

**FULL-OF-FUN YARN OF THE
CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S—WITHIN!**

The GEM
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FOOLED *by* FIGGINS!



The laugh of the school! Figgins & Co. look a prize set of chumps when they are dished, diddled and done by their rivals of the School House. But Figgy's not slow to return the "compliment"—with interest! How he gets the last laugh is the laugh of a lifetime!

CHAPTER 1.

A Question of Celebrating!

"PEWWAPS——"
"We shall want you four chaps," said Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"Pewwaps——"
"With Lowther, Manners, and myself, that will make seven——"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"
"Then Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, of the New House, make ten."

"Weally——"
"Dry up a minute, Gussy! The question is, who's to be the eleventh chap?" said Tom Merry, knitting his brows.

"We want the strongest side we can get to play Greyfriars."

"What-ho!" said Blake.

"Pewwaps——"
"It's a curious thing," remarked Tom Merry of the Shell, looking round Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form, into which he had stepped to discuss football matters with the chums of the Fourth—"it's a very curious thing, kids, that one

can't discuss anything without Gussy always coming in as a sort of chorus."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"If you ever start a subscription in the School House to buy Gussy a gag you can put me down for twopence," said Tom Merry.

"Hear, hear!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth Form, and familiarly known as Gussy, adjusted a gold-rimmed monocle, and gave the hero of the Shell a scornful glance through it.

D'Arcy's look started at Tom Merry's feet, and slowly progressed upwards to his head. Then it descended again to Tom Merry's feet with equal slowness and deliberation.

Tom Merry certainly ought to have been utterly crushed by that deadly stare, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy certainly expected it.

But the hero of the Shell never turned a hair.

He grinned at the swell of St. Jim's in the most self-possessed way in the world.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——" said D'Arcy, at last,

"Now, look here, Gussy——"

—IN THIS FUN-FILLED STORY OF TOM MERRY & CO.!

By Martin Clifford.

"I wegard you as an ass."

"Go hon!"

"And a wank outsidah!"

"Hear, hear!"

"And a feaful boundah!"

"Hurrah!"

Arthur Augustus gave it up. There was evidently no getting through the equanimity of the hero of the Shell.

"And now Gussy has finished his display of politeness to a guest, we'll get on with the washing," said Tom Merry cheerfully.

Arthur Augustus started.

He had forgotten for the moment that Tom Merry was a guest in Study No. 6.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated.

"No, don't begin again, Gussy," said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"When the match comes off," said Tom Merry, who was captain of the junior eleven placed football matches before all other matters whatsoever. "When—"

"Pway allow me to speak."

"Chorus again!" groaned Blake.

"Pway dwy up, Blake! I owe Tom Mewwy an apology," said Arthur Augustus, in his most stately way. "I had allowed the fact to escape my recollection for a moment that he was a visitah in this study. Therefore, I owe him an apology for havin' uttached my opinion of him in that weekless way."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I can see no cause whatevah for wibald laughtah, Hewwies."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway shut up, Dig! Tom Mewwy, I withdrew the opprobrious epithets I applied to you, as you are a visitah to this study, on the distinct understandin' that if you were not a visitah to this study I should not withdraw them."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard this mewwiment as in the worst of taste. I will now resume the mattah I was speaking of when Tom Mewwy intewwupted me with his silly football. Fewwaps—"

"Cheese it, Gussy!"

"Fewwaps you fellows have forgotten that it is our Form mastah's birthday to-morrow," said D'Arcy victoriously, "and that we ought to get up some celebration. I know the New House chaps are goin' to, and my ideah is that the School House ought to put them in the shade, you know."

"Oh!" said Blake.

"Fewwaps you will admit now that it is a matter of great importance," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with chilling dignity.

Tom Merry grinned.

As he was in the Shell, the next Form above the Fourth, the birthday of a Fourth Form master was not a matter of great importance to him. It was not really of the first importance to the Fourth-Formers themselves, but things had been quiet lately, and they were in a humour to celebrate something. Besides, they all liked little Mr. Lathom; he was a popular master.

"Blessed if I can see the importance," said Tom Merry, with a yawn. "Now, if it were the birthday of the master of the Shell—"

"Rats!" said three voices, and a fourth added: "Wats!" "You see, there would be some sense in celebrating that, but as for a Fourth Form master—"

"If you want to go out of the study on your neck, Tom Merry, you may as well say so at once," said Blake darkly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Of course, Lathom has had birthdays before, and no comets were seen," Blake remarked. "But he's a jolly little chap. I've always believed in backing up Lathom."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear, hear!"

"And if Figgins & Co. of the New House are thinking of celebrating his birthday, of course the School House will

have to celebrate it, too, and on a bigger scale," said Blake positively. "That's a dead cert!"

"I should wathah think so."

"Well, that's all right," said Tom Merry, with a nod. "Of course, a chap in my Form can't take much interest in Fourth Form matters."

"A chap in your Form will jolly soon take a thick ear from a Fourth Form fist if he doesn't cheese it," said Blake warmly.

"Yaas, wathah! I suggest givin' Tom Mewwy a feaful thwashin' for his cheek."

"But is the news correct?" asked Digby dubiously. "How does Gussy know that the New House bounders are going to celebrate Lathom's birthday?"

"Yes, how do you know, Gussy?"

"It takes a fellow of tact and judgment to ascertain these things," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "It's wathah fortunate for the School House that I'm lookin' aftah the honah of the House, while you chaps are chattewin' about a footah match that won't come off till next week."

"Get on with the washing, ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass."

"How do you know Figgins is celebrating Lathom's birthday, you frabjous ass?" shrieked Blake.

"I wefuse—"

"Bump him!"

"Hold on, deah boys! I shall be pleased to explain. I had it fwom Mellish."

"Mellish!" said Blake, with a sniff. No one in Study No. 6 liked the cad of the Fourth Form. "How did Mellish know?"

"Well, Mellish does genevally know things."

"He's a spying, listening beast!"

"Yaas, but he usually does know."

"He may have been rotting."

"He would hardly ventuah to wot me," said D'Arcy, with dignity. "I should give him a feaful thwashin'. Besides, he told me he knew the New House bounders had a weason, and offahed to tell me for a shillin'. I gave him a shillin', and if the news isn't twue, Mellish would be a swindlah. Therefore—"

"Therefore the news is true," said Blake solemnly.

"Yaas, wathah! And what's more, Mellish said that he heard Figgins and Kerr talkin' about gettin' up somethin' in the amatuah theatricall line—some sort of a show they're goin' to give, and ask Lathom to it."

"There's no telling whether Mellish is lying or not," said Tom Merry. "I think he's telling the truth in this case, but we can't be sure."

"Bai Jove!"

"Don't interrupt, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Now, to come to bisney—"

"I would like to point out—"

"Dry up!"

"That Kerr and Figgins—"

"Eh?"

"Have just gone by towards the gate," said D'Arcy, "and Kerr was cawwin' a big bag. It looks to me as if there is somethin' on."

"You ass! Why didn't you say so before?" exclaimed Blake, somewhat unreasonably.

"Why, I was twyin' to—"

"Oh, rats! Where are they?"

"They have disappeared now."

"If they've gone out we'd better scout after them," said Tom Merry decidedly. "As I'm the best scout in the party—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"I'll go—"

"What is wequiahed for scoutin' is a fellow of tact and judgment. I had bettah go—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"It's really a Fourth Form matter, so I'll go," said Blake. "You can come, Tom Merry, and as Gussy spotted the bounders, perhaps we ought to let him in."

"I should wefuse—"

"You other chaps spot the rest of the bounders if they follow," said Blake. "I shouldn't wonder if it was a rehearsal, and in that case we come out strong."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Tom Merry and Blake and D'Arcy left Study No. 6 and hurried off towards the gates.

They had nearly reached them when D'Arcy suddenly halted.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated.

"What's the matter now?"

"I think it extwemely pwob that those chaps are makin' for the woods—"

"Most likely."

"In that case, as we may have to cweep aftah them in scoutin', it would be bettah for me to go back and change my toppah for a cap."

Go back and change it for a gladstone bag, if you like."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Buck up!"

Tom Merry and Blake ran for the gates. D'Arcy hesitated for a moment, and then ran after them.

"I say, deah boys, wait for me!"

"Rats!"

"I shan't keep you waitin' more than ten minutes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I think I can see us waiting ten minutes while Gussy changes his topper," Blake remarked, with a chuckle.

And Tom Merry chuckled, too.

The School House juniors ran out into the lane, and there, sure enough, were Figgins and Kerr and Wynn, striding down in the direction of Rylcombe.

As the School House fellows caught sight of them they disappeared into the wood at the side of the lane.

"Come on!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

He ran after the disappearing trio, and Blake ran after him. D'Arcy ran after them, but a gust of wind caught his silk hat and whirled it off his head.

"Pway stop a minute, deah boys!" he called out.

The dear boys did not stop.

They dashed into the wood, and D'Arcy ran back after his topper. He was three or four minutes catching that topper, and by the time he had caught it and dusted it and brushed it, Tom Merry and Blake had long been out of sight.

"Bai Jove! What awful wottahs!" murmured D'Arcy, as he scanned the lane up and down through his eyeglass for the two juniors. "They have actually gone on and left me behind. I wegard it as absolutely wotten! Howevah, I will find them."

And D'Arcy climbed over the stile and entered the wood, too.

CHAPTER 2.

Tom Merry's Raid!

"Q U I E T!" whispered Tom Merry.

"Eh?"

"I said quiet."

"I know you did. What I want to know is what you said it for," said Jack Blake aggressively.

"Oh, don't rot now!"

"Look here—"

"Quiet!"

"If you're looking for a thick ear—"

There was a rustle in the wood, and Blake stopped short. Tom Merry caught him by the shoulder and dragged him away into the thickets.

A minute later a junior came down the footpath through the wood.

It was French of the Shell, a New House fellow.

He had a bag in his hand, and he walked on past the thicket where the School House juniors had taken cover, without a suspicion that they were there.

Tom Merry and Blake made no sound. Blake did not need telling to be quiet now.

French passed on and vanished.

"It's a meeting, you see," murmured Tom Merry. "I—"

"Quiet!"

"Eh?"

"Don't make a row!" grinned Blake, in his turn. "Do you want to alarm them?"

"Look here—"

"Oh, quiet!"

Tom Merry grinned.

"Cheese it!" he said. "Let's go on. It's a rendezvous of some kind in the wood, and the New House bounders are all meeting there."

"I think so."

"Anyway, we're jolly well going to know what it is."

"Yes, rather! Come on!"

The School House Scouts threaded their way through the wood. Again they had to take cover at the sight of a New House junior. It was Pratt of the Fourth this time, and he was carrying a bag, too.

"Half!" muttered Tom Merry.

"Right-ho!"

The School House Scouts stopped. They were on the edge of an open glade in the wood.

A group of juniors stood in full view in the glade, and it was time for the Scouts to stop.

Tom Merry and Blake, deep in cover in the thickets, looked upon the scene before them with keen interest.

They had tracked down Figgins & Co.

They were in the glade with French and Pratt and several

other New House fellows, who had evidently approached the rendezvous by different paths.

"This is the giddy meeting-place!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather! Don't make a row!"

Tom Merry smiled and watched in silence. Since he had made that unfortunate remark to Blake about being quiet the Fourth-Former evidently meant never to let the subject rest again.

Figgins was grinning serenely. He was evidently well satisfied with his scheme for stealing a march on the School House.

The glade in the wood was a very solitary spot, and the rehearsal there was not likely to be discovered or interrupted, Figgins thought.

At St. Jim's it would be liable to interruption from the enemy, and in any case could hardly be kept a secret.

The School House fellows would find out that there was "something on," and would set themselves to discover what it was and baffle it.

But for the chance that had put the School House Scouts on the track, Figgins would have carried out his plans without raising a single suspicion "over the way."

Tom Merry and Blake watched and enjoyed the situation. From the crammed bags the make-up and costumes of the New House Amateur Dramatic Society were turned out in a heap on the grass.

Figgins & Co. had provided themselves well.

Besides their own "properties," there was a quantity of stage "props," hired from the costumier in Rylcombe, for the special purpose of playing "Julius Cæsar."

The New House juniors stripped off their outer garments and donned those of the characters they were to represent in the dress rehearsal.

Tom Merry and Blake watched in silence.

The juniors left their clothes lying in a little heap, and retired into the middle of the glade for the rehearsal.

Kerr had a book in his hand: Kerr was always prompter in the theatrical rehearsals of the New House juniors.

Kerr was the son of an actor, and an actor himself, and his impersonations had caused a great deal of laughter and amusement at St. Jim's, and sometimes enabled the School House to score over their rivals.

What opinion Kerr had of the acting of the other fellows was not known; perhaps he was too polite to let it be known.

"Now then," said Figgins, "you've all got to be jolly careful in this rehearsal. It's the last before the performance. I hope you've all mugged up your parts all right. I've kept you at it, anyway."

"I think I'm pretty strong," said Pratt.

"So am I," said French.

"Good! I hope you are. The performance has got to be a big success, or we shan't score, after all. If we celebrate Lathom's birthday with a giddy entertainment that makes the kids grin, the School House will have the laugh of us."

"We'll make it go all right, Figgy."

"Well, go ahead!"

And the juniors went ahead.

In the thicket on the edge of the glade Tom Merry and Blake watched them as they flourished about in Ancient Roman costumes and spouted the lines.

A sudden gleam of fun darted into Tom Merry's eyes. He grasped Blake's arm.

The Fourth-Former looked round at him.

"Quiet!" he whispered.

"I've got an idea, you ass—a screaming wheeze—"

"Oh, go ahead, then!"

Tom Merry made a gesture towards the heap of clothes within a few feet of them. Blake stared for a moment; then, as the idea penetrated his mind, he gave a suppressed gurgle and rolled over in a silent paroxysm of mirth.

"Oh, gorgeous!"

Blake sat up, almost suffocating.

"Fancy taking away their duds and leaving 'em to go home as Julius Cæsar & Co.!" he chuckled. "Oh, my hat!"

"What-ho!"

"Fancy the surprise of the cheerful youths of Rylcombe when they see them in the lane!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fancy the faces of the chaps at St. Jim's when Julius Cæsar & Co. turn up in broad daylight!"

"My word—"

"And fancy Figgins' chivvy when he finds his togs gone, and knows that he'll have to go back to the school in costume!"

"Oh, don't!" moaned Tom Merry. "I shall shriek in a minute!"

"Pity to spoil the show really when they're going to give us such a ripping laugh to-morrow. Fancy playing Julius Cæsar as a comedy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "How are we going to get the togs?" whispered Blake.
 "We can't dodge out into the open without being spotted."
 "That's all right. One of us can creep round the trees to the other side of the glade and draw their attention in that direction, while the other nips out and collars the duds."

"Good!"
 "Will you go, or—"
 "Oh, I'll go, as I'm a better scout!"
 "I'm!"
 "Mind you don't get collared by the New House cads when you get the togs, Tom Merry."
 "Trust me!"

Blake crept away through the underwood.
 Tom Merry remained in cover, watching the New House rehearsal through the foliage and stifling his chuckles.
 The play had been considerably cut down by Kerr to bring it within the compass of the time that could be allowed and within the numbers of the Amateur Dramatic Society of the New House.

The rehearsers got over the ground quickly.

Tom Merry waited for a signal from Blake, and, meanwhile, he listened to the lines delivered by the amateur actors.

Kerr was the only one who had his part perfect. He was playing the role of Mark Antony.

But most of the others were pretty good, and all of them had their hearts in the work. What kind of success they would make of a public performance of "Julius Caesar" was a question; but there was no doubt that they were all bucking up to do their best.

"So are they all, all honourable men," Kerr was saying, when suddenly Figgins whirled round and stared towards the end of the glade, where the trees grew thickly.

Kerr broke off in his speech.
 "What's the matter, Figgins?"

"I—I believe there's somebody looking at us from that tree," said Figgins.

"By George!"
 "Spotted, by Jove!"
 "I can't see anybody," said Kerr, staring in the direction pointed out by Figgins.

The others did the same, and necessarily turned their backs upon the spot where Tom Merry was in cover, as that was at the end of the glade.

Figgins wrinkled his brows.
 "I saw a cap there," he said.
 "I can't see it."

"One of the School House rotters tracking us out!" said Pratt.

"I don't see how they could know—"
 "A chap from the Grammar School, perhaps," said Fatty Wynn.

Figgins nodded.
 "Yes. Anyway, I'm going to see. Look! There it is!"
 A school hat showed for a moment among the thickets. It disappeared so quickly that the juniors could not even note whether it was a St. Jim's cap or not.

"There's somebody there, at all events!" exclaimed Kerr.
 "We'll have him out!"
 "Yes, rather! Come on!"

And the New House Dramatic Society dashed in the direction of the cap. And as they did so Tom Merry darted out of the bushes behind them.

Not one of the juniors thought for a moment of looking back over his shoulders.
 "This is the jape of the term!" Tom grinned.

He collected up the heap of garments in his arms and dashed into the thicket again with them, and was out of sight once more in a few seconds.

In the cover of the thicket, with the captured clothes in his arms, he stopped for a moment to gasp with suppressed laughter.

He had succeeded.
 Blake had drawn off the attention of the New House party, as arranged, and Tom Merry had made the raid on the clothes.

It had been cleverly carried out, in a manner worthy of the two most skilful Boy Scouts of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry paused only to chuckle, and he shoved the

clothes together in a more manageable parcel. There was no time to waste. Then, with his prize in his arms, he scuttled through the wood to find Blake.

CHAPTER 3.

Gussy Gets Ideas!

FIGGINS & CO. ran into the trees and looked up and down and round about for the owner of the cap that had caught their eyes.

But they had not found him.
 If they had been watched, the watcher had certainly scuttled off before they had an opportunity of getting to close quarters with him.

For fully five minutes the New House juniors searched the thickets, getting their Roman robes and togas considerably rumpled in the process, and then they gave it up and returned to the glade.

"It must have been a Grammar School chap," said Kerr.



As the New House actors dashed away on a false scent, Tom Merry darted out from the bushes behind them. Rapidly he gathered up their garments.
 "This is the jape of the term!" he grinned.

Figgins nodded, with a sigh of relief.
 "I think so," he assented. "If it had been a School House rotter he'd have given us a yell, at least, to let us know he had bowled us out, I should think."

"Yes, rather!"
 "Let's get on with the rehearsal."
 And the rehearsal went on.

Figgins & Co. were too deeply interested in the drama to even glance towards the spot where they had left their clothes on donning the Roman costumes.

They had not the slightest suspicion of the raid.
 Tom Merry staggered away with his burden of captured clothes, and almost fell over a junior who lay in the grass gasping with mirth.

"Oh my hat!" gurgled Blake.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "It's too jolly good!"
 "I've got the duds!"

"I see you have. Did you leave any behind?"
 "Not a rag!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let's get back to St. Jim's," grinned Tom Merry. "We want to tell the fellows and to shove these things into Figg's study ready for him."

Blake shrieked.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can carry some of them, too; the lot weighs something."

"Right you are; hand 'em over!"
 And the two juniors, equally dividing the burden, tramped along the footpath towards Rylcombe Lane.

"Bai Jove! Here you are!"

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

He stopped in the middle of the footpath and jammed his monocle into his eye, and surveyed the School House Scouts wrathfully.

"Yes, here we are," said Blake affably. "As large as life and twice as natural."

"You did not wait for me."

"Never mind. Take some of these togs, and that will make it all right," said Blake, dumping down his load upon the swell of the Fourth.

Arthur Augustus staggered back under a load of waistcoats and jackets and trousers.

"Bai Jove, Blake!"

"We've raided Figgins & Co.'s togs."

"Bai Jove! Have they gone swimmin' in autumn?"

"Ha, ha, ha! No; they've gone rehearsing, and they're going to return to St. Jim's as Julius Cæsar, Mark Antony, Brutus & Co.," explained Blake.

A grin dawned upon the aristocratic visage of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Bai Jove! Ha, ha, ha! I wegard that as funnay!"

The three juniors walked along towards the school at a good pace. They did not want to run any risk of being overtaken by Figgins & Co. when the latter discovered their loss. If that should happen the joke would turn very much against the School House chums.

"By the way," remarked Arthur Augustus, "I wanted to tell you chaps an ideah."

"Whose?"

"Mine, you silly ass. It's a jolly wippin' ideah for givin' a show to-morrow night and beatin' the New House hollow. As a mattah of fact, I have two weally good ideahs, but one of them, I feah, would be wathah above your intellect."

"Well, of all the cheek—"

"I will tell you that one first. I was thinkin' of givin' a song wectial, and singin', say, fifteen or sixteen tenah solos. We could get Rusden of the Sixth to accompany; he's a good pianist."

"But he's not deaf," said Blake.

"Deaf?"

"Yes. You'd have to get a deaf chap to stand your singing fifteen or sixteen tenor solos."

"Weally, Blake—"

"That wheeze being barred, what's the other?" asked Blake cheerfully.

"Well, the othah ideah is not so good."

"By George, it must be a rotten one!"

"It is not so good, but it is jollay good," said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity. "I dare say you chaps have heard of Pwofessah Bulgah, who has been givin' conjuwin' entahtainments in Wayland. He has come to Wylcombe."

"Might go and see him," said Tom Merry. "I've heard he gives a pretty good show. But what has that to do—"

"That's the ideah. I should think it's wathah good. Instead of gettin' up a wotten amatuah entahtainment, why not hiah the pwofessah to come to St. Jim's and give a weally good pwofessional show?" said the swell of St. Jim's. "We could waise his fees between us, and it would be a jollay good evenin's entahtainment. And, of course, the New House wottahs wouldn't be allowed to make any wow on such an occasion."

"By Jove, there's something in that!" said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "I wonder how much Professor Bulger would charge for an evening?"

"We could go and see him in Wylcombe, deah boy, and find out."

"By Jove, Gussy's full of ideas to-day."

"Yaas, wathah!" said the swell of St. Jim's modestly. "You can genevally depend upon me for a good ideah."

"We'll turn Professor Bulger over in our minds," Blake remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I dare say I shall be able to think of a better idea—"

"Wats!"

"If I don't we'll have the giddy conjurer."

"And if he can't come—," said Tom Merry.

"In that case, deah boy, I will give a song wectial."

"That you jolly well won't!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Here we a'e at St. Jim's."

And the juniors went in, and the fellows who saw them come in laden with clothes gathered round to stare.

CHAPTER 4.

Julius Cæsar & Co.!

THIS was the noblest Roman of them all," said Kerr, as Figgins, in the costume of Brutus, lay extended upon the green sward.

The rehearsal was over.

Brutus lay very still while Mark Antony made that

remark, and Pratt, forgetting that he was Octavius Cæsar, said "Hear, hear!"

The dead Roman sat up.

"Shut up, Pratt, you ass!" he said.

"Sorry, Brutus—I mean Figgy! I forgot."

"E you forget when we're giving the show to-morrow evening you'll get a thick ear," said Figgins.

And he rose to his feet. Upon the whole, Figgins was satisfied with the rehearsal, and even the critical Kerr was not dissatisfied.

"We'll show them!" said Figgins.

"I think the play will be better than the School House could give, anyway," said Kerr.

"Yes, rather! Come on, let's get changed," said Figgins.

"If we get in early I was thinking of asking Monteith for a pass to go down and see Professor Bulger's show. I hear it's fine."

"Good egg!"

"Let's change, then. Hallo! My hat!"

"What's the matter?"

"Have you moved the clothes?"

"Moved the clothes? No."

"They're gone."

"Oh, rats!"

"Look, then!"

The New House juniors stared at the spot where the clothes had been.

The bags were still there, and some odd boots and socks. But the clothes were gone—vanished.

The juniors looked round the glade in the deepening sunset.

Where were the clothes?

"One of you chaps must have moved them," said Figgins at last.

"I didn't," said Kerr.

"They were here when we started rehearsing, and we've all been together since then," said Pratt. "Somebody has sneaked along and taken them."

"But we should have seen—"

"My hat!" Figgins smote his chest. "You remember that chap we sighted over there? The beast must have sneaked the duds while we were looking for him, you know."

"Then there must have been two of them."

Figgins looked dazed.

"Blessed if I understand it!" he exclaimed. "What—"

"It's a Grammar School jape, I suppose."

"I believe that was a Grammarian we saw in the thicket."

"Well, the clothes are gone, anyway."

"They may be hidden among the bushes here," said Fatty Wynn—not very hopefully, however.

"Let's look," said Figgins briefly.

The juniors hunted among the bushes.

It was possible that some practical joker had hidden them for a jape, and that they would be able to find them again.

They hunted round about the glade and up and down, but without success. After ten minutes of it they gathered in the open again.

Their faces were very grim. The clothes were not to be found. It was evident that they had been taken away.

The juniors were under no apprehension as to the safety of their clothes and of the contents of their pockets. It was clearly enough a jape—either of the Grammarians or of the School House juniors.

The clothes were safe enough, and would be restored. But, in the meantime, how were they to get back to St. Jim's?

They stared at one another in blank dismay.

"My only hat!" said Kerr at last. "We're done this time. We—we can't go back to St. Jim's without the clothes."

"We can't go in this rig," said Jimson.

Figgins started.

"We shall have to," he said. "That's the jape, of course. The bounders want to make us go back to St. Jim's in these togs."

"We can't!"

"Impossible!"

Figgins shrugged his shoulders.

"We can't stay here all night," he said.

And there was a silence of dismay.

What was to be done?

There was no possibility of obtaining other clothes without going to the village to hire some, and there the unlucky actors would have to run the gauntlet of a more intolerable ordeal than at St. Jim's.

There was nothing for it but to return to St. Jim's as they were.

"We must go," said Figgins at last; "there's no help for it."

"And I'm awfully hungry!" said Fatty Wynn pathetically.

"Oh, cheese it!"

"I tell you I'm famished. I don't see why we can't slip into St. Jim's and dodge into the New House without being noticed—"

"Not much chance of that if this is a School House jape," growled Kerr. "Tom Merry & Co. will be waiting for us at the gates. But it can't be helped."

"Of course it can't!" said Figgins desperately. "And staying here and jawing it over won't make it any the easier. Let's get off."

"We shall look awful guys!" growled Pratt.

"Got any suggestions to make, then?" demanded Figgins.

"Oh, I'm not leader!"

"Shut up, then—or you'll get a thick ear to wear along with your togs!" growled Figgins. "Can't be helped. Come on!"

And the band of Roman figures followed Brutus down the footpath towards Rylcombe Lane.

The juniors reached the stile and climbed over it into the lane, not without difficulty in their Roman garb.

As luck would have it, the lane was unusually full of pedestrians. They passed fellows from the village and more fellows from the Grammar School and the vicar and Sir Hilton Popper in his car.

All stared blankly at the unfortunate Romans.

Figgins & Co. kept doggedly on.

That the jape was known at St. Jim's, and that they were expected there, was soon very evident. As soon as they saw the school gateway they saw that it was crowded with fellows waiting.

Fatty Wynn gave a grunt.

"My hat! There's the whole blessed school turned out to meet us!"

"Can't be helped. Come on!"

"Hallo!" roared Kangaroo. "Who have we here?"

"Strolling players, I should think."

"Barnstormers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on!" muttered Figgins. "Shove through."

Julius Cæsar & Co. shoved on.

The crowd allowed them to pass through and get into the quadrangle, greeting them with a hail of laughter and chipping.

"This way for the players!" roared Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Give a performance in the quad, Figgy!"

"In front of the School House, please!"

"I'll go round with the hat, Figgy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co., gasping with rage, tramped on. They had never felt—or looked—so utterly absurd in their lives. The Roman costume might have been imposing in the streets of Rome, but in the quadrangle at St. Jim's it looked inexpressibly absurd.

The whole school was yelling.

Even New House juniors, who had come to see what the row was about and recognised their Dramatic Society, joined in the laughter. They could not help it. They yelled as loudly as any fellow in the School House.

Tom Merry wiped his eyes.

"Oh, my only hat!" he gasped. "This is gorgeous!"

"It's su-suf-suffocating!" panted Blake, with tears of merriment streaming down his cheeks. "Look at Brutus' chivvy! Isn't it enough to make a cat cackle? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Digby suddenly. "Look out! Here's Lathom!"

"Lathom! Phew!"

"Cave, Figgy!"

But there was no chance for Figgins & Co. to avoid the meeting.

Mr. Lathom, the little master of the Fourth Form, was coming directly towards them, and he was already blinking through his spectacles at the strange sight.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mr. Lathom. "What ever does this mean?"

And Julius Cæsar & Co. stopped, and the little Form master blinked at them in blank astonishment.

CHAPTER 5.

Returned With Compliments!

MR. LATHOM stared at Julius Cæsar & Co., and Julius Cæsar & Co. stared at Mr. Lathom. The little Form master was absolutely astounded.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "This is—is absurd—unheard-of! My good fellows, you cannot give a performance here!"

A joyous chuckle ran through the crowd.

The Fourth Form master evidently did not recognise the juniors in the least, but imagined that a company of strolling players had visited St. Jim's for the purpose of giving a performance in the quad.

The idea quite excited the Form master.

He pointed to the gates.

"You must go away at once!" he exclaimed.

"If you please, sir—"

"It is quite impossible for anything of the sort to be allowed. You should apply, in the first place, to the headmaster, and obtain his permission; but, in any case, an open-air performance could not be given."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you please—"

"I must ask you to quit these precincts immediately!" said Mr. Lathom, in a stately way. "Come! Go at once!"

Blake fell into Digby's arms.

"Hold me!" he murmured. "I have a pain, and I shall burst something if I laugh any more! Oh, why were we born japers?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Go at once!" repeated Mr. Lathom, pointing majestically to the gates. "Come! You are wasting my time!"

"If you please, Mr. Lathom, I'm Figgins!" gasped the unhappy New House leader.

The Fourth Form master jumped almost clear of the ground.

"What—what! Figgins!"

"Yes, sir. I—"

"Figgins—of my Form! Impossible!"

"Yes, sir. You see, sir—"

"Dear me! What does this—this extraordinary masquerade mean, Figgins?" exclaimed Mr. Lathom, blinking at the unhappy Brutus.

"We—we've been having a rehearsal, sir!" stammered Figgins.

"Oh, I see! But—but surely you have not had the astounding impertinence to rehearse in costume in the quadrangle, Figgins?"

"Oh, no, sir; we—we rehearsed in the wood, sir, for the sake of keeping away from rotten, mean interruptions, sir, and some howling cad stole our clothes, sir—some rotten, silly ass, sir, without as much brains as you could put on a threepenny-bit, thought it would be funny to collar our clothes, sir, so—"

"Dear me!"

"It's the fault of that worm, sir—that beastly outsider, sir!"

"Bai Jove! You're gettin' a good chawacter, Blake, I must say!"

"Shut up, ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass!"

"So you see, sir, that rotten worm, having taken our clothes—"

"Who was it, Figgins?"

"I—I didn't see him, sir!"

"Well, as you have been the victim of a joke, you may go," said Mr. Lathom mildly. "Go into your House at once, and take off these absurd things!"

"Yes, sir!"

"And I should recommend you in future to do your rehearsing indoors, Figgins!"

"Yes, sir!"

And Mr. Lathom walked on towards the gates, with a smile lurking on his face, and Figgins & Co. went to their House, followed to the very door by a large and admiring crowd, who passed all sorts of personal remarks.

Figgins & Co. disappeared at last within the portals of the New House, followed in by a roar of laughter.

Tom Merry wiped his eyes as he turned away.

"Oh, it was gorgeous!" he murmured. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard it as vevy funny!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't think the New House Amateur Dramatic Society will give that giddy dramatic performance to-morrow night, now!" said Lowther, with a sob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They would be laughed off the boards!"

"I should say so!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Figgins wouldn't have the nerve after this show-up!"

And the School House chums wept, and walked away, fully satisfied that they had achieved two important things—

(Continued on the next page.)



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worked off a jape that would furnish them with laughter for a week or more, and knocked on the head the New House celebration of Mr. Lathom's birthday.

Meanwhile, Figgins & Co., covered with confusion and dismay, had escaped into their own House, and glad enough they were to get into the shelter of it.

They were safe from School House chipping here, at all events; but the whole New House was one ripple of mirth from end to end.

Monteith, the head prefect of the House, met the returned rehearsers in the Hall, with several of the Sixth—Baker and Dodds and Harris.

They stared at Figgins & Co., and laughed.

"You haven't been out in that state, Figgins, surely?" exclaimed Monteith, recognising the chief of the New House juniors.

"We've been rehearsing——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And some beast has collared our clothes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Baker. "That accounts for it. Tom Merry brought a big bundle in here for you some time ago; he asked leave to take it up to your study. He said it contained some clothes you had mislaid."

"Oh!"

"You'll find it there! Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co. tramped upstairs.

Mr. Ratcliff put his head out of his study door, and asked what was the matter. He asked the question in a snappish tone, but he forgot to snap when he caught sight of Figgins & Co. in their peculiar garb.

"Goodness gracious!" he exclaimed.

"It's all right, sir!" said Monteith, grinning. "Some of the juniors have been rehearsing, sir, and someone appears to have taken their clothes away."

Mr. Ratcliff was not supposed to be blessed with a sense of humour, but the sight of Figgins & Co. was too much, even for him. He broke into a kind of rusty chuckle, and closed the door of his study.

The unfortunate actors went upstairs. In the upper passage they halted, and Pratt glared at Brutus.

"You unspeakable ass!" he exclaimed.

Figgins clenched his fists.

"What's that?" he demanded.

"Oh, you can punch my head if you like," exclaimed Pratt savagely. "I say you're an ass, and I don't care! Nice go this is!"

"I don't think!" said Jimson.

"Pretty go, and no mistake!" French remarked. "I repeat what Pratt says—you're a howling, frabjous, burling ass, Figgins!"

"Hang it all!" growled Figgins, rather taken aback by this general attack. "What could I do? How could I help it?"

"Who proposed rehearsing in the wood?"

"Figgins!"

"Who made us leave the clothes just where we left them?"

"Figgins!"

"Who's supposed to be leader and to look after things?"

"Figgins!"

"Who's got us into this muck?"

"Figgins!"

"Who's a howling burler?"

"Figgins!"

The juniors were asking the questions and answering them in a sort of chant. Figgins stamped away into his study, followed by Kerr and Wynn.

"Nice!" said Figgins heatedly, slamming the study door.

"Blessed if I'm going to be junior House captain any more. This is how one gets treated when things go wrong."

"Oh, they'll get over it!" said Kerr.

"I don't care whether they do or don't! I'm jolly well going to resign!"

Kerr shook his head.

"You can't, Figgy!"

"Can't!" said Figgins warmly. "Why can't I?"

"Because we've got to get our own back on the School House bounders, and you've got to show us how to do it!" said Kerr.

Kerr's words poured oil on troubled waters. Whatever the rest of the House might say or do, Figgins had unswerving loyalty here.

"Well, that's all right," he said. "I hope I can. We'll make them sit up, somehow!"

"We will, rather!"

"We'll make 'em wriggle!" said Fatty Wynn. "I only wish we could raid a feed or something. That's what I——"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Kerr. "Here's the clothes! We may as well change!"

There was an enormous bundle of clothes on the table.

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On top of it was pinned a sheet of paper, bearing the inscription in sprawling letters:

"WITH TOM MERRY & CO.'S COMPLIMENTS!"

Figgins read it, and snorted.

"Well, we've been done!" he said. "They've caught on to the dodge of celebrating Lathom's birthday somehow, and they've dished us."

"We'll dish them yet!"

And the juniors sorted out the clothes.

CHAPTER 6.

The Conjuror!

TOM MERRY & CO. chuckled as they went down to the gates.

They had scored over the New House without limit, and they felt that they had clearly proved, for once, at least, that the School House was Cock House at St. Jim's.

And they were feeling very satisfied with themselves on that account. But that was not all.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's idea of employing the professor from Rylcombe to give a conjuring entertainment the following night had caught on, and so the juniors had got late passes from Kildare to pay a visit to the professor.

Private theatricals were all very well, but a real live professional conjurer was something out of the common, and was bound to take the wind out of the sails of the New House.

They reached Rylcombe, and found the door of the town-hall, where the professor was giving his entertainment, not yet open, and besieged by a good-sized crowd.

The juniors intended to see the show before they tried to get the professor's services. They took up their station as near to the door as they could get, and waited for it to open.

After a little while the door was opened, and the juniors of St. Jim's pressed in with the crowd.

They got pretty good seats, too; and as the hall was not large, they had a very excellent view of the stage.

The hall was about half full, but that was a pretty good audience for a place like Rylcombe, where life was not taken too gaily.

Professor Bulger came on the stage bowing and smiling.

He was a man of middle size, with a bald head, and wore spectacles. He was very stout, and so looked smaller than he was, and his limbs looked shorter than ever in evening clothes.

He had a big smile, like most public entertainers in his line of business, and he bowed with much grace to an imaginary ovation as he entered.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon the professor, and watched him with curiosity. D'Arcy had confided to Blake that he "wathah" fancied himself as a conjurer, a remark which Blake had received with scoffing. D'Arcy was curious to see how it was done, and he was prepared to take a great interest in the conjuring performance.

The professor, after some remarks to the audience, got to business.

He started with some simple tricks, getting yards of ribbon out of an empty eggshell, and so forth; but the Rylcombe folk were not at all blase, and they greeted the simplest trick with great appreciation.

More people were dropping in every few minutes, and presently Blake, glaring round, uttered a slight exclamation.

"My hat! Figgy!"

"Bai Jove!"

The School House party looked round.

Figgins & Co. had just come in. They grinned at the School House fellows. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were late for the start of the conjuring entertainment, owing to the curious circumstances under which they had returned to St. Jim's after the rehearsal in Rylcombe Wood.

But they had turned up, after all. They had to be satisfied with back seats, however, and Figgins breathed hard through his nose as he caught the School House grins from the front.

"Look at those beasts in the second row," he exclaimed.

"And we're in the eleventh," remarked Kerr.

"Never mind," said Fatty Wynn.

"We could have been here earlier if Fatty had hurried——"

"How could I hurry after eight eggs, a pound of ham, half a pound of cold beef, seven jam tarts, and a plum pudding?" demanded Fatty Wynn.

"How could you walk at all—that's the miracle," agreed Kerr.

"I've a jolly good mind to go and bump them out of those blessed seats," grumbled Figgins, with a wrathful glance towards the front.



"This way for the players!" shouted Monty Lowther, as the crowd parted for Julius Cæsar & Co. to enter the quadrangle. "Ha, ha, ha!" "Give a performance in the quad, Figgy!" "I'll go round with the hat!" "Ha, ha, ha!" A hail of laughter and chipping greeted the discomfited Figgins & Co.

"Can't make a row here, Figgy!"

"Well, but—"

"Besides, there are eleven of them, and only three of us," said Kerr, grinning. "We might be the chaps who get the bumping."

And even Figgins had to admit that that was very likely:

"Shut up!" said Fatty Wynn. "The professor's going to do the hat-trick now—that old familiar hat-trick. It brings back such pleasant associations of old times, you know—there's a smack of the Middle Ages about it. Shut up!"

And the New House chums chuckled and watched.

Professor Bulger had come to the front of the stage.

"Will any gentleman oblige me with a hat?" he asked suavely.

No gentleman seemed in a hurry to make himself conspicuous.

"I assure the owner that the hat will not be in the least injured, after I have made fire come out of it. Will any gentleman oblige me with a hat?"

"Go it, Gussy!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Lend him your topper."

"I should be vevy pleased to oblige the pwofessah, but I am afwaid of some injuw to my hat, you know."

"The hat will not be in the slightest degree damaged," said Professor Bulger, overhearing the words. "In case of injury, a wholly brand-new hat will be exchanged for the old one; but injury is impossible."

"That's all vevy well, deah boy; but a new hat purchased in the country will be of no use to me. I have to considah the latest fashions in bwims," said D'Arcy. "Howevah, I will accept your assuwhance that the toppah will not be damaged."

"Not in the least."

And Arthur Augustus handed over his topper.

But in spite of the professor's assurance, and his own knowledge that the trick about to be performed was as

old as the hills, Arthur Augustus could not help a shade of anxiety creeping into his glance as he watched the conjurer.

Professor Bulger took the hat, looked at it, and then carried it to his little table. Then he stuck it on the back of his head while he proceeded to get his materials ready. This raised a laugh; the audience were prepared to laugh: that was what they paid their money for, as well as the conjuring.

Professor Bulger took the hat off again, and proceeded to cram materials for a bonfire into it. D'Arcy watched him in great anxiety.

The conjurer was certainly very skilful.

He had, of course, taken the usual measures to ensure the safety of the hat, but he had acted so skilfully that the keenest watcher could not detect him, and it really looked as if the hat must be damaged.

Arthur Augustus half-rose.

Blake's ready grasp jammed him down into his seat.

"Down, dog—I mean, keep quiet!"

"I am convinced that he is damagin' my toppah!" muttered Arthur Augustus, trembling with excitement.

"Well, never mind—"

"You feahful ass! That is my best toppah, except the Sunday one."

"Well, if it's damaged, it's too late to save it now," said Blake consolingly; "but it's all right."

"I am convinced that it is not all wight."

"Well, keep a stiff upper lip, and hope for the best. It's too late to save it now—and you can show the stuff you're made of in this awful extremity," said Blake gravely. "I hope you won't make a display of vulgar excitement, and make your friends ashamed of you."

"Weally, Blake—"

"I'm afraid, Gussy, that your manners have not been such as stamps the caste of Beer de Beer!" said Blake severely.

"Pway don't be an ass, Blake!"

There was a murmur from the unsophisticated audience; the professor was fairly going at last.

Flames and smoke issued from the hat.

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From the midst of the flames the professor proceeded to draw a white rabbit and a kitten, not singed by so much as a hair.

"Good!" said Tom Merry

"Bwavo!"

The professor smiled indulgently. He threw the hat at last into a box, as the fire in it died out.

"Bai Jove, he's forgotten that the hat's mine, and he's ruined it!" murmured the swell of St. Jim's.

"Bai Jove! Look—look!"

The professor stooped over the box, and drew out a silk hat, and threw it on the floor. It fell with a thud that certainly must have damaged the hat.

"Gentlemen, you see that hat——"

"Yaas, wathah!" shouted D'Arcy, quite rising this time. "Pwaw be careful with that toppah. It's mine!"

The professor smiled blandly.

"Your hat will be restored to you undamaged, sir."

"I twust so," said D'Arcy doubtfully.

"I shall now proceed to stamp on that hat——"

"Bai Jove!"

"That you may all see that it is genuine, I will do it in full view of the audience," continued the professor.

"Gweat Scott!"

Professor Bulger kept his word.

He raised his right foot, and brought it down upon the topper with a terrific crash. The hat buckled up and cracked under it immediately.

There was a gasp from the audience, and a yell from Arthur Augustus. If the professor restored the hat to its original shape after that, he would be a wonder-worker indeed; but D'Arcy did not believe for a moment that he could do it.

"The ass! The uttah ass——"

"Sit down there, in front!" roared Figgins from the rear.

"I wufuse to do anythin' of the sort. I——"

"Sit down!" yelled Kerr.

The cry was taken up by the audience.

"Sit down! Sit down!"

Blake and Lowther dragged Arthur Augustus down into his seat again. They held him there so that he could not rise. D'Arcy's eyeglass dropped from his eye in his excitement, and he groped for it blindly.

"Bai Jove! Gweat Scott! Leggo!"

"Quiet, ass!"

"I wufuse to be called an ass. I——"

"Shut up!"

"He's ruined my hat!"

"Well, take it calmly!" said Tom Merry.

D'Arcy jammed the monocle into his eye and gasped. The professor was walking round the hat, stamping on it at every step. It was evidently useless for the swell of St. Jim's to interfere now. The hat was a shapeless wreck.

D'Arcy sat watching with fixed eyes.

If the professor did not restore to him his silk hat in all its pristine glory he intended that the professor should hear of it. And it seemed pretty certain now that the professor would be able to do nothing of the sort.

The hat having been stamped almost out of all semblance to a hat, the professor picked it up, and made a motion of tossing it into the box again.

Then he faced the audience once more.

"Gentlemen——"

D'Arcy wrenched himself away from Lowther and Blake with a sudden wrench, and bounded out of his seat. Before he could be grabbed he had leaped upon the stage.

The professor stared at him in amazement.

D'Arcy jammed his monocle tighter into his eye, and glared at the professor.

"Really——" began Mr. Bulger.

"I wegard you as a wank wottah, sir," said the swell of St. Jim's. "You have ruined my hat!"

"Really——"

"It was my best one, except the Sunday toppah——"

"Really——"

"Order!" roared Figgins. "Sit down! Chuck him out!"

"Order!"

"Kick him out!"

"I wufuse to be kicked out. I——"

The professor smiled to the audience.

"Our young friend is a little excited," he remarked. "He evidently imagined that his hat is injured——"

"It must be uttably ruined——"

"Nothing of the sort. I undertook to restore it to you totally undamaged," said the professor suavely. "I shall proceed to do so."

"Weally——"

"There is your hat, sir!"

"Where?"

"You may take it from the box yourself. Pray turn the box towards the audience, so that everyone can see that the

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trick is quite genuine, and that there is no other hat on the stage!"

Arthur Augustus, looking astounded, stepped obediently to the box, and lifted a hat out of it—his own silk topper, as elegant and shiny as ever!

There was no sign of damage upon it.

There was no other hat in the box. D'Arcy turned the open box towards the audience, so that they could all see into it.

There was a general gasp.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy, turning the hat over in his hands. "Bai Jove, sir, this is simply amazin'!"

"You are satisfied?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That is your hat?"

"Oh, yaas!"

"It is not damaged?"

"Not at all!"

"Very good!"

"I apologise most sincerely for expressin' any doubt, and I withdraw my remarks about your bein' a wottah, sir."

"That is nothing," said the professor, with a wave of the hand. "Naturally you were a little excited. It was a testimony to the genuineness of the performance, too."

"I am vewy sowwy——"

"Not at all!"

And D'Arcy retired from the stage with his undamaged hat.

CHAPTER 7.

Securing the Professor's Services!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS was very subdued during the remainder of the performance. He felt that he had been rather excited, and that, as Blake put it, his manners lacked that repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere. And so he was very quiet, save when the time came to applaud, which he did most heartily.

When the performance was over the boys crowded out of the hall with the rest, and Tom Merry looked out for Figgins & Co. A hand from somewhere in the crowd knocked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's hat over his eyes, and there was a sudden chuckle.

"Bai Jove!"

"New House cads!"

"Collar them!"

But Figgins & Co. were gone.

Arthur Augustus grabbed his hat with one hand, and jammed his monocle into his eye again with the other, and glared round for the enemy.

"Bai Jove, I suppose that was Figgins!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I do not wegard it as a laughin' mattah, Blake. I have been tweated with gwoss diswespect!"

"Go hon!"

"I'm goin' to thwash Figgins——"

"He's gone. This way for the professor!"

"I will go and look for him. I——"

"Oh, all right, if you want a foot-race!" said Blake. "We'll see you at St. Jim's."

"Upon the whole, I think I will thwash Figgins to-morrow, as it is necessary for me to be pwesent at the intahview with the pwofessah."

"Not at all. You can buzz off if you like," said Monty Lowther. "There are still ten of us, and we can manage it by putting our heads together."

"Not at all, Lowthah. What is wequiahed in an intahview of this sort is a fellow with tact and judgment."

"The professor will come out this way," said Tom Merry. "The chap at the door told me so. We'll nobble him as he comes out."

And the juniors waited.

It was about half an hour before Professor Bulger emerged, and the juniors were beginning to wonder whether their passes from Kildare were good for so long, as they would evidently be delayed.

The portly professor came out at last, in a silk hat and an overcoat, and the juniors stepped into his way. He stopped.

"If you please, professor——" began Tom Merry.

"Pewwaps you had bettah leave it to me, Tom Mewwy."

"Shut up!"

"I wufuse to shut up! I——"

"The fact is——"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"You see——"

"Undah the circs——"

"Do you want to speak to me?" said Professor Bulger, peering at them in the gloom. "I think I saw you in the hall. Ah, yes, this is the young gentleman who imagined that his hat was damaged!"

"I am sowwy, sir——"

"Yes, sir, we saw the performance, and we thought it a jolly good one," said Tom Merry. "We want to ask something of you, professor, if you have a few minutes to spare."

"Certainly!" said the professor wonderingly. "Walk with me down the street. I am putting up at the Red Lion."

"You had better—"

"Keep your lunatic quiet, Blake!"

"Certainly!" said Blake, slipping an arm through D'Arcy's. "Take his other arm, Dig. If he makes a row, bash his hat, Herries!"

"Right-ho!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Shut up!"

Tom Merry chuckled, and walked along beside the professor. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was forcibly excluded from the discussion.

"We're thinking of giving an entertainment to-morrow evening at the school, sir," said Tom Merry, in explanation. "We belong to St. Jim's, the school near here. We came to see your show, and if it was good, we meant to ask you if you could come and give a conjuring performance at the school. Well, it was good—"

"Thank you!" said the professor, with a smile. "I may say that the name of Professor Bulger is known all over the civilised world. When I was in France—"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry hurriedly. "We thought the show was ripping, especially the hat trick. Now, if you could come over to the school to-morrow evening, it would be splendid! Of course, if you've another engagement—"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I have several," said the professor thoughtfully. "But I have no doubt I could make it convenient to come."

Tom Merry had no doubt that he could. It depended on the fee, as the hero of the Shell very well knew.

"Then what would your fee be, sir?" asked Tom Merry bluntly.

"Well—er—let me see. Say, four pounds."

Tom Merry whistled softly.

"I'm afraid we couldn't stand quite so much as that, sir," he said ruefully.

"Well, suppose we say three pounds?"

"Yes, I think we can just manage that much between the lot of us," said Tom Merry. "It's a go!"

The juniors managed to scrape up thirty shillings between them, and the amount was handed as part payment.

And the St. Jim's juniors parted with the professor at the Red Lion, and then walked home, very pleased with themselves.

They flourished their passes triumphantly in the face of Taggles, the porter, as they went through the gates, which Taggles had to unlock specially for them. And Taggles grunted.

He wouldn't have minded opening the gates if he could have reported the juniors; but now there was nothing to report. He grunted discontentedly as the party tramped on towards the School House and up to the dorm.

The juniors were soon undressed and asleep, and Blake woke up once or twice, chuckling over a dream of the astounded and defeated looks of Figgins & Co., when the conjuring entertainment came off.

The next morning there was much satisfaction among the School House juniors.

It was very carefully arranged that the whole matter was to be kept secret from Figgins & Co. until the last possible moment, in case the New House trio should attempt to "muck up" the scheme in any way, which they were certain to do if they heard a whisper about it, of course.

But most of the School House fellows were taken into the secret, and more and more as the day advanced.

Nothing was said to Mellish, of course; but it was very probable that the sneak of the Fourth contrived to keep himself informed of what was going on.

Tom Merry had asked permission to use the lecture-hall, which he knew was not required for anything else that night, and Mr. Railton, the Housemaster, had easily obtained the required permission for him.

He only asked what kind of entertainment was to be given, having some rather dubious recollections of dramatic entertainments given by the juniors.

"It's a conjuring show, sir," said Tom Merry. "A really ripping—er—I mean, a first-class show, sir!"

"Ahem! Who is the conjurer?"

"We've got a professional, sir."

"Oh!" said Mr. Railton.

"Yes, sir. Professor Bulger, who's been giving entertainments in Wayland and Rylcombe. He's jolly good, sir! We saw his show last night."

"You must find it very expensive, surely, Merry, to engage a professional conjurer for an entertainment here," said the School House master, in surprise.

"We've raised the fee between us, sir."

(Continued on next page.)



Do you know a good joke? If so, send it to "THE GEM JESTER," 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.). Fine footballs are awarded every week for the two best jokes received, and a half-a-crown is paid for every other joke that appears in this column.

NATURALLY.

Son: "What is heredity?"

Father: "Something every man believes in until his son begins to act the fool!"

A football has been awarded to D. Mentha, 4, Grove Road, Hoylake, Cheshire.

NO-KNOW.

Teacher: "Jones, can you tell me the present tense of 'knew'?"

Jones: "No, sir."

Teacher: "Quite correct."

A football has been awarded to A. Keech, 11, Fircroft Road, Upper Tooting, London, S.W.17.

A HARD REMINDER.

Navy: "This world is very 'ard!"

Mate: "I'm reminded of it every time I puts me pickaxe into it!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Campbell, 23, West Park Road, Newport.

TOUGH STUFF.

Diner: "Waiter, is this cottage pie?"

Waiter: "Yes, sir."

Diner: "Then it must be the foundation stone I've got!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to C. Lazarus, 1, Lyndhurst Corner, Holland Road, Hove.

NOT HAVING ANY!

Mother: "Now, Tommy, you are going to take your medicine like a little man, aren't you?"

Tommy: "No fear! It says on the bottle 'two table-spoons for adults.'"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Kelly, Wynter, Mersey Road, Sale, Cheshire.

COULDN'T FOOL HIM!

Balloonist (lost in fog): "Hallo, down there! Where am I?"

Yokel: "Ye can't fool Oi, young feller; ye're up in that basket!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to H. Blinston, 123, Ico House Lane, Widnes, Lanes.

THAT EXPLAINS IT!

Bill: "I live by my wits."

Bob: "Now I know why you always look so hungry!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to "A Reader," 60, Mattock Lane, W. Ealing, London, W.13.

POLITELY PUT.

Jim: "Did you call me a blockhead?"

John: "No; I told you to keep your hat on—there are woodpeckers about!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to G. Jones, 116, New Dock Road, Llanelly, Wales.

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"But why is the show to be given? Surely it would be cheaper to visit the professor at his own show?"

"It's a celebration, sir."

Mr. Railton looked puzzled.

"Is to-day an anniversary?" he asked. "I do not recall it, if it is. It is certainly not Founders' Day, or—"

"It's Mr. Lathom's birthday, sir."

"Oh!"

"As he's a Form master in the Fourth, sir, the Fourth Form thought they ought to have a celebration, so we're taking the matter in hand to help them."

"Oh, I see! I am sure Mr. Lathom will be very flattered."

"We want Mr. Lathom to come to the show, sir, and you especially. It will give the thing a—a tone if you come, sir."

Mr. Railton laughed heartily.

"Then I shall certainly contrive to look in, Merry."

"Thank you, sir! It's eight o'clock, sir, but you can come in any time you like, of course."

"Thank you very much, Merry!"

And Tom Merry scuttled off to spread the good news that the lecture-hall could be had, and that Mr. Railton had promised to turn up. And the news was received with a general chuckle of satisfaction by the juniors.

"Figgins & Co. will want to kick up a row when they hear," said Blake, with a grin. "But with a Housemaster and a Form master present they'll have to keep the peace."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"They'll be done all along the line!"

"Clean done!"

"Dished and diddled! Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'd better go and ask Lathom," Monty Lowther remarked.

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"The sooner the quicker!" agreed Manners. "He might have another engagement."

"Very likely," said Tom Merry. "We'll tackle him at once."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Come on!"

"Weally, deah boys, I insist that that is left to us!" said D'Arcy. "As Lathom has the honah to be our Form mastah, you must leave him to us!"

"What-ho!" said Blake emphatically.

"Oh, stuff!" said Lowther. "You kids will make a muck of it."

There was a warlike demonstration on the part of the Fourth-Formers, but Tom Merry pushed in between in time with a graceful wave of the hand.

"It's all right," he said. "Let the kids see Lathom. We've got plenty to do. Mind you put it to him tactfully, kids!"

"Weally, you know—"

Blake and D'Arcy, Digby and Herries and Reilly presented themselves at Mr. Lathom's study. The Form master of the Fourth had gone in there after morning lessons, and he was reading a paper when the juniors knocked. He laid down the paper, and adjusted his spectacles in his deliberate way, and told them to enter.

They entered.

Mr. Lathom looked somewhat surprised at the invasion. The juniors half-filled his study. He blinked at them through his spectacles.

"If you please, sir," said Blake, "many happy returns of the day!"

"Yaas, wathah! Many happy weturns, sir!"

"Thank you!" said Mr. Lathom, looking pleased. "I did not know you were—er—aware that it was my birthday, my dear boys! Thank you very much!"

"Oh, yes, sir, we knew," said Digby, "and we—"

"Pewwaps you had bettah leave it to me, Dig—"

"Shut up, Gussy!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"This is how it is, sir," said Blake. "We've got up a bit of a celebration, sir—to—to celebrate your birthday, sir."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Dear me!" said Mr. Lathom, looking very much surprised.

"Yes, sir. We—we've a professional entertainer chap, named Bulgar, coming over to give a show, and it's coming off in the lecture-hall at eight o'clock this evening, sir. We should all feel very much honoured if you would be present, sir."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Dear me!"

"Mr. Railton has promised to come, sir," said Blake. "It will be a good show; Professor Bulgar is the top of his profession—I've heard him say so!"

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"I will come with pleasure," said Mr. Lathom. "I must say it is—er—very gratifying to me to see you take this—this notice of my—er—birthday. I had—er—almost forgotten it myself. I will certainly come, my dear boys!"

"Thank you, sir!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the juniors retired, feeling very well satisfied with themselves and their Form master.

"Lathom's a brick," Blake remarked. "He may be a bit of an owl in some things, but he's a jolly good sport, and I stick to that."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Lathom's coming," said Blake, as he rejoined Tom Merry. "And now everything in the garden is lovely!"

CHAPTER 8.

The Traitor!

"THEY'RE up to something!"

Kerr made the remark as he stopped with Figgins & Co. in the quadrangle at St. Jim's, and glanced towards the School House.

The Terrible Three were lounging on the House steps, talking and laughing over something. Afternoon school was over, and crowds of the St. Jim's fellows were on the football field, but Tom Merry & Co. were conspicuous by their absence there. Neither were Figgins & Co. thinking of football. They had other things to think of just now.

"They're up to something," repeated Kerr, thrusting his hands deep into his trousers-pockets, and frowning. "I can guess what—in a way!"

"What is it, then?"

"They've got the dodge from us of celebrating Lathom's birthday," said Kerr. "How they caught on to us I don't know, but they did. They knew what we were up to when they tracked us down over the rehearsal. Now we can't give Julius Caesar—"

Figgins shook his head.

"No; it would be impossible now. The fellows would kill themselves with laughing when we came on the stage, after the show they made of us yesterday."

"And those bounders know it," said Kerr. "They've mucked up our play, and my belief is that they've borrowed the dodge, and they're getting up some celebration instead."

"That will be hard cheese!"

"Yes; it will be about the final knock to our prestige. The whole House is simmering over what happened yesterday," said Kerr glumly. "It's rotten. It's no good our howling out that the School House isn't cock-House if they lick us all along the line."

"It's not too late to get up a show," said Fatty Wynn. "I don't see why we can't stick it out."

"Rats! The fellows would laugh any dramatic show off the stage!"

"Well, we needn't stick to a dramatic idea. There are others."

"Thinking of starting as an acrobat?" asked Kerr, with a sarcastic glance at Fatty Wynn's exceedingly plump figure. "Or do you fancy yourself as a tight-rope walker?"

"No!"

"Well, don't then. I— Well, what do you want?"

That question was addressed to Mellish of the Fourth, who came up with a sidling gait and an ingratiating smile. The New House juniors greeted him with a cold stare. They did not like Mellish any more than his own House fellows did.

"Heard the news?" asked Mellish.

"News! No! Anything going on?"

"Oh, I thought you knew, of course!"

The New House chums exchanged an eager glance. Was it possible that the cad of the School House was going to let out Tom Merry's secret?

"What is it?" asked Figgins.

Mellish appeared to reflect.

"About Lathom's birthday," he said.

"Well, we know it's his birthday, if that's what you mean."

"But about the—ahem! Perhaps I had better hold my tongue, as they don't seem to be letting New House chaps into it."

"Well, if it's anything about Lathom, we're entitled to know, as Fourth-Formers," said Kerr persuasively.

"H'm! Perhaps so. I—I wonder if any of you chaps could lend me half-a-crown?" said Mellish blandly.

There was a short silence.

Figgins & Co. tried not to look the disgust they felt. Mellish was putting it as cunningly as he could, but his meaning was plain enough. If they wanted to know the School House secret they had to pay for it!

(Continued on page 14.)

HERE WE ARE AGAIN FOR ANOTHER CHAT, CHUMS!



Let the Editor be your pal! Write to him to-day, addressing your letters: The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HALLO, chums! With the football season well under way now I expect the majority of you are actively engaged in our great winter game. Soccer is a splendid pastime—many consider it is the best of all sports—and such is its popularity that it is rapidly spreading all over the world. Which brings me to the point that Soccer being such a popular game, it is only natural that a Soccer story always has a wide appeal. Hence you will all welcome the fact that next week's yarn of the chums of St. Jim's is all about our winter game. It is an extra-special story, and shows Martin Clifford at his very best. Cleverly intermingled with the more serious side of footer, Mr. Clifford has introduced plenty of fun in

"D'ARCY'S DUD ELEVEN!"

—with our one and only Gussy the cause of it all. Who else at St. Jim's would fix up to play another school team when the St. Jim's junior eleven has already an important fixture for the same day? Who else would get up a dud eleven and challenge the St. Jim's junior team? No one, of course! Only Gussy does these things! Yet who would have him other than he is?

You'll laugh at his efforts at team-building—and the efforts of his team. You'll enjoy the exciting football of the St. Jim's juniors, who have to play two matches in one afternoon—"all through letting Gussy go out without a chain," as Monty Lowther humorously puts it. Therefore, you must make a point of ordering next Wednesday's GEM in advance—that is, if you have not already a standing order with your newsagent.

In contrast to this fun-and-football story there is another thrilling instalment of our most popular serial—

"ST. FRANK'S VERSUS FOO CHOW!"

—starring the boys of St. Frank's in China. Foo Chow is on the run now

before Yung Li Chang's troops, but the St. Frank's adventurers have not yet seen the last of him.

Also, in our thrilling picture-story serial you will see how Mick Ray and Larry Hawkins fare in their fight against "Killer" Gaston's gang—more thrills! Finally, there will be another column of jokes which have made the Jester smile—with footballs and half-a-crowns as the prizes for the readers who submitted them. Who knows, your joke may be a winner!

Before I go on to other interesting news, just listen to what Bernard Raemers, of Catford, S.E.6, has to say.

"I've been reading the good old GEM for four years, and I must say it's the best book any boy can read. By the way, I've just bought the new 'Holiday Annual' and a fine five-shillings' worth it is, too!" Thank you, Bernard, for your letter. Write to me again some time.

To those readers who have not yet had the pleasure of reading this year's "Holiday Annual," let me repeat that it is unequalled for quality and quantity. As our Catford chum says: "It is a fine five-shillings' worth!" "The Popular Book of Boys' Stories," too, is another winner, and for those who like big-thrill adventure yarns, this 2s. 6d. Annual offers value that is incomparable.

FIRE-FIGHTING FOOTBALLERS.

A week or two ago some footballers had a somewhat novel experience. They turned up to play a match in the ordinary way, but just as they were about to start, the dry grass surrounding the football pitch caught fire! At once it was seen that the goalposts were in danger of being burnt, and the footballers turned firemen and proceeded to fight the flames. The heat of the day, augmented by the heat of the flames, made the unfortunate players very hot indeed, and by the time they had put out the fire, they were much too tired to play, so they abandoned the match! Next week, maybe, the goalposts will be freezing, and wishing the goalposts

would burst into flames and keep him warm!

THE PRISON MINT.

For a long time past the Polish Secret Police have been very worried. Someone has been flooding the country with counterfeit coins, and the police have been searching all over the place trying to find the plant which produced the coins. Nothing came to light, and the unfortunate police were beginning to despair of ever finding it, when suddenly, all was well, the plant was found—in the convict prison at Zloczow! It had been noticed that some of the warders of the prison had become very extravagant, and were spending much more money than they earned. The police became suspicious, and decided to raid the prison, and see what was going on there. They did so, and found an up-to-date plant turning out counterfeit coins at full pressure. Warders were helping the prisoners, many of whom were serving sentences for coining. In another part of the prison where the convicts should have been breaking stones and picking oakum, warders and prisoners were operating a gigantic still, turning out hundreds of gallons of vodka and brandy! In Poland, prisoners are let out on leave periodically, so they had plenty of opportunity of spending their counterfeit money.

THE NIGHT WALKER.

A motorist in Warrington got a bit of a shock the other night. He was driving down the road when suddenly his headlights picked out a strange figure in front of him. It was a man, clad in nothing but a shirt, walking along the middle of the road. The motorist stopped his car, got out, and went up to the man, and discovered that the fellow was walking in his sleep! He was unable to awaken him, and finding that the man was walking towards a canal, he turned him round and set him walking in the other direction. Then he went to find a policeman, and the two of them managed to get the man home. Fancy spending your sleeping time walking about—you might have to tell the boss that you were late for work because you walked so far in your sleep that you couldn't get back in time!

WEIRD INVENTION.

From time to time the Patents Office receive applications for patents for strange contrivances of different kinds, but surely one for which they have recently granted a patent must be the strangest of them all. This is a gigantic machine designed to remove dead pedestrians from the roads.

THE EDITOR.

PEN PALS

A free feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging topics of interest to each other. If you want a pen pal post your notice to The GEM LIBRARY, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Hedley Dixon, 22, North Road, Boldon Colliery, Co. Durham, wants to hear from stamp collectors.

D. Bradley, 79, Clifford Avenue, East Sheen, London, S.W.14, wants to hear from stamp collectors, ages 13-16.

Buckwell Graham, 62, Stewart Street, Ottawa, Canada, wants correspondents interested in stamp collecting and engineering, ages 13-15.

Lloyd Storr-Best, 4, Evelyn Terrace, Brighton, wants to hear from anyone owning a Pathe home cinema.

Trevor F. W. Hasleby, Minnivale, Western Australia, wants to get in touch with readers in Australia and New Zealand who are keen on the old copies of N.L.L. He also wants correspondents in Spain, Sweden, Papua, and Central Europe. All hobbies.

G. Rickaby, 13, Pine Street, Norton-on-Teess, Co. Durham, wants a correspondent in South Africa (12-13) who is interested in reading and drawing.

Miss Ethel Humphrey, 46, Oldfield Road, Willesden, N.W.10, wants girl correspondents who speak French, ages 13 upwards.

F. K. Hare, 146, Windsor Road, Slough, Bucks, wants correspondents interested in stamp collecting, ages 14-18, in connection with the Argosy Philatelic Club.

Albert F. Barnes, 21, De Beauvoir Square, Kingsland Road, Hackney, London, N.1, wants correspondents.

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FOILED BY FIGGINS!

(Continued from page 12.)

"I dare say I could manage it," he said at last.

"Right you are! I'm awfully hard-up just now," said Mellish. "One good turn deserves another, of course. If you oblige me I think I ought to oblige you."

Figgins silently handed over two shillings and sixpence.

"Thank you!" said Mellish, slipping the coins into his pocket and grinning. "I suppose it's all right for me to tell you, as you are in the Fourth. I don't hold with this idea of keeping secrets—it's caddish!"

"Well, you ought to know what's caddish, if anybody does," said Fatty Wynn contemptuously.

Mellish coloured.

"Oh, if you're going to put it like that I won't tell you anything!"

"Oh, yes you will," said Figgins, looking warlike.

"Well—er—they've got a professional conjurer, and New House chaps are to be invited at the last moment."

And Mellish walked away.

Figgins & Co. stared hard at one another.

"It's true enough," said Kerr. "We can easily make sure, though—we'll find out if Tom Merry has got the ball for a show, and we can speak to Professor Bulger, too. I could cut down to the village on my bike and take some spoof message to him. Of course, he doesn't know anything about House rows here, and he'd think I came from Tom Merry."

"That's a good dodge."

"Shall I buzz off, Figgy?"

"Yes, rather! And get back as quick as you can," said Figgins. "We've got to tackle this, and if it's the truth we've got to dish Tom Merry somehow."

And in five minutes Kerr was pedalling away towards Rylcombe, and Figgins was pacing his study in the New House, his hands deep in his pockets, and a heavy frown upon his brow, trying to think out some scheme for "dishing" Tom Merry, but without success.

Kerr dashed up to the gates of St. Jim's on his bicycle and jumped down. He pushed the machine over to Pratt, who was standing in the gateway with his hands in his pockets.

"Shove that in the shed, Pratt," he said. "I'm in a hurry!"

And he ran towards the New House, leaving the astonished Pratt to wheel the bicycle away.

Kerr ran into the New House and up the stairs and burst into Figgins' study. The great Figgins was still pacing the room with a clouded brow, and Fatty Wynn was thoughtfully cleaning out the last traces of a beefsteak pie from a dish.

Kerr came in panting, and dropped into a chair.

"You've been quick," said Figgins, stopping his tramp to and fro and staring at his breathless chum.

"I've bucked up," said Kerr. "It came to me all of a sudden, and I simply flew."

"Eh?"

"It was after I saw the professor!" gasped Kerr.

"What was?"

"That I thought of it."

"Thought of what?"

"The wheeze."

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Mick Ray, a young recruit of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, is on his way to Le Rosse to capture a gang of bandits.



Mick and Larry arrived at Le Rosse, to find that "Killer" Gaston and his bandits had already raided the small mining town, robbing the bank and shooting two men.



The bandits' trail led the Mounties into the Big Bear Hills, where they saw an Indian smoke signal. "Somebody warned Gaston that we're after him," said Larry.



Crack! There came the sound of a revolver shot, and Larry's hat was sent spinning from his head. Mick just saw the marksmen on the other side of the ravine.



The report of the shot had terrified Larry's horse, and after unseating its rider, it took a terrific leap and jumped right over the rocky gap.



The following morning found the Mounties at another part of the ravine. "Somehow we're going to get across it into Gaston's stronghold!" vowed Larry.



He flogged a lariat so that the noose settled over a tree stump on the other side of the ravine, and then fastened the rope to the pommel of Mick's horse.

(What will happen to Mick? Can he escape an



lice, is sent with Larry Hawkins to the mining town of
aws led by "Killer" Gaston.



ey camped on the edge of a forest.
e Larry cooked food, Mick scanned the
with his glasses, and suddenly he saw
reeman in the distance.

The Mounties trailed the horseman
to the edge of a ravine, but then the tracks
vanished. "Say, where's that guy gone
to?" asked Larry, in amazement.



ore shots came dangerously close to the
ants, who dropped to the ground and
ned the fire. "Guess this must be
on's secret hide-out!" said Larry.

When it was dark the Mounties crawled
away, but the harness on Mick's horse
rattled and betrayed their whereabouts,
and a volley of shots followed their retreat.



ing to the rope, Mick worked his
cross the ravine hand over hand. A
shot rang out, and as Larry collapsed
o ground an Indian strode into view.

At the same moment Mick was horrified
to see a bandit appear and start to cut the
rope which held him suspended over the
ravine. "This'll settle you!" hissed the bandit.

te? Don't miss next week's thrilling pictures.)

"Oh!"

Fatty Wynn looked up from the pie-
dish, which was almost as clean as a new
pin, and laid down his fork.

"What's that—a wheeze?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Go ahead," said Figgins, with great
relief.

Figgins was always the first to admit
the sagacity of his Scottish chum, and
he made no secret of the fact that he
always looked to Kerr to think of a way
out of a difficulty.

Kerr panted for breath. His face was
flaming red, and beaded with perspira-
tion. It was evident that he had
scorched wildly.

"You've seen the professor?" asked
Figgins.

Kerr nodded.

"It's all straight, what we've had from
Mellish?"

"Yes. I told the professor I'd looked
in to see if everything was arranged,"
said Kerr, with a breathless chuckle.

"That was the exact truth, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The professor never suspected, of
course, that I didn't come from Tom
Merry. He knew I was a St. Jim's chap.
It's all cut and dried. The professor is
to arrive here before eight, and Taggles
will show him to the School House. He's
coming in the Rylcombe cab and brings
his box of tricks with him."

"You said you had a wheeze?"

"It flashed into my mind after I left
him," said Kerr. "It's a bit risky."

"Never mind the risk."

"But it's stunning."

"Go ahead, kid!"

"Suppose," said Kerr, after a glance
at the door to make sure that it was
closed—"suppose somehow the professor
was stopped from coming—"

"I don't see what good that would
do," said Figgins. "Besides, they'd go
and look for him, and—"

"Fathead! That's not all!"

"Oh, go on, then!"

"We were going to give a giddy
dramatic show," said Kerr. "Well, we
can impersonate a portly professor with
a bald head quite as well as we can
impersonate Julius Caesar and Brutus—or
better—what?"

"My hat!"

"Suppose the professor were safely dis-
posed of, and another chap, made-up
exactly like the professor, came up to
the School House, eh?"

"Pshaw!"

"What price that?" demanded Kerr.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Figgins,
lost in wonder. "You are the chap for
ideas, Kerr. I've always said so, and I
say it again."

Kerr chuckled.

"If flashed into my mind all of a
sudden and I scorched back to tell you,"
he said. "I think it's ripping, myself."

"Right you are!"

"Do you see how gorgeous it would
be?" grinned Kerr. "One of us goes into
the School House as the professor to do
conjuring tricks!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And afterwards, when all's serene,
we'll let 'em know the facts."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You see, we score doubly. We shall
muck up the School House show, and we
shall be giving a dramatic entertainment,
after all—at least, an impersonating one."

"Splendid!"

"Ripping!"

Kerr grinned. He was evidently proud
of his idea.

"But who's to do the giddy impersonat-
ing?" said Fatty Wynn doubtfully.
"That's the rub."

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"Oh, Kerr," said Figgins heartily. "Kerr's the best actor in the House. I never met a chop who was a patch on him. Kerr's the man!"

"Right-ho! It's Kerr!"

But the Scottish junior shook his head.

"Hang it all!" said Figgins anxiously. "You can do it, Kerr. You know you can. I've seen you impersonate Lathom, and Skimpole, and a dozen others."

"They were about my height, though," said Kerr. "The professor is two or three inches the better of me."

"Oh, I forgot that!"

"You're the chap, Figgy."

Figgins started.

"But I'm not a patch on you for acting, old man."

"I know you're not," said Kerr, with friendly candour.

"But you're the man for this job. You see, it isn't acting at all; it's just going through the tricks, and wearing ordinary evening dress, with the addition of a little padding to fill you out and a bald head. I'll coach you in imitating the professor's voice—you'll only have to go a bit deeper, that's all. And remember, too, that the man's a stranger to nearly all the School House."

"That's true."

Kerr grinned.

"You'll make up as the professor beautifully, Figgy," he said. "We've got all the things among our props, too. We'll make you up, and leave you here, and you can slip out of the House in the dark while we are dealing with the professor."

"That won't be easy," said Figgins dubiously.

"It will be all right. We'll meet the cab a little way from the gates, and persuade the professor to alight and spend a bit of time in the old barn," grinned Kerr. "I'll take half a dozen fellows to help persuade him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The driver is certain to be old Cope, and he'll be blind and deaf for two bob," said Kerr. "Anyway, if necessary, we can capture the driver, too, and one of us can put on his hat and coat to drive the cab up."

"Good egg!"

And Figgins & Co. went seriously to work.

CHAPTER 9.

The Notice!

TOM MERRY raised his head from the paper he had been writing in his study in the School House, and chuckled softly.

"There! I think that's all right!" he remarked.

"Let's have a look at it," said Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry held up the paper, and the chums of the Shell read it out.

It ran as follows:

"NOTICE!

"This being the anniversary of the birthday of the respected master of the Fourth Form, a celebration has been arranged by his respectful pupils.

"The services of a distinguished professional man have been secured to provide a first-class entertainment, free to all St. Jim's.

"There will be no charge for admission, and both Houses are cordially invited to roll up in their thousands; but New House fellows will be expected to put on clean collars, and wash their faces, and generally make themselves look decent for once. After the entertainment, they may go back to their normal state as quickly as they please.

"The entertainment will take place in the lecture-hall of St. Jim's, kindly lent by the authorities for the purpose.

"Commence at eight o'clock precisely.

"Seats will be apportioned in order of arrival.

"(Signed)

T. MERRY.

"For the Celebration Committee."

"How's that?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Ripping!" said Lowther. "Splendid! It hits off the New House bounders beautifully, and says all there is to be said. I couldn't have done it better myself."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I'll take it and show it to the kids in Study No. 6," he remarked. "They may want to have a hand in drawing up the notice. There's no end to the cheek of these Fourth Form kids."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Tom Merry blotted the notice, and walked away to Study No. 6 with it.

There was a sound of excited voices as he drew near to the famous apartment.

"Undah the cires, Blake—"

"Rats!"

"I tell you—"

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"Bosh!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Poof!"

"I insist upon dwawin' up the notice. What is wequired for dwawin' up a notice of this sort is a fellow of tact and judgment."

"And I'm the chap!"

"Pway don't be widiculous, deah boy! I—"

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry affably. "Are you kids bothering about the notice for the entertainment?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You needn't trouble—"

"I insist upon twoublin'. As the only fellow here with anythin' like tact and judgment, I insist upon dwawin' up the notice!"

"Rats!" said Blake. "Why—"

"If you say wats to me—"

"Well, I do!"

"Order!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "It's no good bothering over drawing up the notice; that's done!"

The chums of the Fourth stared at him.

"Done!" said Blake.

"Yes; here it is!"

Blake pointed to the fire.

"Shove it on!" he said.

"Eh? Why?"

"That's the proper place for it. If you like, you can sit down and listen while we discuss the subject. Now—"

"Here's the notice—"

"If you think that a Shell duffer can draw up a notice of a Fourth Form affair—"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard Tom Mewwy as displayin' a feahful cheek!"

"What-ho!" said Digby and Herries together.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Gentlemen of the Fourth Form, I beg to have the honour of submitting this notice to your august approval," he said.

"Well, if you put it that way, perhaps we'll look at it," said Blake, mollified.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry laid the notice on the table.

"There you are!" he said.

The Fourth-Formers read through the notice, and chuckled at the reference to the New House in it. Blake nodded approval.

"I think that will do all right," he remarked. "I'll just go over it and knock it into shape a little, and write it out in a more decipherable hand, and then it will be O.K."

"Go ahead!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Pin it up on the notice-board when you've done. I'm going down to the lecture-room now to see that all's ready."

"We'll follow you when the notice is up."

Tom Merry quitted the study, and Blake looked over the notice again. He drew out a fresh sheet of manuscript, dipped his pen in the ink, and then paused.

"You may as well write this out, Dig," he remarked.

"You write a very plain fist. I'll go down and see how those Shell chumps are getting on in the lecture-room."

"My dear chap, you could write it out better than I could."

"You can do it, if you like, Gussy."

"Not at all, deah boy. It would be as twoublesome as witin' out a beastly imposition, you know."

"Look here—"

"Wats!"

Blake glanced at the notice again thoughtfully.

"I don't really see that it actually needs rewriting," he remarked. "Those who can't understand the writing can go without. Anyway, it will do!"

"Weally, Blake, I think that a Fourth Form notice ought to be written out by a Fourth Form chap, you know."

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

And Blake picked up the notice, and rose from his chair. He was not inclined to undertake unnecessary labour, and, as D'Arcy had said, it would be as much trouble as writing out an impot.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Rats!"

Jack Blake left the study, and the others followed him. In the Hall of the School House the notice was promptly pinned up on the public notice-board.

CHAPTER 10.

In Deep Disguise!

"**H**OW'S it getting on?" asked Figgins.

"Rippingly!"

Figgins & Co. were busy in their study in the New House. The blind was down, and the door was locked. Only a faithful few had been admitted to the secret as yet. The bulk of the New House fellows would



Professor Bulger uttered an exclamation of astonishment as he entered the woods and found himself standing face to face with his double. "Dear me!" he gasped. "Wh-what does this mean?" "How do you do?" said the disguised Figgins.

not know till the entertainment was on, or perhaps over. Figgins meant to run no more risks than were absolutely necessary.

Kerr, who was a master-hand at make-up, was hard at work now. Figgins, under his careful hands, was growing into a twin brother of Professor Bulger.

Fatty Wynn had just come in and reported about the notice on the board. Kerr chuckled in his quiet way.

"Behold the distinguished professional gentleman," he said.

"It's wonderful!" said Fatty Wynn.

And he sat eating doughnuts and watching the operation with wide-open eyes of admiration.

Kerr's touch was masterly.

And from the varied stock belonging to the New House Amateur Dramatic Society, he had plenty of materials for the purpose.

Figgins' healthy complexion was changed into the somewhat florid face of the portly professor, and the "bald head"—a skull cap—was fixed over his hair, with little tufts of hair above his ears, and at the back of his neck. Then a silk hat was added, and a pair of spectacles.

Kerr stood before a glass and told him to look.

Figgins staggered in his astonishment.

It was the face of Professor Bulger that was looking out at him.

"My only hat!" he gasped.

"It's ripping!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Now for the clothes," said Kerr.

Figgins was soon stripped. Then padding was fixed to his body, arms, and legs, and he was dressed in a suit of evening clothes. The resemblance then to the portly professor was astonishing.

"Ripping!" said Fatty Wynn again, finishing the last of the doughnuts.

"Blessed if I don't feel as if I were the giddy professor," grinned Figgins.

"It's only the voice now," said Kerr. "You needn't trouble so much to make it like the professor's as unlike your own. I've got his voice to a T, and I'll give you a course. Listen!"

Kerr had a wonderful knack of picking up voices, but Figgins was far less skilful. But after a quarter of an hour's practice, Kerr pronounced that he would do.

"Mind, keep on bunting in allusions to places you've travelled in," he said. "I noticed that the professor always did that, and the School House kids must have noticed it, too."

"Right you are!"

"I think you're about done now," said Kerr, looking at his watch. "A quarter past seven. Better go out on the road now, to make sure of being in time. It would be awful to miss the professor and muck up the jape, after all the trouble we've taken!"

"What-ho!"

"How ever am I to get out like this, though?" said Figgins. "It's not dark yet."

"That's all right—you can put on a big ulster to cover up the clothes," said Kerr. "We shall all be round you, you know, so nobody will get a close look."

"All right!"

Figgins put on his ulster, and his disguise was quite hidden save for his face.

He left the School House in the midst of half a dozen fellows who were in the plot, and they lost no time in getting down to the gates.

There was not much chance of their being observed by the School House fellows. They were too busy just then to think of the New House.

Tom Merry & Co. were making the arrangements in the lecture-room, and the other fellows were already crowding in to bag good seats. So were a crowd of New House fellows, too, for nobody intended to miss the entertainment.

Figgins & Co. passed out of the gates, and felt more easy in their minds as they entered the lane.

"All right here," said Pratt.

"Yes, rather! Now for the professor."

"Where shall we lay for him?" asked French.

"Some way from the school," said Figgins. "It's quite possible Tom Merry or some of his lot may come down to

the gates to meet the cab, you know. We want to be out of sight and hearing."

"That's so."

"He'll have to pass the bend in the lane coming from Rylcombe, and that's near the old barn, too, and a good spot to lay for him."

"Come on, then!" said Kerr.

And the New House juniors tramped down the lane.

In a clump of trees where the lane curved they took up their stand, and watched the road from Rylcombe.

Their hearts were beating with excitement now, especially Figgins'. They were fairly embarked upon the biggest jape of the season. But how would it turn out?

That was a question that remained to be answered.

"I'll touch you up now," said Kerr. "We may have a quarter of an hour to wait for the professor, and we shan't have much time to waste afterwards."

"Good!"

"Mind, don't you join in a tussle, if there is one; it will muck up the whole show."

Figgins grinned.

"I'll remember."

Kerr then added a few artistic touches. The juniors looked on in great admiration.

"It's ripping!" said Jimson. "Blessed if I shouldn't think it was the professor himself. I've only seen him once, but I should recognise him again—in Figgins. He'd take in the professor's own mother, if he'd got one."

"By George!" said Kerr suddenly. "There's no need to let the driver know, either. We can work it without that. I've just thought—"

"Hark!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn.

There was a rumble of wheels in the lane.

"That's the cab!"

"I know the rumble of the Rylcombe rattletrap," said French. "That's it. Yes, I can see it now, and old Cope driving!"

"Keep in cover, Figgy," whispered Kerr hurriedly. "Don't let the driver see you. We'll stop the cab. Leave it to me."

"Right you are!" said Figgins who had full faith in his Scottish chum. "Kerr's head cook and bottlewasher now, you chaps."

The cab rumbled slowly along.

It was nearly abreast of the clump of bushes when Kerr made a signal to his comrades, and they sprang out into the road.

Kerr threw up his hand.

"Halt!" he exclaimed.

Cope drew his willing horse to a halt. He stared at the

juniors, rather surprised by Kerr's dramatic command. He would not have been surprised if Kerr had said "Stop!" but "Halt!" had a flavour of the drama about it.

"Anything wrong, Master Kerr?" he asked.

"Oh, no!" said Kerr. "Only we want to speak to Professor Bulger!"

"Genelman wants to speak to you, sir."

Kerr signed to Jimson to take the horse's head, in case of accidents—though old Cope's horse was more likely to go to sleep than to bolt—and then he opened the door of the hack.

The professor looked out in surprise.

The New House juniors could hardly help chuckling as they looked at the portly professor, with his silk hat, so exactly like the disguised Figgins did he look.

"What's the matter?" asked the professor. "Ah, you are the lad who called on me a couple of hours ago, I think?"

"Yes, sir," said Kerr. "Would you mind stepping out of the hack a minute?"

"Why?"

"We want to speak to you, sir. It's about the entertainment, and awfully important."

The professor looked at his watch.

"I haven't any time to waste," he said. "Surely you can say what you want to say without my getting out of the cab."

"We should prefer you to get out, sir."

"Nonsense!" said the professor, beginning to suspect a boyish joke. "I have no time to waste. Drive on, please!"

"Keep hold of the horse, Jimmy!"

"What-ho!"

"Please step out, sir!" said Kerr politely. "I've told you that it's awfully important, and you can't go till the matter's settled."

The professor flushed angrily.

"Come, come; this is more than a joke!" he exclaimed.

"Quite so. Will you get out, sir?"

"I certainly will not."

"Then we shall have to help you out, sir," said Kerr, still politely. "We shall be very sorry if you force us to it. You see that there are six of us."

The professor did not see it, and he was growing very flustered and alarmed. Clever conjurer as he was, he was no athlete, and any one of the sturdy juniors would probably have been more than a match for him in a tussle.

"I—I will step out, certainly!" he said. "I—I do not understand this. You are not the boys who engaged me for this evening's performance."

"It's all right, sir; you won't be hurt, I assure you," said Kerr.

The professor stepped out of the hack.

"This way, sir."

"Why—why?"

"I will explain in a minute."

The professor hesitated, but five juniors were round him. He cast a glance up and down the lonely lane, and then followed Kerr.

He disappeared into the bushes, out of sight of the astonished driver.

Cope looked at Jimson, who was still holding the horse.

"Larks—eh?" he grinned.

"Just so," said Jimson. "Only a game."

The driver stared at the bushes, but he could not see into the thick foliage. He heard the professor utter an exclamation of astonishment, that was all.

Professor Bulger had a right to be astonished.

For, as he entered the bushes, in the dark, he found himself standing face to face with his double.

And the two professors stared at one another—one grinning and the other dumbfounded.

"D-d-d-dear me!" gasped Professor Bulger. "Wh-what does this mean? I—I—"

"How do you do?" said Figgins.

Kerr chuckled.

"It's all right, professor," he said. "It's only a lark. This chap is Figgins, of our Form, and he's got up."

"But—but—"

"It's a lark," explained Kerr. "It's a jape up against Tom Merry."

"Merry! That is the lad who engaged me!"

"Exactly. And Figgins is going instead of you to carry out the engagement."

The professor gasped for breath.

"I—I—"

"You see, sir, it's a jape!"

"I—I cannot consent. I—"

"You must, professor," said Kerr coolly. "We haven't taken all this trouble for nothing. Figgins is going on in the cab instead of you, and even the driver won't know the difference."

The professor simply snorted.

"I will not allow it."

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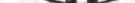
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"We shall be sorry to use violence, sir," said Kerr smoothly. "Don't force us to. You can see you have no chance."

The professor made a movement to rush back to the road. The juniors closed round him grimly.

Mr. Bulger looked extremely flustered.

"It's only a lark, sir!" exclaimed Figgins. "It's a jolly good one, and the fellows we're japing will take it like sportsmen when they know."

"But my fee—"

"Oh, that's all right," said Kerr. "You will receive that in any case. I believe you have thirty shillings still to come?"

"Exactly," said the professor, calming down a little.

"Well, here it is."

Kerr handed over thirty shillings, and the professor's face cleared very much as he received them.

"Thank you," he said. "But—"

"That sees you clear," said Kerr. "But we're going to pay you an extra fee of a guinea for the inconvenience we're putting you to."

Professor Bulger smiled.

"Well, I must say that is very fair," he remarked.

"Of course, sir; and it will be a ripping good joke, too. Don't you think so?" said Kerr insinuatingly.

The professor chuckled.

The promise of another guinea had evidently had the effect of awakening in him an hitherto unsuspected sense of humour.

"Well, it will be funny," he said.

"We shall have to ask you to spend the next couple of hours in the barn over yonder," said Kerr. "But a couple of these fellows will stay and keep you company, and there's a lantern and some newspapers, if you care to read. At half-past nine you will be handed the other guinea, and you can go where you like."

"But—"

"And you'll have the satisfaction of having assisted in a ripping jape."

"If I do not consent—"

"Oh, you will, sir."

"But if I don't—"

"Well, in that case we should have to tie you up in the barn, and you wouldn't get the extra fee, sir. But surely—"

"Well, I am in your hands," said the professor. "You will let it be known that I was not to blame for not fulfilling my engagement."

"Of course, sir. We'll tell the whole story. That's what we want."

"Then I consent—under compulsion, of course."

"Good enough," Kerr turned to Figgins. "Go it, Figgy!"

"Right you are!"

Figgins stepped from the bushes, in sight of the driver. Cope looked at him, without the least suspicion that it was not the real professor.

"Ain't 'urt, I 'ope, sir?" he remarked.

"Not at all," said Figgins. "It was only a joke."

And he got into the hack.

"Shall I drive hon, sir?"

"By all means."

Jimson stood away from the horse's head, and the animal was induced to get into motion again.

The hack rolled away towards St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 11.

The Professor's Performance!

TOM MERRY started as three-quarters rang out from the clock of St. Jim's.

"Time the professor was here!" he exclaimed.

"Let's go down to the gate and meet him," said Blake in a jival manner.

"Yaas, wathah!"

And half a dozen of the juniors trooped out of the School House.

It was quite dark now, but Taggles had been directed to leave the gates open till the cab from Rylcombe entered. As the juniors reached the gateway they heard a rumble of wheels on the road.

"That's the cab, deah boy!" said D'Arcy.

And the cab rolled into the gateway.

A florid face looked out.

"Good-evening, professor!" sang out the juniors.

"Good-evening, boys!"

"Drive on to the School House, Cope."

"Yes, Master Merry."

And the juniors walked with the hack to the School

House. There the professor alighted, with a black bag in his hand.

"Here you are, sir!" said Tom Merry cheerily. "This way!"

Professor Bulger the Second followed the juniors into the House. They passed the door of the lecture-room, and a heavy buzz of voices proceeded from it.

Tom Merry passed on with the professor, while the other fellows went into the hall.

"That is the room, sir," explained Tom Merry; "but you enter at the other end on the stage."

"Very good!"

And the professor followed the hero of the Shell into the small room which opened off the upper end of the lecture-hall.

"Booked to begin in ten minutes, sir," said Tom Merry, glancing at his watch. "We've got some sandwiches here, and tea ready to make, sir, if you feel peckish."

"Thank you, I'd like a cup of tea," said the professor.

"Right-ho!"

The fire was burning in the room, and the kettle was singing on the hob. A laid tray was on the table. Tom Merry made the tea quick enough, and the professor sat down to tea and ham sandwiches.

He sat with his back to the light, but it was not necessary. Tom Merry had not the slightest suspicion in his mind.

He looked after the professor hospitably.

Mr. Bulger the Second demolished three sandwiches and two cups of tea, and then declared himself satisfied, and rose from the table and opened his bag.

"I shall be on in a minute, now," he remarked.

"Nothing more I can do, sir?"

"No, thanks; I need no assistance. When I was in France—"

"Then I'll get into my place, sir," said Tom Merry. "I don't want to miss any of the show."

"Certainly! When I was in Japan—"

"Quite so, sir!"

And Tom Merry made his escape before the professor could relate any of the happenings he had experienced in Japan.

The hall was very full when Tom Merry entered it.

For the lecture it was designed for, or for the Greek play the seniors sometimes gave there, it was certainly never half so well filled.

The School House and New House had rolled up, if not in thousands, at least in strong force. Seniors were as well represented as juniors.

For the show was not an amateur performance, but a real professional one, which many of them would have paid money to see in Rylcombe, so they naturally rolled up to see it for nothing.

The masters, too, were there in force. Mr. Lathom, blushing a little—for he was a quiet and unassuming gentleman, not much accustomed to figuring in the public eye—sat in the place of honour aside from the crowds of juniors and seniors, and on either side of him were other masters—Mr. Bailton, Mr. Selby of the Third, Mr. Tutt of the Second, the mathematics master, and the German master. Kildare, the captain of the school, was there, with Darrell and Rushden and Knox, School House prefects; and with them sat Monteith and Baker and Dodd, New House prefects.

There were rows of other Sixth-Formers, too, and every seat was taken; and at the back of the hall were crowded the fags of the Third, Second, and First Forms, most of them standing.

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed with pride as he glanced over the audience. It was safe to say there never had been an audience so crammed before at St. Jim's—not even on Speech Day.

"They have wolloed up, haven't they?" said D'Arcy, as Tom Merry dropped into a seat beside him.

"Yes, rather; it's jolly good!"

"Well, they're going to get a really ripping show for nothing!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Get your hat ready, Gussy. The professor will want a for the hat trick!"

"Yaas; here it is, undah the seat, deah boy!"

"That trick will go like anything," said Blake. "Blessed if I see how he did it, though! He must be awfully clever. I couldn't see through him."

Then the professor came on to the stage and cut short the discussion.

Professor Bulger made his bow to the audience, and they greeted him with a general murmur of applause.

"Will any gentleman present oblige me by lending me his hat?" he asked, as soon as he had his arrangements made for the trick.

Up jumped Arthur Augustus at once. There wasn't any hesitation about the swell of the School House this time. His topper had been safely through the ordeal once, why not again?

He handed a really resplendent topper to the professor. "Thank you very much!" said the professor, taking it. "I suppose you are quite willing to trust this hat in my hands?"

"Yaas, wathah, sir!" "You are willing to take the risks?" asked the professor, with a smile.

"I am willin' to take all the wisks, sir," said D'Arcy cheerfully.

"Very good!" Arthur Augustus resumed his place, and the professor, with the hat in his hands, faced the audience.

"Some of the young gentlemen present saw my performance last evening," he remarked. "They saw me perform the hat trick. I shall now proceed to do so without the aid of the box."

"Bai Jove!" "Everything that is done will be done in full view of the audience," said the professor blandly.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, full of faith, watched the professor. Certainly it looked as if the topper was doomed this time. The professor proceeded to light a fire in it, as he had done the previous evening, but in a slightly different way.

The juniors knew that when a fire was lighted in a hat some sort of a skin had to be skilfully inserted first to guard it from injury, but there was evidently no illusion about what Mr. Bulger was now doing.

He called up a member of the audience to examine the hat, to ascertain that it was not protected in any way. And Lefevre of the Fifth performed the duty.



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"There's nothing in the hat?" asked the professor. "Nothing, sir," said Lefevre. "That's what I say—nothing at all!"

"Regardez," said the professor. He proceeded to pour paraffin into the hat. When the lining was soaked with it, he placed the hat upon its crown on the table, and applied a match.

There was a searing flame at once. "My only hat!" gasped Lefevre. "No deception about that. The blessed hat's alight!"

And he returned to his seat, lost in wonder. The professor allowed the hat to flame up for several moments, and then splashed water over it, and extinguished the flame.

A slight shade of anxiety was growing upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's aristocratic brow by this time.

It really seemed as if there were no illusion, and the professor had really set the silk topper on fire.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "Looks like business!"

"But he is an awfully clevah conjuwah, you know." "The topper's done for!" said Lowther obstinately.

"Wats!" said D'Arcy, but with less conviction than before.

"Gentlemen, you have seen me set fire to the hat," said the professor. "Now you will see me stamp upon it."

"Bai Jove!" Professor Bulger set the hat upon the floor, and lifted his right foot. It came down on the hat with a powerful stamp.

At once D'Arcy's topper was changed into an opera-hat. "Gwreat Scott!" gasped D'Arcy.

"My word!" murmured Digby. "He'll have to be a jolly clever conjurer to get that hat back into shape again!"

But the professor was not yet satisfied. He stamped upon the hat again and again, till it had lost all semblance of the shape of a hat.

Then he picked up the wreck, and, with a sweep of his arm, tossed it off the stage into the wings.

"Now, gentlemen, I will proceed with the paint trick—" D'Arcy rose to his feet, somewhat excited.

"But you haven't westored my toppah yet, pwofessah!" he exclaimed.

"Please do not interrupt—" "You have not returned my toppah—"

"I shall return your hat in good time, Master D'Arcy! I prefer to get through the tricks in a series, and then—"

"But my hat—" "Sit down!" roared a dozen voices.

"Weally, you know—" "Sit down in front!"

Blake dragged D'Arcy into his seat. "Shut up, you ass!" he muttered. "What do you mean by interrupting our own show?"

D'Arcy looked excited. "I feel that he has blundahed with the hat, deah boy!"

"Well, if he has, you don't want to give our own conjurer away before the New House cads, do you?" said Blake scathingly.

"Bai Jove, you know, I nevah thought of that!" "Then think of it now, and shut up!"

"But my toppah—" "Your topper's all right!"

"Don't think much of your conjurer, Blake," said Kerr, with a superior smile. "I'll bet he's ruined Gussy's hat!"

"Rats!" said Blake warmly. "The hat's all right!" "Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy, changing his tone at once, as soon as there was a suggestion of New House criticism.

"The hat's all right!" "You weren't so sure about that a minute ago!" grinned Kerr.

"Oh, wats!" "Order there! Shut up!" said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—" "Order! The professor's speaking—"

"I shall be obliged if any gentleman who wishes to assist me will step upon the stage," said Professor Bulger.

"Go it, Blake!" "Oh, all right!"

Jack Blake stepped on to the stage. The professor had a tube of colour and a hard brush in his hands.

"This is my famous paint trick!" he announced. "I paint the face of this gentleman—"

"Oh, do you?" exclaimed Blake, backing away hastily. And there was a laugh from the audience.

"I paint his face—" "Go it, Blake!"

"Buck up, kid!" "Of course, it is only a trick, Mr. Blake," said the professor, with an indulgent smile. "It appears to the audience, as well as to yourself, that I really paint your face. As a matter of fact, it is a trick."

"Oh, I see!" said Blake, only half-reassured.
"Stand still, please!"

The professor squeezed some colour out of the tube upon the brush, and proceeded to streak Jack Blake's face with bright scarlet.

In a couple of minutes the junior presented a really startling appearance, and the audience were grinning hugely.

Blake shifted uncomfortably under the infliction, and he wondered how the paint was coming off again. It seemed to him, as certainly as to the audience, that his face was really being painted.

"I—I say!" he muttered. "This stuff will come off, I suppose. Ow!"

There was a delighted giggle from the audience as Blake spluttered. Either accidentally or not, the professor had poked the brush into his mouth as he spoke.

"Grooh!" gasped Blake. "Ooch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I say— Ooch!"

Blake did not try to speak again. The professor was too clumsy with the brush, and the paint did not taste at all nice.

"There," said the professor at last, "that is the celebrated Paint Trick, gentlemen, as performed before all the crowned heads of Europe. You all see that the youth has been painted."

"What-ho!"

"You are satisfied that there is no deception?"

"Oh, yes; rather!"

"Very good! When the paint is quite dry, I shall perform the second part of the trick. Pray sit down, my lad, for a time."

"But—"

"The paint must dry before I remove it."

"But—"

"Here is a chair."

The professor pushed Blake into a chair on the stage, and the junior sat down, his face glowing scarlet, and his feelings too deep for words.

CHAPTER 12.

Something Like a Jape!

"NOW, gentlemen," said the professor, turning blandly to the audience, the next trick is the Famous Knot Trick. I will tie up two persons together with this rope in a way that will make it impossible for them to get apart. The second part of the trick is to make the rope fall asunder by a wave of my magic wand."

"Bai Jove, that sounds vewy good!"

"Yes, rather!"

"I require the assistance of two members of my audience," said the professor. "Will you oblige me, Messrs. Merry and Noble."

Tom Merry and Kangaroo looked at one another. They could not refuse, and they rose from their places and went on the stage.

The professor uncoiled several lengths of thin and strong rope.

"Blessed if I like this!" Kangaroo whispered to Tom Merry.

"Just what I was thinking."

"I don't see how he's to get that colour off Blake's chivvy, even if he makes Gussy's topper all right again."

"Same here."

"I—I suppose he isn't a fraud!" muttered Kangaroo uneasily.

"Well, you saw his show last night, didn't you?"

"Yes; he did everything he undertook."

"Anyway, we couldn't give him away now, even if he was a fraud," said Tom Merry, in a whisper. "It would be a rotten come-down and spoil everything."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"I will now proceed to tie up these two youths," said the professor. "Mr. Merry, will you stand on your hands? Mr. Noble, hold his ankles close to your face."

Somewhat reluctantly the two juniors got into the strange position.

(Continued on the next page.)

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Then the professor bound the rope round their bodies, tying them so that they were bound to one another.

There was certainly no deception about it.

The two juniors, with Tom Merry head-downwards, and Kangaroo facing him, were fastened up as fast as they could be. They could not move a limb.

"There!" said the professor. "Now try to get loose."

Tom Merry and Kangaroo tried hard enough. But there was no loosening the grip of the ropes.

"You cannot get loose?"

"No!" gasped Tom Merry, his face looking rather red.

"Very good! Gentlemen, are you satisfied?"

"Yes!" shouted the audience.

"Very good! I will now proceed with the next trick—"

"Here, finish this blessed trick first!" shouted Kangaroo.

"My dear lad—"

"Let us free!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

The professor shook his head.

"I am going to finish up all the tricks together," he said reprovingly. "I trust you will not interfere with the proper sequence of my tricks."

"But—but this is jolly uncomfortable!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Never mind," said Kangaroo, who was in a more comfortable position, and didn't mind, "we can stick it. We're not so much in the pickle as Blake, anyway."

"Very good!" said the professor blandly. "I will now proceed with another famous rope trick, as performed before all the crowned heads of Europe with marked success. I shall require two persons to take part in this trick. Who offers?"

After what had happened to D'Arcy's topper, to Jack Blake, to Tom Merry and Kangaroo, no one was eager to offer his services.

The professor gazed at an unresponsive audience.

"I should be glad of the assistance of two youths," he said. "I will call them by name, as they are too modest to volunteer. Mr. D'Arcy—and, oh, Mr. Blake, on the stage here will make the other one!"

Gussy reluctantly rose from his place and went up on the stage. The audience looked on very keenly.

"Please stand with your right leg raised as high as you can get it," said the professor, to D'Arcy. "I want to rope it to your body. It will perhaps be a little uncomfortable, but it won't be for long."

Arthur Augustus nobly tried to do as he was bid, but he succeeded in losing his balance three times before the professor could rope him up. Loud laughter came from the audience.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Gussy!"

When D'Arcy's right leg had been tied to his body, the professor turned to Jack Blake.

"Now, I want you to lie on the stage, face downwards, with your knees bent backwards. I wish to tie you up also."

Blake hesitated as he looked lamely at the awkward positions of the other fellows. But they had backed up, and so it was up to him to do the same, much as he would like to refuse. He lay face downwards on the stage, and the professor then bound his legs to his body.

The professor surveyed the juniors with much satisfaction. The attitudes the four fellows were now in were so utterly ridiculous that the whole audience shrieked.

The professor stepped into the wings, and returned with a large sheet of cardboard, which he hung up on the curtains at the back of the stage, showing the blank side to the audience.

"Gentlemen," said the professor, "kindly look at these youths."

The audience were looking, and rocking with laughter.

"Remain in those positions until I return," said the professor. "When that card is turned round to the audience the whole trick is explained." And he disappeared into the wings.

As he left the stage, Binks, the page-boy, came on, and standing on a chair, he swung the sheet of cardboard round. Then there was a gasp through the hall, and a frenzied yell from the New House juniors.

For the sheet bore the following inscription in large letters:

"PROFESSOR BULGER,

alias

GEORGE FIGGINS,

says

EVER BEEN HAD?

and

GOOD-BYE-EE-E!"

"My only hat!"

"My word!"

"Great Scott!"

"Done!"

"Spoofoed!"

With these wild ejaculations, and many others of the like kind, the School House fellows stared at the card.

Slowly they realised it.

That was why only the first half of each trick had been performed. The second half never was to be performed.

"Cut us loose!" howled Tom Merry, who had heard the message read out. "Go after him! Collar him! Bump him! Squash him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the New House.

The audience shrieked. Even the School House part of it could not help yelling. Seniors and juniors yelled in concert.

The Form masters tried to remain grave, but they could not; the merriment was irresistible. Mr. Railton laughed heartily, and Mr. Selby, who seldom laughed, was shrieking now. Mr. Lathom almost wept with mirth, and he had to take off his spectacles and wipe them, and he was shaking so much with laughter that he could not put them on straight again.

Some of the School House juniors jumped up on the stage and untied Tom Merry, Kangaroo, Blake, and Gussy. Others rushed in search of the bogus professor.

But he was not to be found.

The redoubtable Figgins was not likely to linger.

He was gone.

The conjuring entertainment was at an end. The audience were almost in convulsions.

Tom Merry & Co. were furious, and the entertainment would probably have ended in a battle royal, but for the presence of the masters and prefects. Battle was impossible, and when the audience broke up the New House fellows marched off, yelling with laughter.

The School House yelled, too, all excepting Tom Merry & Co. They did not feel like laughing, especially Blake, who was vainly scraping all the paint off his face.

Outside the School House, in the moonlight, a crowd of New House fellows gathered, and the roars of laughter drew Tom Merry & Co. to the door.

There was Figgins, alias Professor Bulger.

Still in disguise, he was hoisted on the shoulders of Kerr and Wynn, and surrounded by a yelling crowd.

"Who's Cock House at St. Jim's?" roared Kerr.

And the crowd took up the yell.

"New House! New House!"

"Who's been spoofoed and done and diddled?"

"Tom Merry!"

"Three cheers for Figgins!"

"Hip-hip-hurrah! Figgins to the fore! Figgy for ever!"

"Hear us smile!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the New House juniors marched off with their redoubtable chief shoulder-high, yelling; and the School House fellows were laughing too much to even think of pursuing them. Tom Merry & Co. looked at one another with sickly smiles. They were all very red, though none so red as Blake. He was scarlet still.

"We've been spoofoed," said Tom Merry at last.

"Yaas, wathah! My hat is wuined!"

"Look at my face," said Blake.

"I wonder where the professor is," remarked Kangaroo—"the real professor, I mean?"

"Blessed if I know or care!" said Tom Merry. "What does it matter? We've been done, fooled by Figgins, and the New House have given the giddy entertainment after all, and scored all along the line."

"It's wotten!"

"Beastly!"

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"Never mind!" he exclaimed. "It was a good jape, and we'll get even with the New House yet. We'll make Figgins & Co. sit up soon."

And the School House juniors vowed that they would. But for the present Figgins & Co. triumphed, and the New House fellows gloated.

THE END.

(Fun and football are the star features of next week's ripping yarn of the chums of St. Jim's. Look out for 'D'ARCY'S DUD ELEVEN!'—it's a winner!)

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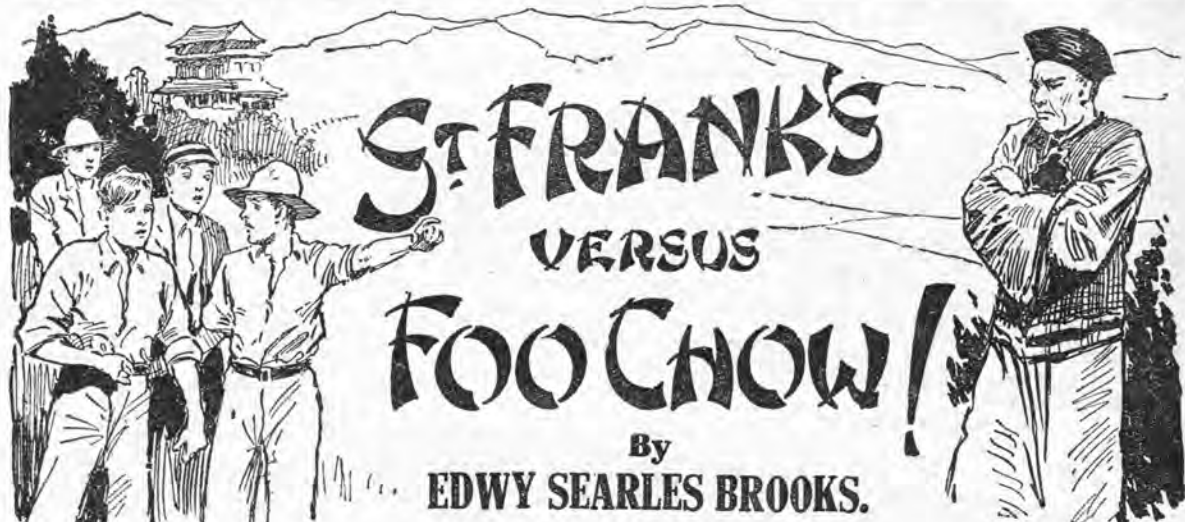


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THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

Dr. Foo Chow, a war lord of Inner China, kidnaps Yung Ching, of St. Frank's, his object being to compel the boy's father, Yung Li Chang, to surrender up the rich province over which he rules. A holiday party from St. Frank's come to the help of Ching and eventually rescue him after they have fallen into the hands of Foo Chow. War then breaks out between Foo Chow and Yung Li Chang. The St. Frank's party escape and recapture the steam yacht which brought them to China. But danger threatens from Foo Chow's yacht, and hurried preparations are made for a night raid!

The Raiding Party!

WITHIN five minutes the Wanderer was quietly bustling with added life. Already the engineers were working against time to repair the damage to the engine-room. And now the other members of the crew were called upon to do their share. Not that they needed much urging.

Even the stewards were eager to volunteer their services for this night adventure. But there were enough men without them—trustworthy sailors, all of whom were powerful swimmers.

It wasn't dark even yet, although the glow of daylight was fading in the distant sky. The whole surroundings seemed singularly peaceful, but the distant booming of gunfire told its own story. Somewhere across that rugged landscape the armies of Yung Li Chang were penetrating deeper and deeper into Foo Chow's territory.

"Hallo, sir! Anything in the wind?" asked Dick Hamilton, as he came across Mr. Stokes hurrying along the deck.

The young Housemaster paused.

"You're too cute, my son!" he said severely.

"I suppose that means there is?" said Dick.

"As a matter of fact, yes," growled Barry Stokes. "I wasn't going to tell any of you youngsters about it, but you've trapped me. Just a bit of a raid on the Dragon by some of our men. This is strictly in confidence, and I'm trusting you to keep it mum."

"Right you are, sir," replied Dick. "I understand. I'd love to go; but I'll be a martyr and stay behind. The other fellows would only be jealous if I went without them. And I suppose they'd be justified, too. I thought we should be well under steam before now, though," he added.

"Yes, just a little trouble down in the engine-room," said Mr. Stokes carelessly. "Well, don't forget to keep it quiet, Dick."

"All right, sir. Where's the guv'nor?"

"You'll find him down in the laboratory. I oughtn't to have told you that, though," he added. "Still, I suppose you're in a different position to the others."

Mr. Stokes hurried off before he questioned further, and Dick grinned to himself, and made his way down to the laboratory, and found the door locked. This "lab" had indeed been fitted up mainly for Lee's benefit, for Lord Dorrmore was quite lavish where his yacht was concerned, and it was provided with practically every innovation conceivable.

"Who is there?" came Nelson Lee's voice curtly.

"Only me, sir."

"All right, young 'un!"

The door was unlocked, and Dick Hamilton went in.

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For a moment he fell back, fanning his face.

"Phoo! I say, guv'nor, what an awful niff!" he protested. "What on earth have you been doing? These chemicals are enough to kill you! Fancy you making experiments at a time like this!"

"It is not quite so incongruous as you might think!" retorted Nelson Lee. "As for the unpleasant odour of the chemicals, that is a minor point compared to their effectiveness. They are going to be very useful later on."

"Yes, sir; Mr. Stokes told me," grinned Dick.

"Oh, he did! That was very unwise—"

"But I guessed it first, guv'nor," interrupted Dick. "I promised him I'd keep it mum, so you needn't worry. But what's the exact reason for raiding the Dragon? Aren't we satisfied with the Wanderer?"

"Perfectly satisfied; and that is the main reason why we are going on this adventure," replied Lee. "We shall disable the enemy's guns, my lad. They are a deadly menace to us, particularly as we are compelled to remain at anchor until the engines are repaired. At any moment those brutes may open fire on us. We can't leave such a thing to chance."

Dick's eyes were gleaming.

"Good luck to you, sir!" he said. "I wish I could come; but I won't be unreasonable."

And Dick Hamilton went out of the laboratory.

A few hours later everything was nearly ready for the raid. The final preparations were made far below, in the very depths of the yacht. Nelson Lee had chosen a storage chamber for the purpose—one that had two wide portholes close to the water level. From here it would be possible to slip noiselessly into the water and swim off. So even if there were secret watchers on the look-out, they would need to have very sharp eyes to detect the move.

Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrmore, Barry Stokes, Mr. Stewart—the yacht's first officer—and twenty picked men were in readiness. There were two dozen altogether, not counting Umlo, who was practically as good as another half-dozen on his own. They were all attired in swimming costumes, and each wore a belt containing revolvers and cartridges. These latter would be none the worse for their immersion, since they were watertight.

"We appear to be in luck," Nelson Lee was saying. "Everything remains quiet, and before very long we shall be in the midst of this affair. Are all the instruments ready, Mr. Stewart?"

"Everything, sir," said Mr. Stewart. "If we don't make a mess of those guns, I shall be a Dutchman!"

The big storage chamber was reeking with the smell of chemicals, and a large pot stood upon an upturned barrel with a brush in it. The pot contained a murky-looking paste.

"An' is this stuff goin' to do the trick, old man?" asked

Dorrie, as he gazed dubiously into the pot. "It doesn't look particularly luminous to me. It's not like the stuff I've seen before."

"It's an invention of my own," replied Lee.

"Then it's bound to be pretty horrible," said his lordship. "By the way, does it taste as bad as it smells? If so, I'd rather not have any on my handsome visage. I hope it doesn't smart much."

"The stuff is perfectly harmless, and is only effective after it has been wetted. As it dries, the effectiveness disappears, but is instantly renewed upon re-wetting."

"How long does it remain moist, then, Mr. Lee?" asked Barry Stokes.

"Quite long enough for our purpose, I fancy," replied Lee grimly. "Twenty minutes, at least—and even after that it will only begin to slightly fade in luminosity. Oh, you need have no fear that it will not be effective. The stuff has the added advantage that we can slip into the water unseen."

"Gad, that's a bright feature!" said Dorrmore, with a nod. "It would rather give the game away if we were all seen tumblin' into the river. Well, who's first? Are you goin' to be the artist, Lee? You can make me look as ghastly as you please. You won't need to do very much to me to secure that effect, anyhow!"

Nelson Lee was indeed the artist. One by one the members of the raiding party were dealt with. The Housemaster-detective made no pretence of performing any elaborate painting. In most cases he daubed his subjects so that they would resemble skeletons; only a few deft touches were needed to gain this effect. But here, under the brilliant electric light, the whole thing seemed absurd. A few smears of the brownish paste down the limbs of the men—a few ribs over the chest—one or two smears over the face. They looked comic, rather than horrifying.

"We're trusting to you, sir, that everything'll be all right," remarked one of the men, as he gazed down at himself. "Strike me! I don't look as if I should scare a five-year-old kid!"

"The effect will be very different in the dark," promised Lee. "In any case, it is only an experiment, and we must all be prepared to fight every inch of the way. Take no notice of the noxious odour; it will cause no ill effect, although our skins may smart for some little time, particularly upon contact with the water."

Within five minutes everything was ready, and the raid upon the Dragon was imminent.

Demons of the Night!

THE Dragon lay dark and silent.

According to every outward appearance she was utterly deserted by her crew, and by every living thing. Her decks were empty, and she lay moored against the quay like a ghost-ship.

But actually things were very different.

Indeed, the wisdom of Lord Dorrmore's suggestion was far greater than anybody on the Wanderer realised. For even now—precisely as Nelson Lee had feared—grim, sinister activities were afoot.

Dark figures flitted about the deck on the Chinese yacht—silent, stealthy, and shadowy. Although the vessel seemed so deserted, her main deck was actually peopled by scores of Dr. Foo Chow's trained men. They had received their orders—they were about to put these orders into execution!

Men were working silently at the forward gun, training it into direct line with the Wanderer's hull, close against the water-line. Officers were giving orders, and men were obeying. But everything was being done so stealthily that no sound could be heard, or no motion seen. The darkness enshrouded these operations.

So it was the intention of the Chinese to blow the Wanderer to fragments in one appalling burst of fire. They intended no warning to be given. They were making sure that their victims should not have any chance of escape. It was fortunate, indeed, that the holiday party was preparing to take the bull by the horns!

Failure to act would certainly have meant disaster for the whole party. Foo Chow's officers knew well enough that a raid would be costly, and even fruitless. They could throw hundreds of men into the attack upon the British yacht, and all would be beaten back. And Foo Chow no longer desired to have these white people alive. His one wish now was to kill them—to destroy them utterly and completely, so that the world would know them no more.

In this way he would ensure silence as to his methods. The Chinese Republican Government would never learn the exact details of these events if the Wanderer and her occupants were sent to the bottom of the river.

One shot would be sufficient to cause a gaping wound, to create a death-dealing gash. And two or three following shells would complete the ghastly work. Within five minutes it would be all over. It was Nelson Lee's fear of this possibility that had given rise to the raid.

But even Lee did not guess how fine the margin was!

Nobody saw those black figures slip into the water from the Wanderer's porthole—nobody heard them. When it came to silence and stealthiness, the Britons were the equal of the Chinese.

A look-out man was stationed in the bows of the Dragon, others were placed at various points along the rail. Perhaps the Chinamen were half expecting some sort of attack. At all events, they were leaving nothing to chance.

And one of these look-out men suddenly drew in his breath. He stared down at the silently running water of the river as it flowed relentlessly past the yacht's plates. It seemed to the Chinaman that there was a mysterious sort of reddish glow in the water—down beneath the surface. The man knew this river in all its moods, but he had never seen such an effect as this.

He stared harder, and then uttered a low cry.

There was something rising out of the river—a terrifying, skeleton-like creature, which was not merely inhuman, but blazing with lurid flames, and surrounded by a haze of smoky radiance.

And this monster of the river, this flaming thing which came from the water itself, was swarming with deadly agility up the overhanging rope.

The Chinaman was struck dumb for a moment, and then he saw other demons—many of them—and all were climbing up the yacht's side.

The look-out man ran wildly. He charged full tilt into an officer. Other look-out men were running back, too, and several of the Chinese who had glanced overside caught the panic.

And well they might!

The Dragon was being attacked by these flaming devils from the river! Never for an instant did the Celestials believe that they were human creatures. Superstitious to a point of fanaticism, they were filled with the utmost horror. They had always known that the river was peopled by demons. Were not the occasional devastating floods caused by the wrath of the river gods? Were not the tremors of an earthquake created by the earth demons, far below the surface?

And here were these fiends coming up from the river to exact some vengeance or other.

Even white people would have been startled at these grotesque figures which were now climbing over the rails. In the intense darkness they stood out luminously. Not greenish, in the way of commonplace luminous paint, but lurid and red. And each skeleton figure was surrounded by a halo of misty vapour. The effect was terrifying in the extreme.

And yet it was really a simple effect. For the water, acting upon that paint, caused it to send forth constant clouds of vapour—luminous vapour, which looked for all the world like flames.

Screaming now, and panic-stricken to the last degree, the Chinese ran helter-skelter over every part of the deck. And one of the demons—a greater one than the others—was already doing deadly havoc with a burning, glowing weapon which resembled a spear.

Man after man was struck down as he fled, screaming. Others hurled themselves headlong into the river. The demons were running over the decks madly, leaping high, and making wild and horrifying sounds.

Within five minutes not a single Chinaman was left, for even the officers had joined in the general panic. Some had fled below, and were skulking in the cabins behind locked doors, trembling and faint with fright. But the decks were cleared.

"By gad, it's worked!" said Lord Dorrmore, breathlessly. "Barry, old man, you're a genius! You deserve diamond-studded medals for this suggestion of yours!"

"Yes, it's proved a success!" breathed Nelson Lee, with great thankfulness. "But now we must follow up our advantage. By Heaven, we were not a minute too soon, either! These yellow devils were preparing for our destruction."

Mr. Stewart and his men were at work already.

There were sounds of metallic clangings, and there were experts on the work, too. For this raiding party contained three skilled engineers—ten who were experienced gunners, too. They knew exactly what to do with this modern ordnance.

And while the working party disabled the heavy guns, all the others capered round the decks in the same mad way as they had started. They had no desire to fight against impossible odds, and it was better to scare the Chinamen off. Scores of Celestials who had been on the quay had bolted long since.

"Wau! Is this not a pitiful pretence, Umtagati, my master?" growled Umlooi, in disgust, as he recognised the features of Nelson Lee through the glow of the luminous paint. "I am sick at heart. For did I not come hither to fight? And have I not been basely fooled? These yellow

sons of dogs have fled like the cravens they are! I am sad, my master."

"I know it has been a disappointment for you, Umlosi, but we came here to wreck these guns—not to kill men," said Lee quietly. "Let us be satisfied that we have achieved our great object. Thou art thirsty for blood, but we desire naught but the end we seek."

Umlosi grunted.

"If thou art satisfied, Umtagati, 'tis well," he rumbled.

Mr. Stewart came up, breathless.

"All clear, sir!" he panted. "If they can use these guns now, they'll be magicians! They'll never be any use until they've been overhauled in an ordnance works. Will you give the order, sir?"

"Yes!" breathed Lee. "Splendid, Mr. Stewart! Our good fortune in this affair is almost too good to be true. Let us get back to the Wanderer without a minute's delay."

Lee uttered a piercing cry, thrice repeated. It was a signal that had been prearranged, and at the sound of it every member of the raiding party ran to the rail, and dived headlong into the river. And so the lurid demons vanished, as mysteriously and as dramatically as they had appeared.

Aboard the Wanderer, men were waiting—men who had been told off for this task. Ropes were being held over-side, and as the swimmers went down with the flow of the river, they grasped at these friendly ropes.

There was not one man lost. All members of the party arrived safe and unscratched. From every point of view, the raid had been a brilliant success.

Early the next morning the Wanderer, her engines now repaired, sailed away up-river into Hu Kiang, ruled over by Yung Ching's father, Yung Li Chang. She came to anchor later in the day opposite a large town, and Nelson Lee went ashore. He succeeded in getting word conveyed to Yung Li Chang of the St. Frank's party's position, and that afternoon the war lord of Hu Kiang came aboard.

After an exchange of greetings and explanations, a consultation was held in the captain's cabin, and Handforth was called in to give the exact position of the place where Yung Ching was in the safe keeping of Ah Fong. Yung Li Chang was quite optimistic about having his son safe in his own hands before many hours had passed. His armies were sweeping all before them, and Yang Fu would soon be taken, he said.

He also gave it as his opinion that, after a few days, it would be quite safe to sail down-river, except that it would be necessary to have a pilot aboard to navigate the ship through the dangerous rocks and channels below Foo Chow's palace. He offered to send a man aboard, who would pilot the Wanderer down to Yang Fu, where Yung Ching would be waiting to pick up the ship and return to England.

Yung Li Chang then took his departure, and a few hours later a pilot was brought out to the ship.

The Wanderer stayed at anchor for three days—peaceful days for the St. Frank's party after their exciting adventures—and then commenced the journey down to Yang Fu, en route for England and home. But the party were to experience many more thrilling adventures before they left China for good.

Archie, the Peacemaker!

PHIPPS halted in the doorway of the state-room and winced.

It was a quiet afternoon about a week after the St. Frank's party had left Hu Kiang for the journey home.

Archie Glenhorne's valet had come to the state-room in response to a summons, brought by a steward. And as he stood there in the doorway, he perceptibly winced. And at the same time his manner became cold and frigid.

"You sent for me, sir?" asked Phipps.

"What-ho!" observed Archie Glenhorne, the swell of the St. Frank's Remove. "What-ho! So here we are, Phipps! You have trickled down, I presume, in answer to the young master's S O S?"

"Precisely, sir."

"Well, what about it, laddie?" asked Archie, as he drew himself up. "I mean, the general effect, and all that sort of thing. Not dashed bad, eh? In fact, priceless, what?"

"Quite so, sir," said Phipps woodenly.

"Good gad!" protested Archie. "That is to say, odds Arctic blasts and blizzards! Every dashed word you utter, laddie, has about ten icicles hanging to it! I mean to say, you're absolutely covered with frost as you stand there! What's the exact idea of this frightful chilliness?"

"I beg your pardon, sir!" said Phipps. "It was not my intention to hurt your feelings. But the necktie, if I may mention it—"

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"Absolutely not!" said Archie curtly. "I refuse to listen to any criticisms whatever. I refuse to hear your opinions! And that, Phipps, is absolutely that! What's wrong with the dashed necktie, anyhow?"

"But you just forbade me to pass any opinion—"

"This chunk of good old neckwear actually belongs to Brent," explained Archie. "I thought it was somewhat juicy, so the dear old lad bunged it across, as it were. I mean to say, pretty ripe, what? A jocular assortment of colour, and all that. Why, dash it, I thought you would be dumb with joy at the very sight of it, old cheese! That's absolutely why I sent for you!"

Archie was distinctly upset. It was perfectly preposterous the way Phipps always put the veto on anything bright and jazzy. The genial ass of the Remove had a weakness for startling colours, and he had never been able to resist the temptation of highly decorative ties. Left entirely to himself, he would have outrivalled the gaudiness of a peacock.

The necktie in question was of bright blue, with curious orange and crimson ornamentations which somewhat resembled microbes, as viewed through a microscope. To add to the general effect, there were bars of green at regular intervals. In Archie's opinion, the thing was a dream. In Phipps' opinion it was a nightmare.

"Let me urge you, Master Archie, to remove the—the atrocity at once!" said Phipps firmly.

"The what, dash you?"

"The atrocity, sir."

"I mean to say—"

"There is no other word to describe it, sir," said Phipps grimly. "I am rather amazed that Master Brent should own such a vile abomination. He has always revealed a certain amount of taste."

Archie started.

"Well, as a matter of absolute fact, the dear old lad was about to shove it through the porthole when I rescued it," he explained feebly. "A brand-new necktie, I mean! Said it affected his eyesight, and all that sort of rot. A present from one of his aunts, or one of those dear old souls. Anyhow, Alf kindly presented it to the young master."

"I am relieved to learn, at least, that Master Brent appreciated the horror of the thing, sir," said Phipps. "If I had my way, the manufacturers of these appalling conceptions would be sentenced to penal servitude. They are a menace to civilisation, sir."

"Who? The ties, or the good old manufacturers?"

"Both, sir."

Archie wavered. He had been slightly dubious from the very start, and his valet's firm attitude caused him to hesitate. After all, seen in a certain light, the thing was undoubtedly lurid.

"Oh, well, if you absolutely think—"

"I do, sir," said Phipps earnestly. "I might mention that Miss Marjorie has a wonderful taste in colour, sir. It would pain her exceedingly if she saw you in that riot-of-nastiness. I might add, sir, that my head is already beginning to throb."

"Good gad!" said Archie blankly. "Dear old Marjorie, what? Laddie, you're absolutely right. Why, the dear girl would simply expire on the spot. Away with the beastly thing, Phipps, and give me the mauve silk!"

"Thank you, sir!" said Phipps gratefully. "But might I venture to suggest the smoke-blue in preference to the mauve?"

Phipps had his own way—as usual. At various intervals, Archie would attempt to assert his own authority, but it was very seldom that he prevailed. Sometimes he would remain obstinate for a few hours, but Phipps generally won.

And this afternoon Archie was certainly looking rather wonderful. His white flannels were spotless, and from head to foot he was a picture of immaculate perfection. Not that there was any particular reason for this display.

The St. Frank's holiday party was confined to the yacht, and there was a strict order in force, to the effect that nobody could go ashore. The city of Yang Fu stretched out in the afternoon sunlight, dusty and blistering with heat. And Lord Dorrimore's party lounged under the Wanderer's canvas awnings, or rested in the sumptuously appointed lounges and state-rooms.

Until recently, Yung Fu had been the capital of Dr. Foo Chow's slave-ridden territory. But now it was in the hands of Yung Li Chang and his army, and the population appeared to welcome the change with joy.

War was still going on, but to the St. Frank's fellows everything now appeared normal. They were just Dorrie's guests again, enjoying the many luxuries of the yacht. After their recent imprisonment it seemed that complete freedom was already with them.

Archie sallied out of his state-room in all his glory, and made his way along the carpeted corridor towards the main staircase.

"The good old engineers appear to be making repairs, and so forth," he murmured, as he heard thumps and thuds. "Steam-hammers, by gad! I mean to say, it seems dashed rummy—" He paused, puzzled, and stood listening. "Odds mysteries and riddles! The chappies appear to be mangling the old machinery in one of the state-rooms!"

The thuds were undoubtedly emanating from a private cabin, and Archie Glenthorne gave another start when he recognised which cabin it was.

He moved forward, and drew opposite the door. That state-room was in the possession of the celebrated Handforth & Co., of Study D.

"What-ho!" remarked Archie sadly. "Trouble in the family, what? It appears that Handy is wrecking the happy home. Good gad! He'll sink the ship at this rate!"

Without warning the door of the cabin flew open, and Walter Church of the Remove dodged out. He came backwards, and didn't see anything of Archie—who only just stepped back in the nick of time.

"I say, dash it—I mean—" he began feebly. Church took no notice. He was a partial wreck, one sleeve being torn away, his collar had vanished, and there was a significant puffiness in the region of his left eye.

"Chuck it, Handy!" he gasped. "Look here, you ass, chuck it—"

"That's just what I'm doing!" roared Handforth, whizz!

Something shot through the open doorway with terrific speed, and Church ducked with the adroitness of long practice.

Squelch!

Archie Glenthorne, not being so adept in the art of dodging Handforth's missiles, received a horrible mass of something in the very centre of his face. In Study D at St. Franks such incidents as this were of daily occurrence.

"Missed me!" said Church sourly.

"Gug-gug-gurrrh!" moaned Archie, in absolute horror.

He dimly realised that he had been struck by an over-ripe fruit—and he had a vague idea that it was an ancient and defunct orange. But Archie wasn't worrying much about his face. That, after all, could be easily washed. But his immaculate clothing was utterly ruined in appearance.

Through a misty, watery haze of orange-pulp, he gazed down at himself. His shirt was a horrible mess, his jacket was stained and blobbed with sundry chunks of squelchiness, with a sundry pip clinging here and there. His beautiful bags were streaked and ghastly to look upon.

"Good shot, Handy!" exclaimed McClure from inside the cabin.

"Odds disasters and catastrophies!" Archie moaned. "I'm absolutely un-put! I mean to say, Phipps! S.O.S! Help! Rally round, dash it! Archie is positively in distress!"

"Who told that dummy to interfere?" demanded Edward Oswald Handforth curtly, as he came to the door. "Clear off, you fathead! Can't we have a bit of an argument without you pushing in, and messing everything up?"

Archie was too staggered to reply.

"It's a bit thick, Handy!" protested Church. "You've ruined his appearance—and he was all smartened up, too. You might be a bit more careful with those oranges and things."

Handforth glanced at Archie and grunted.

"That's nothing!" he said. "No need to make a fuss over one or two silly stains. Nobody will notice 'em."

Archie seemed to come out of a dream.

"I don't wish to be frightfully unpleasant, but this is one of those dashed cases when a chappie needs to assert himself," he said coldly. "I might tell you that Phipps will give one look at me, and absolutely expire on the spot! I forgive you, old volcano, for this murky deed, but it's up to me to wade in with a few slices of homely advice."

"You can clear off, you funny ass—"

"Absolutely not!" said Archie grimly. "The whole of this dashed country is in a state of war, and we don't want the same beastly stuff in our own family circle, as it were. Be good enough to explain the trouble, and Archie will smooth the ruffled waters."

Upon the whole, Archie was singularly calm. But he was never a fellow to cry over spilt milk—and he was fortunate enough to possess any amount of spare suits. So he decided to curb his wrath, and settle this unhappy dispute.

He didn't know what he was biting off!

Yung Li Chang's Invitation!

ARNOLD MCCLURE appeared from the rear of the state-room, looking hot and ruffled, and rather fatigued.

"Take my advice, Archie, and clear off," he said wearily. "Look at us! I'd rather fight in a Chinese battle than argue with Handy! It's nothing, after all. We've just been persuading him to remain on board."

"And you can go on persuading!" said Handforth curtly. "I've made up my mind to go ashore, and you can all eat coke! We shall soon be starting back for home—and I mean to take souvenirs. I'm going ashore to buy 'em!"

"But we're not allowed to go ashore!" howled Church, exasperated.

"I don't care—"

"You've got to care!" roared Church. "We've had enough trouble with you, you hopeless chump! You're always going off, and getting yourself into a mass of trouble! This time Mac and I mean business!"

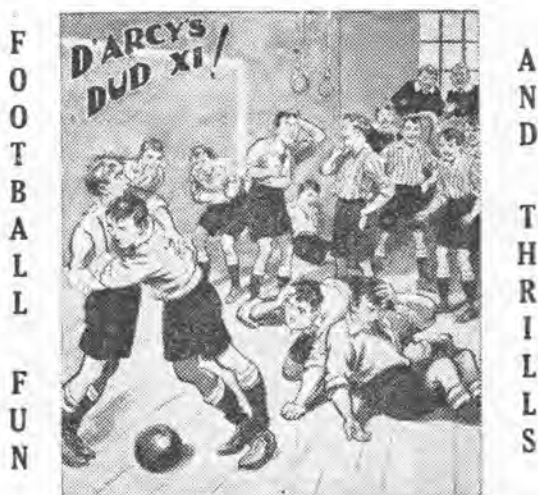
"Hear, hear!" said McClure loyally.

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "Business, what? I mean to say, the good old persuasive stuff. Handy, old chump of pepper, allow me to remark that these dear old scouts are absolutely on the mark. You can't go ashore as though we were anchored off Margate, or some frightfully decent place like that. Absolutely not! We're here, in the midst of China."

"Go hon!" said Handforth sarcastically.

"Absolutely!" repeated Archie. "I mean, here we are,

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in China. To be exact, we're simply surrounded with China. China, in fact, encircles us somewhat foully."

"There's no earthenware about, I suppose?" said Handforth.

"Oh, I say!" protested Archie. "Hardly the time, I mean, for these mould-encrusted jokes, what? Good gad! What with civil wars, and Chinese torturers, and—and you— Well, there you are! Life, as it were, is becoming a mere round of frightfulness."

Handforth pushed back his sleeves.

"Are you classing me with a Chinese torturer?" he asked ominously.

"Absolutely not! At least, not exactly—"

"What?"

"After all, these Chinese torturer chappies have a certain limit!" said Archie stoutly. "They torture a lad for some time, and then desist. I mean, if they had Church and McClure in their good old clutches, they'd shove the half-nelson across them, and so forth, with several degrees of foulness."

"Well?" asked Handforth thickly.

"Well, there you are!" said Archie. "Or, to be exact, there it is. After a given amount of this treatment, the Chinese torturers would apply the good old brakes, and

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close the throttle, and take out the clutch. But with you, laddie, it's different. Why, odds persistence and perpetuity, you keep the poor chaps in a state of torture week in and week out. I mean, month out and month in, as it were. The years roll on, dash it, and still they suffer."

"Why, you—you insulting dummy—" "No!" interrupted Archie firmly. "That is, absolutely not! I'm just pointing out a few of those frightfully interesting facts. You know, hard facts—made of cement, or something—Concrete facts, laddie. That's the jolly old word!"

"Concrete may be hard—but it's pulp compared to this!" roared Handforth aggressively. "By George! I'll teach you to lecture me, you tailor's window-dressing!"

Crash! Archie had the presence of mind to jerk himself slightly aside, but he caught the force of Handforth's punch on his left shoulder. He spun round like a top, clutched wildly at the air, and seized the only substance within reach. It happened to be Handforth's hair, and Archie caught a handful of it, and stuck to it. And as he sank dizzily to the floor, he nearly pulled Edward Oswald's head off. As this didn't happen, Handforth naturally went to the floor, too.

"Without wishing to be inquisitive, may I inquire if this is an imitation of a Rugby scrum, or merely a friendly chat?" asked William Napoleon Browne of the Fifth, as he paused in the corridor. "Brother Horace, we appear to have arrived at a crucial moment."

Horace Stevens, also of the Fifth, shook his head. "I'm surprised at Archie!" he said. "I didn't know he was in the habit of indulging in brawls. We'd better not associate ourselves with it, Browne, old man. Let's get up on deck—"

"One moment, Brother Horace," said Browne. "I am always a man of peace. I would like to settle this unhappy scrimmage."

"You'll have a job!" growled Church. "Handy's made up his mind to go ashore—and you know what he's like when he's made up his mind. Wild bulls in a Spanish arena are like white rabbits compared to Handy when he's fixed his heart on something! Think of it! He's made up his mind to go ashore!"

"Yes, I have!" hooted Handforth, as he wrenched himself free from Archie's clutching grip. "And if you start interfering, Browne—"

"Never can it be said that a Browne interferes," interrupted William Napoleon. "A Browne may occasionally butt in, and a Browne has even been known to dispense free advice. But never does a Browne interfere. What is all this unhappy dissension? Why are there such rooted objections to Brother Handforth going ashore?"

"Why?" snorted Church. "Because it's forbidden!" "It grieves me deeply to contradict you, Brother Church, but surely you are in error?" asked the captain of the Fifth mildly. "Indeed, I have heard on the best authority that we are all at liberty to venture ashore as much as we please."

"What?" gasped the juniors. "Indeed, I can safely inform you that this is no mere rumour," continued Browne. "It is officially guaranteed and sealed with the censor's approval."

Handforth was flushed with excitement. "I say, is this honour bright?" he asked breathlessly. "I can assure you that I got it from Lord Dorrington!" declared Browne. "Furthermore, his Excellency, Brother Yung Li Chang, has invited us to participate in a banquet this evening. There are wondrous times ahead, brothers. So let us rejoice in our new liberty, and make merry. Without exaggeration, I can say that Brother Horace and myself are now setting forth to paint the city crimson."

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