Lee, the boy with a secret. True blue, loyal and plucky, he yet shuns the friendship of his Form-fellows. What secret does he hold that can account for his curious behaviour? The thrilling, dramatic yarn of Jim Lee's adventures at Greyfriars will grip you from first line to last.

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THE LOST LEGION!

By
DON ENGLISH.



Jim Nelson and Phil Harris set out with their guardian, Colonel K, and his secretary, Rex Bruce, on a flight round the world. Engine trouble forces them down in Central Asia, where to their amazement they find a city called "Rome the Second," which is inhabited by ancient Romans. They become friendly with the Romans, and decide to help them fight against Dolabella, a Roman rebel, who has joined up with the Albans, another strange people who inhabit the town of Iolensis near by. Camillus, a young Roman, and Jim Nelson are captured by the Albans, and Phil Harris and a Roman captain enter the city in disguise on a rescue attempt. Outside the Temple of Antimon, where the prisoners are, the captain and Phil come face to face with Dolabella, who, thinking the captain to be a peasant, demands his hat!

In the Temple!

THE order sent a shiver down the spines of the horrified pair. Dolabella knew Curiatus Fufetus well. Once let him get a look at his face without the protecting shade of the big brim, and all was lost! The renegade prince was not drunk. There was no chance that he would fail to recognise the captain. The game was up with a vengeance.

"Come, man! For what waitest thou?" roared Dolabella, as the other hesitated.

For an instant it seemed that he might stride forward and tear the hat from his head, but his dignity restrained him.

"In faith, good my lord, it is the honour," stammered Fufetus, disguising his voice as best he might. "I did not think so great a personage would deign to sully his locks with so humble a covering."

"Tush, man, give it!" said Dolabella, more than a little appeased by the flattery. "My slaves will pay thee thrice its value."

He made a pace towards him, extending his hand, and Fufetus reached unwillingly for his hat. There was nothing else for it. To refuse to sell the battered headgear would only arouse suspicion. He must trust to the shadow of the pillar to conceal his features.

But just as he started to remove it Fate intervened, to save them for the second time that day. One of the Roman officers, who had accompanied Dolabella to the temple, stepped forward and addressed his master.

"Lord, pardon my presumption, but it seems to me the fellow is right. For you to assume so mean an article of apparel is not befitting. I have here a cloak with a hood which may be drawn up over the head. Will you not wear that instead?"

He held out the cloak as he spoke, and Dolabella, snatching it roughly from his grasp, flung it about him and pulled up the hood.

"Fool!" he said. "Why couldst not have given it before, instead of leaving me to bandy words with a vulgar peasant?"

Without another glance at the countryman and his son, he turned and stalked magnificently into the temple on the heels of the priest. Phil let out his pent-up breath in a long, low whistle. He felt that he had never fully appreciated the perils of a spy's life till then.

"I never want a closer shave than that," he muttered, in English. "It's enough to turn your hair white."

But Curiatus Fufetus, apparently unmoved by their narrow escape from detection, was already making towards the temple door, and beckoning him to follow. So the boy, steeling himself for the next effort, drew a fold of his outer garment over his head, and slipped through the entrance after him!

Along a dusky passage Fufetus led, hard on the heels of Dolabella and his company, and into the main hall of the temple. It was a stupendous shadowy place, the roof supported by hundreds of fluted columns that went soaring aloft into the darkness. At the far end was a gigantic statue of the god, Antimon, a hideous ram-headed figure faintly seen through the gloom.

The priest conducting the Romans swung to the left at the foot of the idol, and the whole band vanished behind it. Fufetus, advancing slowly, watched them out of sight, then urged Phil behind a pillar where none of the handful of worshippers could see them.

"When Dolabella comes out again we must enter," he said, with his lips close to the boy's ear. "Open the sack, O Arrius, and let us prepare."

Phil obeyed, and laid out on the pavement a startling array of objects. The top half of the bag's contents were innocent enough, consisting mainly of the fruit and vegetables left unsold from the morning. But at the bottom were quite a surprising number of things which should certainly have found no place among the goods of a respectable peasant.

He charged a water-pistol with strong ammonia from a bottle, and handed it to his companion, following it up with a clasp-knife and a loaded revolver. The weapons disappeared under the captain's cloak, and were safely

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tucked away, for all Romans were adept at carrying small articles in the folds of their garments. Finally Phil added a powerful torch, armed himself in the same way, and packed the rest of the things away again. Then he settled down with his back to a column to wait as patiently as he could, while the obscurity gradually deepened all about.

The Rescue Party!

DOLABELLA spent a long time with the prisoners. As far as Phil could judge, it must have been an hour before the smoky flare of torches and the tramp of many feet announced the return of the renegade prince through the temple. Peering cautiously round the sheltering pillar he saw him pass, and noted with a grin that he wore a thunderous frown. Whatever he had learned in his interview, it could not have been pleasing.

Then Fufetus touched his arm, and they slid like phantoms towards the door concealed behind the grim idol. The thin beam of the Roman's torch stabbed a pencil of light through the darkness as they stole round the marble base, and they saw a scarlet curtain against the wall. Phil twitched it noiselessly aside. They were at the mouth of a narrow black corridor, and without hesitation they plunged in. Soon the priests who had accompanied Dolabella to the entrance would be returning. There was no time to be lost.

The passage twisted this way and that, sometimes rising a little, sometimes trending downwards. Off it on both sides opened innumerable small chambers, but all were unoccupied. Then suddenly, as they approached a corner, Fufetus motioned to Phil to stop, and switched off his torch. They shrank back against the wall, and the boy saw the ruddy reflection of a lamp advancing towards them.

Silently they waited, holding their breath.

A moment later a black-robed priest turned the corner, made another step or two, and then came to a dead stop as the light fell on the intruders. He opened his mouth, but whether it was to question them or to shout for help the pair never knew.

Fufetus levelled the water-pistol, which had miraculously appeared in his hand, and pressed the trigger. The thin jet of choking ammonia struck the priest full in the face, and instinctively he flung up his hands. The lamp fell crashing to the floor, and went out.

In the momentary blackness the priest thrashed about, gasping, but it was a matter of seconds before Phil got his torch into action. Then he delved into the precious sack and produced several lengths of cord. The Antimonite was bound hand and foot, and thrust into the nearest cell. Over the archway was a heavy curtain, of such thickness that it cut off all sounds as effectively as a door, and they guessed that it would be some while before he was found.

Phil recharged the pistol, and they sped on again. And just before they turned the corner the boy's quick ears caught the sound of footsteps behind, echoing down the passage. Dolabella's escort was on the way back.

The corridor forked, and without pausing Fufetus swung to the right. They bounded silently up a short flight of stairs and came to a standstill in front of the hangings which barred the top. From beyond came a hubbub of laughter and joking, and an occasional clank of armour as some soldier moved. Phil and the captain both found chinks through which they might peep.

They looked into an octagonal chamber of fair size, with a second curtained entrance on the far side. The sole illumination was afforded by a tall, bronze lamp in the centre, and half a dozen guards—three Alban, three Roman—were lounging fully armed on the wooden benches that formed the only furnishing.

After a swift scrutiny, Fufetus drew Phil back a few paces down the stairs, and they hastily agreed upon a plan of campaign.

A moment later the soldiers were startled to see the hangings torn roughly aside, and a tall peasant burst into the room, with a strange object in either hand. They sprang up with cries of alarm, reaching for their weapons. But before they could fall upon the intruder a thin stream of liquid shot from each of the things he held.

Choking, half-blinded, they reeled back, gasping for breath, and Fufetus leaped to the other archway.

"Haste thee, O Arrius!" he called, softly and urgently.

Phil, revolver in hand, raced across to his side, pausing an instant on the way to kick over the lamp. It fell, with a resounding clang and crash, spluttered feebly, and died out, plunging the place into blackness. The next instant Phil and Fufetus were beyond the second curtain, fairly flying down a corridor, lighted here and there by lanterns set in wall-niches.

Up another stairway they rushed, Phil in the lead, but

at the head they were brought to an abrupt halt. Out of the shadows had stepped a huge Alban legionnaire, challenging fiercely.

It was no time for half-measures. Evidently they were drawing near to the prisoners, and a clamour from behind showed they were pursued. As the guard presented his sharp, trident-like spear at Phil's breast, the boy raised his gun and shot him dead.

On again, momentarily deafened by the explosion in the confined space of the passage. Fufetus was methodically overthrowing every lamp as he went, in order to hinder the soldiers as much as possible. Then round a corner they came face to face with two startled guards. Phil fired once—twice, with the same terrible accuracy.

And as the sentries fell, an English voice beyond them exclaimed in amazement:

"Great Scott! If it isn't old Phil!"

There, behind an elaborate bronze grille, were the two for whom they had risked so much—Jim Nelson and Camillus.

However, there was no time for lengthy greetings. All about them the enormous temple was beginning to buzz like a disturbed nest of angry hornets. It was only a matter of seconds before the hunt would be up in grim earnest.

"Stand back!" shouted Phil, leaping to the grille.

He jammed his revolver against the lock and blew it to smithereens with three quick shots. The gate swung inwards, and the prisoners dived out into the passage, just as a yell of rage and a clatter announced that the foremost of the pursuers had stumbled over the dead guard at the head of the stairs.

"Come, lord! This way!" called Curiatius Fufetus, indicating a passage-mouth to the right.

Phil plunged into it unhesitatingly, switching on his torch. As he ran he pulled a packet of cartridges from his belt, and passed them, with the empty revolver, to Jim, who was at his heels.

"Here! Load up again!" he rapped. "We shall need it before we're through! We're not half out of the wood yet!"

Even as he spoke the flickering light of a lamp became visible ahead. And, standing full in the glow, gazing suspiciously in their direction, was an Alban guard. Jim thrust a couple of cartridges into the gun and prepared for action, but he did not need to use it. Phil suddenly sighted a stairway leading down into darkness on the right, ten yards short of the sentry, and began the descent at racing pace.

Curiatius Fufetus, who brought up the rear of the stampede, paused a second at the head of the steps to fire a warning shot at the surprised guard. The bullet grazed along the side of his helmet, carrying away one of the strange golden wings and partially stunning him. The captain had just time to see him reel back against the wall and bring the lamp smashing down, then he was flying downstairs in the wake of the other three.

At the foot was a long gallery. As they pelted silently along it they heard the clatter of steps behind come to a halt in the passage above. Their pursuers were momentarily at fault. Uncertain whether the fugitives had taken the stairs or gone straight on, they were trying to obtain information from the dazed sentry. It was only a matter of seconds before they started helter-skelter down the stairway, but that delay, brief though it was, probably cost them the chase.

All at once Phil stopped dead in front of a door which closed the end of the gallery. The simple mechanism presented no difficulty, and in a trice he had opened it. The four of them bolted through like rabbits, and then glanced about them in amazement, for the darting beams of the torches showed that they had emerged into the great pillared hall of the temple. It was now quite dark, but far above them in the shadows to the right two red circles glowed eerily. They were the eyes of the hideous ramheaded idol, lighted by some inward fire.

Phil made for the entrance, but he had barely gone a dozen yards when the blaze of flares in the passage told them all that there could be no escape by that avenue. The main door was closely guarded. As Phil hesitated, temporarily at a loss, Fufetus suddenly took the lead.

"Come!" he cried. "I know how we may reach the roof!"

With a leap he gained the nearest of the huge columns, and his light flashed up and down as he searched for something. Then all at once he gave a satisfied exclamation, and for a moment fiddled about with two projections on the stone. Then a secret door swung abruptly open, revealing the bottom of a narrow staircase that wound upwards inside the pillar.

"Hasten, my lords!" he said. "It is our only chance!" The boys needed no second bidding. The last of them vanished just as the howling mob of pursuers burst into the hall from the gallery, and Fufetus lost no time in following. Up, up, they climbed, round and round and

round, till their heads swam, their knees felt like water, and every breath was an agony. It seemed that they would never reach the top, but at last Phil pushed open a heavy trap, and they staggered out, one after the other, into the starlight on the roof of the temple.

"Summon the bird-chariot, O Arrius!" gasped Fufetus, listening intently at the head of the spiral. "Our enemies are close after us!"

Phil reached into the sack, to which he had clung during all the mad race for freedom. When his hand came out again it contained what appeared to be a flat automatic, and, pointing it straight upwards, he pulled the trigger. Next instant three globes of brilliant white light burst a hundred feet overhead, and came drifting slowly down, illuminating the whole vast roof.

"The Albatross is supposed to have been circling round the city since nightfall," Phil told Jim. "She's on the look-out for signals, and that ought to fetch her here. Quick! Help me set these flares!"

The two English lads ran swiftly to and fro, preparing to give the great white monoplane sufficient light to manoeuvre by. Then, straining eyes and ears, they stood gazing tensely up into the sky in search of her. Faintly at last Jim caught the hum of her engines, and there she was swooping down towards them like a phantom.

And even as they sighted her Fufetus cried suddenly:

"To me, my Lord Camillus! Our pursuers are here, and I cannot hold the trap alone!"

The Roman boy leaped to stand on the door beside him, while the other two touched off the flares, and everything was bathed in a ghastly white light. Closer and closer dropped the Albatross, but not fast enough. The combined efforts of the soldiers on the stairway were making the trap lift, even when Jim's weight was added on the outside. Phil charged his signal-pistol, and sent up three red balls as a warning to hurry, then ran to stand with the rest.

"If we can hold them till she lands it'll be all right," he said, in English to Jim. "Be ready to bolt for the cabin door."

He translated into Latin for the benefit of the two Romans, and then followed the most nerve-racking three minutes any of them ever spent. The Albatross was sweeping down, but to land on the roof was no easy task, and the pilot was forced to take his time. And beneath the feet of the four the trap was quivering, lifting up and down with little bumps, while the soldiers howled with baffled rage.

But at last the Albatross planed gently down, and her wheels touched the roof. They saw the cabin door open, and at the same moment the trap gave an extra lurch, nearly flinging them off.

"Come on! Run for it!" yelled Phil, grabbing Camillus' arm and setting the example.

They heard the trap fall back with a crash as they bounded towards the plane, which was swinging about, ready to take off without delay. A second later a furious shout told that they had been seen. Fufetus turned to glance over his shoulder, and saw the Alban soldiers pouring out of the stairway; but they were too late!

A jaunty wave of the hand, and he was safe in the cabin, with the door closed. The Albatross went roaring across the roof like a wild thing, and the Albani scattered before her. She ploughed a way clean through the middle of them, and soared up into the night in triumph amid hoarse yells of fear and execration. Jim and Camillus had been whisked away from under the very noses of their guards.

In the cabin Colonel K, guardian of the two English lads, and Valerius Martius, Camillus' brother, were engaged in slapping Phil and Fufetus on the back.

"It was nothing, sir," Phil said. Then, with a chuckle: "I'd give something, though, to see Dolabella's face when he hears the news."

The Start of the Battle!

DAWN breaking crimson over the eastern hills filled all the enclosed valley with a lurid glow. Thousands of watchers, seeing it, shuddered, for it seemed an evil presage of what was to come. Before the sun sank to rest again there would be terrible bloodshed in this forgotten corner of the world.

Across the middle of the cliff-encircled valley ran two long spurs, which almost joined in the centre. And as the light strengthened it could be seen that all along the top of these spurs lay a turreted wall, with weary sentries pacing to and fro, long spears in hand. The narrow pass itself was closed by a triple line of defences, and it was on the second of these that a golden-bearded giant of a man was standing with a couple of boys.

They were all leaning against the breast-high curtain-wall between two huge catapults, facing east, and their gaze was fixed on a vast army encamped on the plain a mile or so beyond. A fanfare of trumpets had roused the soldiers

at first crack o' dawn, and now there were signs of great activity among them. The tall man shook his head gravely as he watched.

"Forty thousand of them, if there's one!" he said, in English. "They outnumber us about four to three. I shall be very sorry for Rome if they get over the wall."

"But you don't really think they will, do you, sir?" asked Phil Harris.

Colonel K shrugged his broad shoulders.

"I consider it highly probable, though I suppose it doesn't do to be pessimistic," was his reply. "You see, the Albani realise that with a traitor like Dolabella on their side they have a good chance of subduing their ancient enemies for ever. So I'm afraid that there's going to be a bitter struggle for supremacy."

"Still, that doesn't mean that Rome will be defeated." It was Jim Nelson, the colonel's other ward, who spoke.

"I wonder when the attack will begin?"

"Not for another hour, at least, I should imagine," said his guardian. "But here comes Valerius Martius. He'll be able to tell you more than I can."

The trio turned to greet the newcomer, who had emerged from a staircase-trap near by. He was a good-looking young man, clad in the magnificent trappings of a Roman general, white buskins laced with gold, splendid bronze cuirass and crested helmet, gold-embroidered scarlet cloak and all. He returned their salutations cordially, glancing at the enemy camp as he did so.

"Hail, O Colonus!" he said, in Latin, to the colonel. "What thinkest thou of their forces?"

"They appear to have pressed every able man into the army," answered Colonel K, in the same tongue.

And the Imperator nodded.

"They are very strong," he said, "but I think that we can hold them. Look! Our legions are beginning to man the wall!"

He pointed away to the right and left, where cohort after cohort was appearing on the summit and preparing for action. Beneath the spot where they themselves stood a massive door had been opened, and soldiers, lightly armed with short spears, slings, and leaden bullets, were marching forth. They took up their position behind the earthen breastwork fronting on the wide-staked ditch which formed the first line of defence; and at their heels came supporting bands of heavily-armed troops.

Presently a cheerful "Good-morning, sir!" from two throats brought the watchers a second time from their rapt contemplation of the bustle in the Alban camp. The latest arrivals were Rex Bruce, the colonel's secretary, and his little Welsh servant Llewelyn, the remaining crew of the Albatross. They joined the little group between the catapults, which had been manned and loaded in readiness, and settled themselves to wait for whatever move the Albani would make.

The sun rose slowly above the hills, and the reddish glow which had characterised the dawn vanished. The whole length of the wall, from north to south, was now alive with Roman legionnaires, and scraps of gay marching songs drifted down to the flyers in the pass. The Alban camp was struck, and their cohorts, winged helmets gleaming in the early light, were forming swiftly in battle array. Naturally, their greatest strength was concentrated at the pass, and a truly formidable force confronted the triple defences.

"Oh, for a machine-gun or two!" breathed Colonel K, not for the first time. "We could bowl 'em over like nine-pins, and finish the battle before it started!"

Even as he spoke a trumpet-call rang out clear and pealing from the host in front of them, to be taken up and repeated all along the line on both wings. And as the last ringing note died away, the entire Alban front moved, and came rolling forward like a great wave. The signal for attack had been given; the assault on the wall had begun.

Down towards the staked ditch streamed the van of the army, and as they approached nearer and nearer it could be seen that the five foremost ranks bore heavy sacks upon their back. A few moments later the purpose of these became clear. Advancing right to the farther edge of the shallow pit, the men cast their burdens down among the terrible pointed stakes, placing them so as to cover the spikes completely.

Some of the bags split, revealing that they were filled with earth, but this was soon trampled hard by the succeeding ranks. Line after line of laden soldiers came to the front, threw down their sacks, and retired to make room for those following. And little by little the ditch was made passable for the attackers behind.

'The Great Battle is about to start! Look out for breath-taking thrills next week!'

THE SCHOOLBOY JOCKEY!

(Continued from page 24.)

"Pway halt a minute, deah boys, while I speak to Algarotti!" he exclaimed.

"Halt it is!" said Tom Merry.

"I say, Algarotti, deah boy, I'm sowwy you came that purlah, you know," said D'Arcy. "It was wathah wuff!"

"Hang you!" muttered the Italian savagely. "If my confounded horse had not failed, you—"

"Yaas, it was wathah bad luck."

"You—"

"But it was a good wace," interrupted D'Arcy. "It reflects credit on all of us. Yaas; and you can gwin if you like, Monty-Lowthah. I—"

"Don't talk to that foreign scum, Gussy!"

"Hallo, Wally! Where have you been, and what do you mean by speakin' so wudely of my wespected opponent, Mr. Algarotti?"

"He's a scum," said Wally, "a dirty, sneaking, low-down scum, and that's what I've come here to tell him! He had two men hidden in a ditch to frighten your horse, and if Pongo hadn't led me there you would have been crocked for the race."

"What?"

Algarotti turned pale. He knew that his plot had failed, but he had not expected an exposure. He turned quickly away, but an iron grip closed on his collar, and another on his shoulder, and he gasped with fear as he swung round and found himself staring at Dick, the groom, and Bob, the stableman.

"No, you don't!" said the stableman grimly.

"Let me go!" yelled Algarotti.

"Wait till the young gentleman has finished!"

"Look here, Wally!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Are you sure of what you're saying?"

"I shouldn't say it otherwise, Merry. I tell you I was following Pongo, and found two villains hiding in a ditch. They were talking over what they were going to do, and I found out that they had been hired by Algarotti to throw fireworks at Gussy's horse, when he had cleared the hedge, to frighten him and dish Gus. And they'd have done it if

I hadn't jumped on 'em in time and stopped 'em."

"Bai Jove! Now I wemembah, I heard fireworks going off at one spot, and there was a fight or something in the ditch!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

"It is false!" exclaimed Algarotti. "I do not know them. I never—"

"You lying coward!" said Wally. "Your face is enough to give you away."

"There's not much doubt about it, I wathah think, gentlemen. You can wely on my young bwothah. I am extremely obliged to you, Wally. Algarotti, I weward you as the wottenest wottah that I evah came across in all my experience."

"Curse you!"

"I am afraid I cannot stay here and listen to such extremely coarse wemarks," said D'Arcy, with dignity.

"Pway pwoceed."

"Let me go! I— Help!"

"Duck him!"

"Scrag the welsher!"

"Chuck him in again!"

Algarotti struggled in wild terror in the grasp of the angry crowd. Dick, the groom, propelled him towards the water, and Bob helped him from behind with liberal applications of a huge and heavy stable-boot. Others crowded round, poking and pommelling and shoving, and the Italian, almost in rags, shrieked and yelled for help and mercy.

"Pway desist, gentlemen!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in great distress. "Don't duck the beastly wottah. Pway oblige me by lettin' him go!"

The word of the steeplechase winner was law, especially to Dick and Bob. They flung the Italian down.

"Right you are, sir!" said Bob.

The Italian picked himself up, and ran like a hare. He did not reappear to deny the story of his rascality. The Tytchley country saw no more of Algarotti.

And as he fled, the enthusiastic crowd bore the winner of the great steeplechase onward, amid cheers and howls and yells that made the welkin ring.

As Arthur Augustus remarked afterwards to Blake, it was really quite a "triumph," and if he hadn't been a particularly modest chap he might "weally" have suffered from an attack of swelled head.

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