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The GEM

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What are they
SEE INSIDE
FOR DETAILS of
NEXT WEEK'S
FREE • GIFTS!

"GUSSY'S LATEST LOVE AFFAIR!" LIVELY SCHOOL STORY OF THE CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S— WITHIN.

THERE ARE LAUGHS GALORE IN THIS SPARKLING STORY OF THE

GUSSY'S LATEST



CHAPTER 1.

A Question of Neckties!

"I WEALLY think that a chap ought to be able to depend upon his chums when he's in a difficult posish."

That opinion was delivered by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's. D'Arcy had jammed his monocle into his eye, and was regarding Blake, Herries, and Digby with an expression of growing indignation.

Perhaps the swell of St. Jim's had cause to be exasperated. For ten minutes or more he had been trying on neckties before the big glass in Study No. 6 in the School House.

Blake, Herries, and Dig were in the study, reading the latest football reports; or, rather, Blake was reading them, and Herries and Dig were listening to him.

D'Arcy had tried tie after tie, surveying the effect of each in the glass, not being quite satisfied with any of them.

Each time he had donned one he had glanced towards his chums, his manner hinting that he wanted an independent opinion on the subject; but the three juniors were so

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Gussy's in love—not for the first time! But the swell of St. Jim's is so "moony" about his latest "charmer" that he tells his Form master the first king of Rome was named Clara!

interested in the League results that they had no eyes for him.

Besides, D'Arcy was always trying on a new necktie or a new silk hat, or something new. How were they to know that this was a special occasion?

Blake glanced up from the morning paper as D'Arcy spoke.

"Hallo!" he remarked. "What's the trouble?"

"I am twyin' on a new necktie—"

"Only one?"

Blake glanced at the table, which was covered with neckties of all shapes and sizes and colours.

Every hue of the rainbow was represented there, and a few shades which were beyond the scope even of a rainbow.

"Weally, Blake—"

"My only hat!" ejaculated Blake. "Where did you get that crop of ties?"

"I have had a few sent to me."

"A few! By Jove!"

"Not starting in business as a necktie merchant, are you, Gussy?" asked Digby innocently.

"Weally, Digby—"

"Go on about Newcastle United, Blake," said Herries.

"Weally, deah boys, I think you might for one moment on a special occasion dwop that wot."

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FUNNY ADVENTURES OF "GOOFY" GUSSY, THE ST. JIM'S ROMEO!

LOVE AFFAIR!

By
**MARTIN
CLIFFORD.**

"Rot!" ejaculated the three juniors together.
"Yaas, wathah!"
"You call League footer rot?" roared Blake.
"Weally, deah boys, there are more important mattahs. I want somebody's opinion on this necktie."
"Mine?"
"Yaas."
"Well, it's rotten!"
"Weally, Blake—"
"Give him your opinion, Dig."
"Certainly," said Digby. "It's beastly!"
"Digbay, you feahful ass—"
"It's terrific!" said Herries. "Chuck it out the window. Get on with Newcastle United, Blake!"
"When the whistle went for the second half—" Blake began.
"Bai Jove, Blake!"
"What's the matter now?"
"I weally think a fellow ought to be able to depend on his chums on a special occasion. I want to dwess wathah nicely this aftahnoon."
Blake stared at his elegant chum.
"What's on?"
"Oh, nothin' in particulah!" said D'Arcy, colouring a little. "But a fellow wants to look decent, you know."
"I suppose you're not going to play footer in that rig?"
"Certainly not!"
"Then you'd better change. We meet the New House this afternoon. I suppose you haven't forgotten that?"
"Bai Jove!"
"What?" roared Blake. "Do you mean to say you'd forgotten there was a House match on?"
"Yaas, wathah!"
Blake laid down the morning paper. He rose to his feet and stared at the swell of St. Jim's. Herries and Digby followed his example. D'Arcy coloured, and seemed curiously uneasy under their combined gaze.
They stared at him in silence for a full minute, and D'Arcy, in unaccustomed self-consciousness, turned to the glass again. As a rule, the swell of St. Jim's had all the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere, but it seemed to have deserted him now.
"What's the matter?" demanded Blake at last. "I've noticed for a long time—two days, at least—that you've been moony."
"Weally, Blake—"
"You've been muttering to yourself in class—"
"Weally, deah boy—"
"You were sitting up in bed last night, mumbling about something—"
"Weally—"
"And when Mr. Lathom asked you this morning what age George the Fourth was when he came to the throne you said he was twenty-four."
"Oh!"
"And you told Mr. Lathom that the name of the first king of Rome was Clara!"
"You uttah ass!"
"Didn't he, you chaps?"
"He did!" said Herries and Dig together sternly.
"Bai Jove! It was a slip of the tongue, you know."
"What's the matter with you? You do all these things which ought to be done in a lunatic asylum or not at all," said Blake severely. "Then you interrupt a chap who's

reading about Newcastle United with babble of neckties. Then you say you've forgotten a House match."
"Weally, Blake—"
"Explain yourself. Are you ill?"
"Certainly not!"
"Are you insane?"
"I wefuse to continue this widiculous discush," said Arthur Augustus, in a tone of great dignity. "I wegard you as an ass, Blake!"
"What is the matter?"
"Nothin'."
"Then stop playing the giddy ox!" said Blake severely. "Chuck those neckties away, and get into your football things."
"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort!"
"Kick-off in half an hour," said Herries.
"I am sowwy, deah boys, but I shall have to cut the match."
"What?"
"You can play Kangawoo instead. He's a wathah good forward, though, of course, not up to my form. I have no wesource but to cut the match."
"Why?"
"I have an engagemment."
"You—you frabjous ass!"
"I wefuse to entah into any discush on the topic, and I decline to be called oppwobwious names," said D'Arcy. "If you cannot tweat a fellow with pwopah wespsect, I will wetiah ffrom the study."
"Take the neckties with you, then," said Blake cruelly.
"You howwid boundahs!"
Throwing all the disdain he could into the words, D'Arcy gathered up a double handful of neckties and retired from the study.
The chums of the Fourth stared at one another.
"What on earth's the matter with Gussy?" said Blake.
Digby shook his head.
"He's got something on his mind, I suppose."
"Or a bee in his bonnet," said Herries.
"My hat!"
"What's up with you?"
"Perhaps he's in love again!" roared Blake.
Herries and Digby burst into a roar.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Well, he's been in love before," said Blake. "There was Cousin Ethel, and the Head's niece, Ethel Courtney, and a girl named, Ethel in the village. I know he's always falling in love with girls named Ethel."
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"The question is, whether he has met a girl named Ethel."
The Fourth-Formers chuckled. D'Arcy had a great respect for the gentle sex, and looked upon girls as highly superior beings to be deferred to and worshipped. Unfortunately, he sometimes carried his regard for them to the extent of falling in love, which was really, as Blake often remarked, a little too previous, considering that he was barely fifteen, and had footer, and lessons, and an amateur dramatic society, and several other matters to occupy his mind.
Digby uttered a sudden exclamation.
"Clara!"
"What?"
"He's changed the name this time!" exclaimed Digby

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excitedly. "Don't you remember? He told Latham this morning that the first king of Rome was named Clara!"

"My hat!"

"The name was running in his mind, you see."

"By George!"

"Gussy's in love!"

Now, being in love is a serious matter, leading to still more serious matters, and the Fourth-Formers ought to have regarded it as something solemn, and drawn long faces, and spoken in hushed voices. But they didn't. They burst out into a wild roar, and roared again and again till the sound of their merriment rang the length of the Fourth Form passage.

CHAPTER 2.

Wanted for Footer!

TOM MERRY, the captain of the Shell Form and football captain of the School House juniors, came down from the Shell dormitory, where he had been changing into his footer clothes.

He had an overcoat on, with the jersey of the School House underneath it. Tom Merry was looking very fit and well, and prepared to give the New House fellows "socks."

Manners and Lowther were waiting for him in the Lower passage. The two Shell fellows were also in football garb.

"Time we were on the ground, Tommy," said Lowther.

"I'm ready."

"Those Fourth Form chaps ready?"

"Here we are," said Jack Blake, coming downstairs with Dig and Herries. "Gussy won't be playing this afternoon."

"What's that?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Gussy says you'll have to scratch him."

Tom Merry looked concerned.

"Isn't he fit?" he asked. "I've noticed for a day or two that he seems to be a little off his feed."

Jack Blake chuckled.

"Oh, he's fit enough," he said. "But he says he's got another engagement."

Tom Merry simply snorted.

"Got another engagement, has he, when there's a House match on? I'll give him another engagement! You chaps get down to the ground, and I'll bring Gussy."

"But I say—"

"Where is he?"

"In the dorm, I think."

"I'll bring him. You go to the ground."

Tom Merry ran lightly upstairs. He reached the Fourth Form dormitory and kicked the door open.

"You are just in time, Tom Mewwy."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"I'm tryin' on a waistcoat—"

"I can see you are. Off with it!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Get into your football togs!"

"Wats!"

Tom Merry breathed hard through his nose. He felt the natural indignation of a captain who finds that a member of his team is not ready, and doesn't want to be ready. Fellows in the School House would have given their little fingers for a chance for the House junior eleven. D'Arcy had what so many coveted, and did not value it, apparently. It was enough to make the junior captain wrathful.

"I wathah think the pale gween with the cwimson bars suits me best," D'Arcy remarked, in a reflective way. "Would you mind waitin', Tom Mewwy, while I twy them all on in turn, and give me your opinion?"

"You champion ass!"

"I decline to be called a champion ass. Powwaps, upon the whole, a dark blue, with yellow spots—"

"Take that waistcoat off!"

"Wats!"

"Get into your footer things!"

"Wot!"

"The match will be starting."

"I am sowwy, but I can't play to-day. Would you advise me to twy this one, with the silvah bars?"

Tom Merry came towards the swell of St. Jim's. His intention was unmistakable, and D'Arcy put up his hands in defence.

"Take that waistcoat off!" roared the captain of the Shell.

"I decline to do so."

"Change into your footer things!"

"I wefuse!"

"Then I'll change 'em for you!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

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The hero of the Shell grasped D'Arcy. Arthur Augustus hit out. He didn't want to hurt Tom Merry, but it was impossible to allow sacrilegious hands to be laid upon his fancy waistcoat.

Tom Merry staggered back with a gasp.

"I am sowwy to have to chastise you, Tom Mewwy."

"What?"

Tom Merry recovered from his momentary surprise and rushed forward. In a moment D'Arcy was being hurled headlong round the dormitory in the grasp of the sturdy junior.

"Ow!" he roared. "Welease me! Welease me, you howwid wuffian! You are wumplin' my waistcoat! You are ewumplin' my bags!"

"Hallo!" said Kangaroo of the Shell, looking into the dormitory, with Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn of the same Form. "What's the row?"

"Welease me! Help!"

"Will you get into your things?"

"I distinctly wefuse!"

D'Arcy made a great effort and wrenched himself away. The effort expended all his strength, and he staggered and sat down.

The three Shell fellows in the doorway looked on in amazement.

"What on earth's the matter?" asked Kangaroo.

Tom Merry panted.

"Gussy won't change. Says he's got another engagement, and doesn't want to play footer!"

"Oh, rats!"

"I wefuse to play footah!"

"Then we'd better change his clothes for him," said Bernard Glyn, with a chuckle.

"Good!"

"Ripping!" said Tom Merry, with dancing eyes. "Lend a hand here!"

D'Arcy sprang to his feet.

"Keep off, you feahful wottahs!" he exclaimed. "Keep off! I shall stwike you violently if you touch me! Keep off! I wefuse to change my clothes! I—"

"Collar him!"

The four Shell fellows rushed at the swell of St. Jim's at once. There was no doubt that D'Arcy would not be able to offer much resistance when they had hold of him, and he fled.

He leaped a bed with great activity and ran the length of the dormitory. After him went the Shell fellows at top speed.

"Head him off from the door!" yelled Tom Merry.

Kangaroo cut towards the door. D'Arcy was headed off, and he dodged round a bed as Clifton Dane made a reach for him.

He doubled at the end of the dormitory, tackled Glyn as if he were on the Rugger field, and floored him, and came racing back.

Tom Merry leaped upon a bed as he scrambled over it, and they gasped one another, and rolled off the bed to the floor together, D'Arcy splitting the knee of his trousers as he landed with a bump.

"Ow!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Yah! Ow!"

"Got him!" roared Kangaroo. "Hold him!"

"I'm holding him!" gasped Tom Merry.

And he held on fast. D'Arcy struggled desperately, but in vain. Kangaroo, Glyn, and Dane were upon him in a moment. The swell of St. Jim's was lifted bodily and plumped down upon a bed, still struggling feebly in the grasp of the Shell fellows.

CHAPTER 3.

D'Arcy Reveals the Secret!

TOM MERRY gasped for breath. The hot chase up and down the dormitory, and the tussle at the end of it, had almost winded him.

He stood back for a moment, leaving the other three to hold D'Arcy.

The swell of St. Jim's was allowed to sit up, still with the grasp of the Shell fellows upon him.

"Now, then!" gasped Tom Merry. "Are you going to change?"

"Ow! Certainly not! Yow!"

"Will you play footer?"

"No; certainly not!"

"Get his footer things, Kangy," said Tom Merry. "They are here in his box, I suppose. We'll put them on him!"

"I uttably wefuse."

"That won't make any difference."

"I will give each of you wottahs a feahful thwashin'."

"I—"

"Rats!"

"You uttah wuffians!"



"Hold him while I drag his things off!" said Tom Merry—and he gave such a hearty wrench at Gussy's waistcoat that it split up the back and all the buttons came off. "Ow!" roared Arthur Augustus. "Leggo, you feahful wottahs!"

"Here's the jersey and the bags," said Kangaroo.

"Good! Now strip him!"

"I uttably wefuse to be stwipped!"

"Hold him while I drag the things off!"

"You feahful wottahs!"

"Here goes!"

D'Arcy's waistcoat was jerked off. It split up the back and nearly all the buttons came off in the process. But that could not be helped.

Then his braces were tugged with such effort that all the buttons came off his nether garment, and Tom Merry and Kangaroo seized them by the ankles to pull them off.

"Ow!" roared D'Arcy. "Leggo!"

"Now then, hold him, Glyn!"

"I've got him!"

"A long pull, and a strong pull, and a pull altogether!"

"Help!"

"They're coming!"

"You howwid wascals!"

"Here they come!"

The trousers flew off so suddenly that Tom Merry and Kangaroo sat down in the dormitory, holding the garment in their grasp.

"Oh!" gasped Kangaroo.

"M-m-my hat!"

"Help!" shrieked D'Arcy. "You feahful wuffians! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Welease me, you wottahs! I will change!"

"Honour bright, Gussy?"

"Yaas, you wottahs!"

The Shell fellows released the swell of the Fourth. Gussy's word of honour was inviolable, and they knew it. The swell of St. Jim's sat on the bed in his shirt and pants, and gasped for breath.

"I wegard you as a set of wottahs!" he said breathlessly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I considah you uttah wuffians!"

"Go hon!"

"I wefuse to wegard you as fwiends aftah this."

"Hurrah!"

Words failed the swell of St. Jim's. He simply gasped with rage. The Shell fellows stood round grinning.

"You chaps can run along and say I'm coming," said Tom Merry, laughing. "I'll keep with Gussy to hurry him up!"

"Right you are!"

And Cornstalk & Co. walked out of the dormitory, laughing.

D'Arcy still sat on the bed, pumping in breath.

Tom Merry watched him and chuckled.

"Well, Gussy, you're wasting time," he remarked.

"You feahful wottah!"

"Buck up, old son!"

"Look here, Tom Mewwy—" D'Arcy paused.

"Well, I'm looking!"

"I have a most important engagement this aftahnoon."

"Rats!"

"It is feahfully important."

"Rubbish!"

"Weally, you know—"

"Get into your things. The fellows will be waiting for us."

D'Arcy made no move.

"I suppose I shall be forced to explain the mattah to you, Tom Mewwy," he said slowly. "I am in a most difficult posish."

Tom Merry looked at him quickly. His expression changed for a moment to one of concern.

"Look here, Gussy, there's nothing wrong, is there?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, no!" said D'Arcy hastily.

"You're not in any trouble?"

"Not at all."

"Well, then, you can play footer. Buck up!"

"Imposs."

"Rats! Buck up!"

"I will confide in you, Tom Mewwy. Pewwaps I ought to have appowched you before on the subject, and asked you to excuse me fwom the team this aftahnoon. But, as a mattah of fact, I forgot all about the mattah."

"Forgot a House match!"

"Yaas, wathah! You see—" D'Arcy paused again.

"Well?" demanded Tom Merry.

"You see—" Another pause.

"I can't say I do," said Tom Merry, puzzled. "What do you want me to see? What are you driving at, anyway?"

"You see—"

"You'd better change, D'Arcy."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy shook his head.

"Imposs, deah boy. I shall nevah-nevah change."

"What?"

"I—I mean, I shall nevah change in one wespect," said D'Arcy hastily, and colouring. "You see, Tom Mewwy—"

Another pause.

"Are you off your rocker?" asked Tom Merry.

"Certainly not!"

"Then what's the matter with you?"

"Nothin'. Only, if you insist, I'll tell you why I can't play footah this aftahnoon, Tom Mewwy."

Arthur Augustus' face grew perfectly crimson as he spoke.

Tom Merry gazed at him in unbounded astonishment.

"Why can't you?" he demanded.

"I've got an engagement!"

"Rats!"

"It's an—an appointment."

"Stuff!"

"With a—a—a lady!"

The secret was out at last. D'Arcy's face was now the colour of a well-cooked beetroot. Tom Merry gazed at him petrified. For some moments he stood bereft of speech, and then he gasped.

"A lady!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Your Cousin Ethel?"

"No!"

"Your mater?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then—then—then you're in love again!"

"Yaas!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry roared. He could not help it.

Arthur Augustus started to his feet, looking at him with great indignation. But the merriment of the Shell captain did not cease. He threw himself back on a bed, and kicked up his feet and roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 4.

Major and Minor!

JACK BLAKE looked into the dormitory. At the sight of Tom Merry stretched upon the bed apparently in convulsions, and D'Arcy standing half-dressed and dishevelled, glaring at him with speechless indignation, Blake stared.

"What on earth's the matter?" he demanded.

Tom Merry roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The fellows are waiting," said Blake. "Figgins & Co. have been on the ground a long time. You fellows coming?"

Tom Merry staggered off the bed.

"I'm coming," he said weakly. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Gussy's not playing!" gasped Tom Merry. "Under the circumstances, I excuse him. I don't think he'd be likely to give footer much attention in his present state of mind, so we'll have to play somebody else."

Blake grinned.

"All on account of Clara!" he exclaimed.

D'Arcy started.

"Bai Jove, Blake—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How did you know?"

"Well, I know you told Mr. Lathom in class that the first king of Rome was named Clara," chuckled Blake. "I suppose you weren't thinking of the king of Rome?"

D'Arcy coloured.

"I wufuse to have this mattah discussed with wibald mewwmint!" he exclaimed. "I wegard you as a beast, Blake!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as anothah beast, Tom Mewwy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry staggered from the dormitory. He was exhausted with laughter. Blake stayed behind for a moment to speak to his elegant chum.

"Gussy, old man, stop playing the giddy ox and come and play footer," he said. "Don't be an ass, you know!"

"I wufuse to be called an ass, Blake!"

"Well, you are an ass, you know. Look here, come and see—"

"I wufuse to come. I twust you would not wecommend me to bweak an appointment with a lady," said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Blake, and he tottered out of the dormitory after Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus was left alone.

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He bestowed a glare of indignation upon the doorway through which Tom Merry and Blake had departed, and then proceeded to dress himself.

He glanced at his watch, and hurried his dressing as much as was possible with the reposeful and dignified character of the swell of St. Jim's.

The result was certainly effective.

When D'Arcy was finished, no one could have denied that he looked a perfect picture.

His waistcoat was perhaps a little rich, but it was toned down by the dark jacket of perfect fit and cut. The necktie was tied as only Arthur Augustus could tie neckties, and the collar was the highest and whitest in the School House. If anything could exceed the elegance of the beautifully creased trousers, it was the gloss of the handsome little shoes, or the delicate tint of the gloves.

With his eyeglass jammed in his eye and his gold-headed cane and silk hat in his hand, D'Arcy was a triumph of elegance. He had reason to be considerably satisfied with himself as he looked at his reflection in the glass.

He descended the stairs at last.

He burst like a vision of elegance upon the fellows he passed.

Wally, his younger brother, who was never elegant, met him on the stairs, and, pretending to be overcome by so much splendour, clung to the banisters while he passed.

Arthur Augustus passed on with his nose very high in the air.

Gore of the Shell met him in the Hall. Gore was not on the footer ground and didn't intend to show up there. He was giving up footer and taking to his old habits of hanging about the passages on a half-holiday with his hands in his pockets, or smoking cheap cigarettes secretly behind the woodshed.

Gore stared at D'Arcy.

"My word!" he exclaimed. "Ripping! This is worth a penny admission."

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon Gore.

"Gore, I wegard you as a wottah!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Where are you going?"

"Mind your own business, Gore!"

And D'Arcy strode towards the door. Mellish, the cad of the Fourth, was there, and he stared, too, at the resplendence of the swell of St. Jim's.

"Going out, D'Arcy?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Like me to come?"

"Thank you vewy much, deah boy, but I have an appointment."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Mellish—"

"Oh, Clara!" sobbed Mellish. "Oh, Clara, Clara! Who could be fairer?"

D'Arcy turned crimson.

"Mellish, you wottah, you have been spyin'!"

The cad of the Fourth roared.

"You uttah cad!" said D'Arcy. "Give me that papah!"

Mellish had a paper in his hand, written upon in the handwriting of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

He put his hand behind him as D'Arcy reached towards it.

"Mellish, you wottah—"

"Findings keepings," said Mellish coolly. "I found this in the Form-room. You shouldn't leave your poems about if you don't want them seen."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Gore. "Let's hear it."

"I wufuse to allow—"

Mellish backed away from the swell of St. Jim's, holding the paper in the air and reading it as he did so.

"Oh, beauteous Clara!"

Who could be fairer?

Oh, beauteous star,

I adore from afar!"

D'Arcy rushed forward and snatched the paper from Mellish's hand.

"You uttah wottah!" he exclaimed, with crimson face. "If I were not goin' to keep a most particulah appointment I would give you a feahful thwashin', Mellish!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus thrust the paper into his pocket and walked away with his nose high in the air.

Mellish sat on the balustrade of the steps and roared.

Gore held his sides and yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy, with a flushed face, walked quickly towards the gates. The House match had begun on the junior ground, and the shouts from the spectators reached his ears.

"Goal! Hurrah!"

(Continued on page 8.)

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*Make Sure of
Next Week's Issue, Lads!*

The School House was getting ahead. On the senior ground Kildare and his men were playing a visiting team. But Arthur Augustus had no eyes or ears for football that afternoon.

He had a more important matter to attend to—more important to him, at all events, in his present frame of mind. He strode down to the gates of the school, and then he hesitated.

Why he hesitated he hardly knew.

He had dressed as quickly as he could, taking only three times as long as any other junior would take, and he had walked quite quickly down to the gates. Now he was there he hesitated.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured. "I—I don't think I—I—"

There was a sound of a motor-car on the road.

D'Arcy looked up.

A car with an old gentleman and a young lady in it swept by.

D'Arcy glanced at the girl, and waved and smiled, and the old gentleman gave him a nod.

The car sped on towards Rylcombe and disappeared.

D'Arcy stood in quite a flutter.

"My only Aunt Jane!"

The swell of St. Jim's swung round at the voice of his minor.

Wally stood regarding him with a grin—the cheeky grin natural to a Third Form fag.

"Weally, Wally—"

"So that's it, is it?" said Wally severely.

"You young wascal! What do you mean?"

Wally jerked an inky thumb after the car.

"That was the vicar's car, Gussy."

"Well?"

"And Miss Clara, the vicar's daughter, was in it."

"Well?"

Wally chuckled.

"I rather think I know why we're dressed so splendidly this afternoon," he remarked. "We're going to the vicarage."

"You young boundah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus fastened a tighter grasp upon his gold-headed cane, as if he thought of chastising his younger brother.

Wally watched him warily, prepared to dodge.

"Look here, Gus, don't be an ass, old man!" he said, with the fatherly air he sometimes assumed towards his major. "I'm hard-up this afternoon. Chuck up the vicarage bosh. Lend me five bob and I'll take you to the cinema. Jameson and Gibson won't mind you coming if you behave yourself."

"You—you young wascal!"

"You've been mooning for days and looking an awful ass all round," explained Wally. "Why don't you chuck it? I take an interest in you, you know."

"Look here, Wally—"

"Come along with Jameson and Gibson and me, and we'll have a good time. We'll get into a row with the Grammar School cads, and—"

"Wats! Look here, Wally," exclaimed Arthur Augustus abruptly—"look here! Will you come with me?"

Wally stared.

"Come with you?"

"Yaas!"

"To the vicarage?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"To see Miss Clara?" shouted Wally.

Arthur Augustus frowned.

"No, of course not, you young ass! To back me up, that's all! You ought to back up your major. I—I'm goin' to see her, you know, but—but I feel wathah in a fluttah. I feel that I ought to have somebody with me to back me up. I can't ask any of the fellows. They would only treat me with gwoss disrespect. Look here, Wally, you ought to stand by your major!"

Wally gave his elder brother a smack on the shoulder that made him gasp.

"And so I will!" he exclaimed heartily. "Come on!"

CHAPTER 5. A Faint Heart!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY looked doubtfully at his minor. Wally was not the kind of companion that he would have chosen for such a delicate errand as he was now engaged upon. The fag could hardly be expected to understand a fellow being in love—he was too young for that, D'Arcy thought.

D'Arcy at present was feeling about thirty-five or thirty-six. But he felt that he must have somebody. He wanted

to outpour the tender thoughts in his mind—he wanted somebody to back him up. His own chums were playing football, and, besides, they would only make a joke of it. D'Arcy felt that he could not stand that. Wally was the fellow, if only Wally had a little more tact. There was a lurking gleam in Wally's eyes that disconcerted Arthur Augustus. But the plain truth was, that he dared not go alone.

"Vewy well, Wally," he said. "I shall be vewy glad of your company, deah boy. I trust you will be as sewious as the occasion demands."

"Solemn as a judge, old son!"

"You see, it is a vewy delicate mattah."

"Bless you, I know all about it," said Wally cheerfully.

"Do you think I've never been in love?"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Let's get off, old son!" said Wally. "I know Miss Clara is always in the garden before ten, and you'll catch her nicely with no heavy father about."

D'Arcy choked down the remarks he was inclined to make, and walked on in silence.

Wally suppressed a chuckle. He knew his major of old.

D'Arcy had been like this before, and had always fortunately been rejected by the charming ladies upon whom he had bestowed his affection, and at whose feet he had laid his heart and his worldly possessions—consisting chiefly, if he had enumerated them, of a bicycle, a pony, a set of books, and a very considerable wardrobe, and an allowance of from five to ten shillings a week pocket-money, with an occasional fiver from his governor thrown in.

Wally wondered what his major would do if he should be accepted one of these days.

At the thought Wally burst into an involuntary chuckle.

Arthur Augustus looked round.

"I trust you will let me share the joke, Wally," he said frigidly.

Wally chuckled again.

"Gussy, old man, you are the joke," he explained.

D'Arcy halted.

"If you are goin' to accompany me in this fivulous spiwit, Wally, I shall decline your company," he said.

"Pewwaps you had better go back."

"Oh, stuff!" said Wally. "I'm going to back you up."

"Then pway be more sewious."

Wally drew a solemn face.

"Will that do, Gussy?"

Gussy disdained no reply. He walked on with his nose very high in the air. Wally followed, taking care not to chuckle aloud again. But he suppressed many an internal chuckle as he followed his major to the crossroads in Rylcombe Lane, and took the shaded path that ran to the vicarage gates.

A glimpse of a red-tiled roof could be caught between the trees. Arthur Augustus paused in the cover of a thicket and mopped his brow with a cambric handkerchief, pushing back his silk hat for the purpose. The day was certainly not warm, but D'Arcy's brow was clotted with perspiration.

Wally looked at him with a solemn grin.

"Feeling bad, Gussy?"

"Certainly not!"

"Would you rather go back?"

"Not at all, you young ass!"

"I'll stick to you, old son!" said Wally encouragingly.

"I won't desert you in the hour of danger."

"Pway don't be an ass!"

"If it turns out all right, I suppose you'll stand something decent at Mrs. Taggles' when we get back?"

"You are a mercenary young wuffian! How can you think of gwub at such a time?"

"Well, I'm not the chap that's going to propose," said Wally. "When a chap goes to propose I know he's usually off his feed, but there's no sense in the rest of the world being off their feed, too."

"You are a howwid little boundah!"

"If you'll take advice," said Wally, with a fatherly air, "I should recommend ginger-pop before going in. It'll back you up."

"Wally, you are a howwid little wuffian! Pway go!"

"What?"

"Wetiah! Your howwid wemarks disturb me, and it is necessary for me to compose myself. Pway buzz off!"

"Oh, all right!" said Wally. "I think you're jolly ungrateful, Gussy. It isn't every chap who'd stand by you at a time like this. Suppose there should be some bungle and I got accepted by mistake? I tell you, it's a jolly big risk for a chap to run."

"Wetiah, you young wuffian!"

"Oh, all right!" said Wally. "Toodle-loo!"

D'Arcy remained a moment watching his minor as he walked off. Then he called out:

"Wally!"
The scamp of the Third Form turned his head.
"Hallo, Gus! What is it now?"
"Come back!"
"Don't you want me to buzz off?"
"No-no! Don't desert me, deah boy!"
"I'll stick to you like glue!" said Wally, retracing his steps. "Rely on me. I suppose there'll be a feed at the school shop when we get back?"
"Ya-as, if you like!"
"Tarts and ginger-pop, I suppose?"
"Yaas!"
"Can Jameson and Gibson come?"
"Yaas!"
"All serene, then," said Wally. "Let's get on with the washing. Look here, I can see a blue dress in the shrubbery there!"

CHAPTER 6. The Charmer!

MISS CLARA O'NEIL gave Arthur Augustus D'Arcy a sweet smile as he came up, raising his silk hat with the grace that belonged only to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

In spite of his confusion of mind Gussy was as graceful as ever.

Miss Clara looked glad to see him. She liked D'Arcy. Most people did—especially the gentle sex. The vicar's daughter was no exception. As she was ten years older than Arthur Augustus, she could like him without any danger of being misunderstood; and it never even crossed her mind that Arthur Augustus might want to improve upon a mere friendship. Not that there was anything alarming in D'Arcy's love affair. To think about the bright eyes of his charmer, and to think they were bright, whether



"Gussy's in love with a ripping girl," said Wally cheerfully. "But she's old enough to be his mother!" "Who is she?" asked Miss O'Neil. "You're the party!" replied Wally. Smack! Miss O'Neil suddenly leaned forward and boxed D'Arcy minor's ear. "My only Aunt Jane!" yelled the scamp of the Third. "What the—"

"Bai Jove!"

"Go ahead!"

Wally pushed D'Arcy in at the side gate of the garden. Certainly a graceful form in a blue dress could be seen among the shrubbery.

It was Miss Clara O'Neil without a doubt.

D'Arcy hesitated.

"Look here, old man, go ahead," said Wally. "I'll wait here for you. Faint heart never won a fair lady, you know. Go ahead! I'll wait here, and whistle when you're to propose, and then you get it out at once! See?"

"Shut up, you young ass!"

"Go ahead! Get in!" Wally pushed his major into the garden, and a crackle of the bushes made the girl turn her head.

D'Arcy was seen.

There was nothing for it now but to go on, and he went. Wally sat on the gate, under an overhanging tree, to wait, and filled up his leisure by sucking toffee. He glanced after his major, but the shrubbery now hid D'Arcy from sight.

Once or twice Wally left off sucking toffee to murmur:

"What larks!"

they were or not; to write yards and yards of bad poetry, and then burn it; to sit in her presence as dumb as an owl—such were D'Arcy's methods of love-making. No lady was likely to discover that he was in love at all.

But this time D'Arcy meant business.

There was a certain naval officer who sometimes came to the vicarage, and it seemed to D'Arcy that he was inordinately attached to Miss Clara's company, and that Miss Clara regarded him with too much admiration.

It was evidently necessary to get something settled.

After all, a long engagement had really nothing to be said against it. In fact, Arthur Augustus thought it was a jolly good arrangement.

Miss O'Neil was fond of gardening. She was very busy now, and had on a pair of large, thick gardening gloves. She was a charming girl, with bright, blue Irish eyes, and a smile that had had destructive effects upon more hearts than Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's. She had the most delightful touch of brogue in her speech, too, and a way of saying "Faith" that was simply ravishing. At least, D'Arcy thought so, and so did that obnoxious naval officer.

"Faith, and isn't it a beautiful day?" said Miss O'Neil, as D'Arcy did not speak. "Didn't I see you at the college gates as father and I passed, Arthur?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I thought so. And you've come to tea? That is really kind of you," said Miss O'Neil, wondering in her own mind what D'Arcy had come for, and why he was standing so silent, turning alternately white and red.

"Tea!" said D'Arcy vaguely.

"Faith, and you find me gardening again," said Miss O'Neil. "Are you fond of gardening, Arthur?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And you haven't asked me about the garden at all."

D'Arcy blushed.

"I'm sowwy! I was wathah an ass, you know. I—I hope the pwimwoses are comin' out all wight."

Miss O'Neil looked surprised.

"I hope they will next spring," she assented. "As a rule, we don't expect them in autumn."

"N-no, of course not," said Arthur Augustus, colouring again.

"Perhaps you would like to come in and see father?" Miss O'Neil remarked.

"Oh, no!"

"No? Then you shall watch me gardening."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Miss O'Neil went on with her occupations. Arthur Augustus watched her, and could not speak. He tried

He paused.

"Yes?"

"I twust—"

"Yes—"

"I sincerely wish—"

"Well?"

"Oh, nothin'," said D'Arcy, flooded with shyness all at once—"nothin' at all! It's of no consequence. Good-bye!"

And he raised his hat and scuttled off.

Miss O'Neil looked after him in great astonishment. She had not the faintest understanding of the unaccountable behaviour of the swell of St. Jim's.

D'Arcy reached the gates, gasping for breath, and his colour was coming and going.

Wally was rubbing his sticky fingers on a handkerchief which, judging by its colour, was not likely to make them much cleaner.

He looked up at his major with a grin.

"All right?" he asked.

"Oh deah!"

"Rejected?"

"Certainly not!"

"Accepted?"

"No."

"My only Aunt Jane!" said Wally. "But you must be one or the other. I don't believe there's any middle course."

"I—I haven't said anythin'."

Wally surveyed his major with a glance of unmitigated disgust.

"You call yourself a D'Arcy!" he exclaimed.

"Weally, Wally—"

"Well, I suppose you're going to drop the whole matter?" said Wally. "Better come to the tuckshop and forget all about it."

"You young ass!"

"What are you going to do, then?"

"I don't know. I was thinking that I might—might leave St. Jim's, and—go abroad," said D'Arcy. "If I were a little oldah, I would volunteer for a forlorn hope somewhere. Pewaps I shall be able to speak to Miss O'Neil anothah time."

"Why don't you chuck the whole bisney?"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Look here, if you're going to keep it up, you'd better get down to business now," said Wally. "If you haven't the cheek to speak to Miss Clara, I'll do it for you."

"Wally!"

"It's all right; you wait here."

Wally slipped off the gate, and was gone before his major could make a movement to stop him.

"Wally!" shrieked D'Arcy. "Wally!"

The fag did not even reply.

D'Arcy took a couple of steps after him, and then stopped. He leaned against the gate, gasping, and waited.

CHAPTER 7.

Wally's Way!

WALLY chuckled to himself as he plunged through the high shrubbery. A blue dress glimmered before him, and then he saw a charming, surprised face.

Miss O'Neil knew the scamp of the Third Form very well, and, in spite of his ways, she liked him. It was hardly possible to help liking Wally, cheeky young rascal as he certainly was. Wally dragged off his cap, and ducked his head to Miss O'Neil, most of his hair standing up like quills of a porcupine until he replaced the cap.

"Your brather has just gone," said Miss O'Neil.

"Yes, I've seen him," said Wally, with a grin.

"I thought he was going to stay to tea, but—"

"He doesn't feel quite up to tea, I think."

"I hope he's not ill?"

"Oh, not at all!"

"Are you going to stay to tea, Wally? There's strawberry jam and new tarts and cake."

Wally considered.

"Plain or seed cake?" he asked.

"Plum cake," said Clara, laughing.

"Thanks; I'll stay," said Wally. "We get lots of seed cake in the School House at St. Jim's. I believe it's cheaper. But, look here, I came to speak about Gussy!"

"Yes?"

"I suppose you've noticed that there's something wrong with him?"

Miss O'Neil laid down her shears and regarded Wally attentively.

"I thought he was a little strange in his manner this afternoon," she said. "But you say he is not ill."

"No; he's in love."

Miss O'Neil gave a little shriek.

SOMETHING TO MARVEL AT!

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several times, but instead of "Miss Clawah, I adore you!" he only succeeded in saying: "It's a fine aftahnoon, you know!"

He was not making much progress.

Suddenly from behind the trees in the direction of the gate came a shrill whistle.

D'Arcy started.

It was a signal from Wally. The fag of the Third had finished his toffee, and was getting impatient.

"Dear me!" said Miss O'Neil. "Did not that sound like a signal?"

"Yaas, wathah!" stammered D'Arcy.

"Perhaps you have a friend waiting for you?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then I mustn't detain you," said Miss O'Neil.

"Wathah not!"

D'Arcy hardly knew what he was saying.

"It was so kind of you to call," said Miss O'Neil, quite puzzled, and wondering if Arthur Augustus was ill.

"Yaas, wathah!" murmured D'Arcy.

"Good-bye!"

She gave him a hand, extracting it from the big gardening glove for the purpose.

Arthur Augustus hardly dared to touch it, but he finally managed to do so.

"Good-bye!" said Miss O'Neil.

"Good-bye!" said D'Arcy, pressing her hand so slightly that she did not feel it. "I hope—"

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"Wally!"
 "Fact!" said Wally stoutly. "Gussy's often taken like that. He was dead spoons on Cousin Ethel, you know, and she laughed him out of it. He wanted to be engaged to a young lady in Rylcombe once—a ripping girl, too. I must say that Gussy has good taste. She's married now, I believe. Then there was the Head's niece at St. Jim's. He was a regular Romeo that time, only she wouldn't play the game and act Juliet."

Miss O'Neil laughed, and at the same time shook her finger reprovingly at the scamp of the Third.

"You must not speak of serious matters in this way," she said.

"All serene," said Wally; "I'm coming to the point. Gussy is in love again, and he's got it badder than ever this time!"

"Oh dear!"

"Romeo isn't in it with him this time," said Wally. "He's talking of volunteering for a giddy forlorn hope, or something of the sort."

"Nonsense!"

Wally shook his head seriously.
 "I tell you he's got it," he said. "I've talked to him like a father, but it's no good. Gussy's an awfully obstinate chap."

"But it is nonsense!" said Miss O'Neil, laughing. "Faith, you must be joking, Wally! Whom is he in love with, then?"

"A ripping girl!"

"They are all ripping girls, it seems."

"Oh, this one is quite as nice as any other!" said Wally. "I like her very much myself!"

"Then you know her?" said Miss O'Neil, taking a feminine interest in the matter. "Is she older than Arthur?"

"Oh, years and years!"

"Is she quite old?"

"Oh, awfully old!" said Wally vaguely. "Of course, it's all rot. She's old enough to be his mother, you know. But she's a ripping girl!"

"What is she like?"

Wally looked at her.

"Blue eyes," he said, "very pretty face, mouth very nice, but perhaps a little too wide. Really a jolly girl!"

"Does she live near here?"

"Very near."

"What is her name?"

"Clara O'Neil."

Miss O'Neil gave quite a jump.

"Wally!"

"Well?"

"The same name as myself!" said Miss O'Neil, in astonishment.

"You're the party," Wally chuckled.

"What!"

"You're the party."

"Wally!"

"Fact!" said Wally.

Miss O'Neil looked at the scamp of the Third long and hard. Suddenly she leaned forward and boxed his ear.

Wally started back with a yell of indignant astonishment.

"My only Aunt Jane! What the—"

"There, I'm sorry!" said Miss O'Neil, with a charming smile. "But, faith, you should not joke so!"

"I wasn't joking!" roared Wally. "It was all true!"

"How could it be true, when D'Arcy is fifteen?" exclaimed Miss O'Neil, her blue eyes sparkling with indignation.

"That doesn't make any difference. He was fourteen the first time," said Wally, rubbing his ear ruefully.

"I—I mean— You said I—she—the young lady was old enough to be his mother," said Miss O'Neil.

"Well, so she is! She's jolly well over twenty. I know that!" howled Wally, still rubbing his ear. "Look here, don't you go for a chap like that!"

Miss O'Neil laughed.

"Never mind, Wally—never mind! There, I'll give you a kiss—"

"That you jolly well won't!" said Wally, backing away. "Look here, it's all right, I don't mind a thump, only you're not going to start kissing me! It's all right, I don't mind a bit! About Gussy, now—"

"You must not talk any more nonsense about Arthur."
 "You've got to get him out of this," said Wally. "He's mooning about like a silly ass. He got three hundred lines yesterday for neglecting his lessons, and he'll have them doubled to-day for not doing them."

Miss O'Neil looked concerned.

"How absurd!"

"Then he's cut a footer match this afternoon to come over here," said Wally impressively. "You'd hardly believe it, but he has!"

(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.

A BAD BARGAIN.

Johnson gazed critically at his friend Jackson's car.
 "What did you give for that?" he asked.
 "Nothing," replied Jackson. "I took it for a debt—a fellow owed me two hundred pounds."
 "H'm!" said Johnson. "When do you get the other hundred and ninety-nine pounds?"
 A football has been awarded to M. Powell, 4, Thalia Place, Shakespeare Street, Leeds, 9.

THE LAST LAP.

The stage manager was up against it. He was producing "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" and only ten of the "thieves," one of whom was very fat, had turned up. He solved the difficulty by sending them across the stage four times. All went well until the fourth appearance, when a voice called out from the gallery:
 "Cheer up, fatty—last lap!"
 A football has been awarded to A. Horne, Corner House, Stanley Road, Cheadle Hulme, near Manchester.

NOT HIS CHICKENS.

Levy was very upset. Somebody had opened the door of his fowl-house, and the birds had got out and flown away.
 "Don't worry, Levy," said a friend. "Birds always go back to their own home to roost."
 "Yes," said Levy, "that's just the trouble!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to G. Burnett, Main Street, Winstar, Matlock.

THE DIFFERENCE.

Willikins: "What is the difference between a bottle of medicine and a hearthrug?"
 Billikins: "One is shaken up and taken, and the other is taken up and shaken."
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. Horton, Labour in Vain, Sun Street, Brockmoor, Brierley Hill, Staffs.

SOUND CREDENTIALS.

Boss: "What credentials have you for the position of office boy?"
 Applicant: "I haven't any grandmothers, grandfathers, uncles or aunts, and I don't go to football matches."
 Boss: "You'll do!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to G. Clifton, 76, North Street, Bicester, Oxon.

NO WONDER!

First Golfer: "I wonder who made the first bunker?"
 Second Golfer: "I've always understood that it was a Scotsman who lost his ball down a rabbit hole!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. John, 18, Park Street, Taibach, Port Talbot, Glamorgan.

SOME SPRINT!

As the train was moving out of the station the young man dashed on to the platform, wrenched open the door of a compartment and tumbled inside gasping for breath.
 "When I was a young man," remarked an old man in the corner, "I could sprint to the station and catch a train without turning a hair."
 "B-but," puffed the young man, "I—I missed this train at the last station!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to N. Wilkins, 10, Penhill Road, Pontcanna, Cardiff.

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Miss O'Neil's expression hinted that she did not realise the tremendous importance of a footer match.

"He's got to stop it," said Wally. "It's no good my talking to him; I've tried. You're the party to do it."

"I! How?"

"He's going to propose to you——"

"Wally!"

"That's what he came for just now, only he hadn't the nerve. But he will start this rot again soon, and then you ought to stomp him."

"Stomp him?" said Miss O'Neil, not comprehending.

"Yes. He's got to be cured. I shall get chipped in the Third Form about it if something isn't done," said Wally seriously. "I can't have that, you know. Now, when Gussy comes and pops the question——"

"Don't be so vulgar, Wally!"

"Then, you're not to reject him."

"Not!" exclaimed Miss O'Neil, in astonishment.

"No," said Wally, with a wink. "You see, if he's rejected, he'll go on imagining that he's in love the same as ever. He'll keep on writing rotten poetry about Clara and fairer, and the chaps will get hold of it, you know, and I shall get chipped. And he'll get hundreds of lines every day."

"Poor Arthur!"

"But if you accept him——"

"Don't be silly!"

"I'm not being silly!" said Wally wrathfully. "I'm proposing a jolly good scheme, like a man of the world!"

Miss O'Neil laughed.

"Well, go on," she said.

"Suppose you accept him," said Wally sagely. "Then he'll begin to realise that he's rather young to be engaged, and he'll wake up to the fact, I think. It stands to reason that an engagement would knock it on the head. It must be pretty awful to be engaged! Don't you think so?"

"No."

"Oh!" said Wally, disconcerted. "If you don't think so——"

"But I will see," said Miss O'Neil. "I am very sorry Arthur has been so foolish, Wally, as to fancy himself in love——"

"Yes, he's an awful ass, you know!"

"But it shows that he is a very nice boy, and worth a thousand of his younger brother," explained Miss O'Neil.

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Wally, in astonishment.

"If Arthur should speak to me on such an absurd subject, I shall use my own judgment," said Miss O'Neil.

"Better accept him——"

"Nonsense!"

"Otherwise he'll be mooning, and getting lines, and missing footer matches, and going to the dogs generally!"

The girl laughed again.

"I will think about it," she said.

"Oh, all right!"

And Wally departed.

CHAPTER 8.

Accepted!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS was leaning on the gate, his brow damp with perspiration. He was buried so deeply in a reverie that he did not hear footsteps behind him, and did not move till he felt a slap on the shoulder. Then he jumped.

"Ow! Weally, Wally——"

Wally grinned at him.

"It's all right, Gussy!"

"What do you mean, Wally?"

"Just you go and pop the question, that's all right," said Wally mysteriously.

"You—you haven't said——"

"Yes, I have!"

"You young wascal!"

"My dear chap, I've made it all plain sailing for you!" said Wally. "Go in and win!"

"Weally——"

"Go ahead, you ass, and I'll wait for you!"

D'Arcy gave his minor a doubtful glance, and then plunged into the shrubbery.

Wally sat on the gate, and searched through his pockets for toffee. Not finding any, he contented himself with whistling shrilly, and very much out of tune, while he waited for the return of his major.

He had to wait quite a little time, whistling and kicking his heels at the gate.

At last Arthur Augustus reappeared.

The swell of St. Jim's seemed to be walking on air. His face was beaming, his eyeglass fluttered unheeded at the end of its cord.

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Wally grinned.

"Hallo, Gus!"

Arthur Augustus grasped his hand, and shook it silently. He could not speak. His feelings were too deep for words.

Wally slid off the gate.

"Going?" he asked.

D'Arcy nodded.

"Why don't you stay to tea?"

D'Arcy shook his head.

"Better," said Wally. "They're having strawberry-jam and plum-cake."

D'Arcy smiled in a far-away manner. What was strawberry-jam and plum-cake to him now?

He walked down the path to the lane as if he were treading on air. Wally followed him unwillingly. As a matter of fact, Wally was feeling a little remorseful, but he comforted himself with the reflection that he had acted for the best. It was necessary for D'Arcy to be cured; and what was a more certain cure for a love attachment than an engagement, thought Wally, in his wisdom. But had Clara accepted his major?—that was the question.

Wally plucked at his major's sleeve.

"Gussy, wake up!"

"Eh?"

"How has it gone?"

"Who could be faiwah?" murmured D'Arcy. "Whose beauty and wace could be wicher and wawah?"

"My only Aunt Jane! If he isn't composing poetry!" exclaimed Wally, in disgust. "Look here, Gussy!"

"In the bloom of sweet youth is the blossom of beauty, to love and adore her is pleasuah and duty."

"Great Scott!"

"Eh?"

"You frabjous ass!" roared Wally, shaking his major by the shoulder. "Come to earth!"

"Weally, Wally——"

"Did you pop?"

"What?"

"Did you pop, you ass?"

"If you mean, did I ppopose to Miss O'Neil——" began D'Arcy, with stately dignity.

"Well, did you?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Has she accepted you?"

"Yaas."

"Good!" Wally chuckled. "Did you kiss her?"

"Pway don't be a coarse beast, Wally!"

"Oh, all right! I am only asking a civil question," said Wally, in an injured tone. "I thought people always kissed one another when they were engaged. If they do, I know jolly well I won't ever get engaged, that's all. It's a thing I can't stand myself. But, look here, I suppose you're going back about that feed now——"

"Eh?"

"The feed you're going to stand to Jameson and Gibby and me, you know."

"Eh?"

"Blessed if he hasn't forgotten all about it!" exclaimed Wally, in disgust. "Look here, I'll have that feed to-morrow, Gussy. I'm going to have tea at the vicarage. They've got strawberry-jam and plum-cake—Clara said so."

"Eh?"

"Ain't you coming?"

"Comin'?"

"Yes—to tea!" roared Wally.

"Tea?"

"My only Aunt Jane! If he hasn't turned into a blessed parrot! What's the matter with you, Gus?"

"Like a symphony sweet is the name of my Clawah, and——"

"What?"

"What loveliness ever was wichah and wawah?"

"My hat!"

"In all the wide world there is no othah faiwah."

"Great Scott!"

"Have you a pencil, Wally?"

"A pencil?" ejaculated Wally, in immeasurable scorn. "You don't mean to say you'd have the cheek to write that rot down?"

"Weally, Wally——"

"Look here, I'll have that feed to-morrow. I'll have to cut back to the vicarage now, or all the plum-cake will be gone. Clara's young brother's there, and I know that young beggar. Toodle-loo!"

And Wally cut off.

Arthur Augustus hardly noticed him go.

He walked—or, rather, sailed—on down the lane, with his eyes turned skywards and his feet seeming scarcely to touch the ground. He had been accepted. He was engaged. He seemed to touch the stars with his sublime head.

(Continued on page 14.)



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! I've got so much grand news to talk about this week that I really don't know where to start! Free Gifts, a special new St. Frank's serial, and a ripping St. Jim's yarn, plus other popular features—next week's bumper number is simply packed with good things.

However, let's take the Free Gifts first. You know all about these now. What do you think of them? Weren't you pleasantly surprised? They're just the dandiest Free Gifts one could wish for! Think of it—One Hundred magnificent coloured Pictures and a superb Album to contain them! It's the Free Gift Scheme of the century!

When you get the first set of pictures and the Album next Wednesday you'll be simply delighted! The following week you get another set of pictures, and so on for ten weeks in all until your Album is full up. Then you'll possess a splendid picture-collection that will be the envy of all your chums—unless they, too, start collecting these grand pictures.

The subjects of our Free Gifts are extremely interesting and will be sure to appeal to all of you. The sets as they appear in completed form in the Album show "Queer Ships," "The Story of

Guy Fawkes," "The King and His Guards," "Artillery Since the World Began," "A Day in an Air Port," "The Life of Buffalo Bill," and "The Year's Sport." In addition there are grand cover and back page pictures, and many others besides, which are artistically arranged on the left-hand pages of the Album, where the librettos that describe the pictures are printed. Every picture, which has a sticky back, is numbered and its position in the Album bears the same number. So all you have to do as you receive the pictures week by week is to cut them out and stick them in carefully in the appropriate places.

You will see from announcements on other pages that our Companion Papers, "The Magnet," "The Ranger," and "The Modern Boy," are presenting to their readers, too, a fine Album and a set of one hundred pictures. Every paper's set of pictures deals with different subjects, so if you decide to collect them all, you will have four fine Albums and 400 different pictures. It's well worth doing!

"THE WHITE GIANTS OF EL DORADO"

This is the title of our thrilling new St. Frank's serial story, which the author, Mr. E. S. Brooks, discusses below in his

special message to all of you. As he says, it is his masterpiece, and you can take it from me, you are in for a big-thrill story that you will follow with avid interest every week.

In a super airship, the Sky Wanderer, all the leading lights of St. Frank's, with Lord Dorrimore and Umloot, set out for an educational tour of the British Empire. But unexpected adventure comes to them ere they reach their first intended stop! And what a thrilling adventure it is—in a strange lost land in South America—a land literally paved with gold, and whose king is none other than a character all "Nelson Lee" readers will well remember. This is easily our best serial story ever, and you will enjoy every word of the gripping adventures of the chums of St. Frank's.

"THE MILLIONAIRE BOOT-BOY!"

Henry Binks—millionaire! Can it be true that the boot-boy of St. Jim's is a millionaire? It is—it are! Henry comes into a fortune left by his uncle, and in next week's sparkling complete story Mr. Clifford deals in fascinating manner with his adventures at St. Jim's. But what's he doing at St. Jim's if he is a millionaire? Ah, that's the story! Henry has high ideals, and he means to live up to them now he is rolling in money. Read all about the boot-boy millionaire—it's the school story of the week bar none!

To complete this wonderful Free Gift number, a thrilling new picture-story serial of "Mick o' the Mounted!" starts. Mountie Mick goes out after fur robbers, and his exciting adventures make the best set of pictures we have had so far.

There will be another column of readers' prize-winning jokes, specially selected by the Jester, and—a tip-top new feature starts—"The St. Frank's Stamp Who's Who," which will give, week by week, pictures of St. Frank's characters. Finally, yours truly will be in the chair again for another chat. See you in next week's bumper number!

THE EDITOR.

A Special Message from Edwy Searles Brooks.

My Dear Readers Old and New,—If the pleasure you derive from reading my new St. Frank's serial is half as great as the pleasure I have had in writing it—well, you're in for a good time. I am so enthusiastic about it that I've just got to sit down and pen this message to all my thousands of loyal old readers. At the same time I am addressing a new host, and it is my sincere hope that I shall soon be able to look upon the New Host as a part of the Old Host. It's up to me, of course, to give you something in the way of school-adventure stories which will make you sit up and ask for more.

I want to tell you something about this big new yarn. After many lengthy pore-voices, the Editor and I decided that a thrilling new tale in a really novel setting would be most popular—a story featuring all the old favourites of St. Frank's—to say nothing of such celebrities as Lord Dorrimore and Umloot. And I was so keen on this new story that while I was writing it I sometimes felt that I was actually a member of Lord Dorrimore's schoolboy party.

It's a tale of breathless adventure in a strange and wonderful land—Arcacland, the lost country of the White Giants, the amazing land of El Dorado. I can hear some of you old readers saying that this reminds you of something. Of course! The St. Frank's fellows went to the land of the White Giants once before, and I have vivid recollections of writing of their dangers and adventures. One of the reasons why I am so enthusiastic about this present story is that I am taking Nipper & Co. back to the same old scenes—only for Nipper & Co. to find that they are really new scenes. This present story is absolutely brand new, of course, from beginning to end, and in my opinion it is my masterpiece.

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity of thanking the many, many loyal readers who have written to me during the past months and to tell them that I very warmly appreciate their good wishes and their steadfast friendship.

Always at your service with my pen,



Edwy Searles Brooks

Gussy's Latest Love Affair!

(Continued from page 12.)

CHAPTER 9.

Very Funny!

TOM MERRY gave a whistle of astonishment.

The football match was over, ending in a draw and a prolonged argument. Both the match and the argument being finished, the Terrible Three were indulging in a quiet stroll before tea. Their conversation had turned upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, when, near the school gates, they caught sight of that individual, and Tom Merry gave a whistle.

D'Arcy did not look as usual. He did not see the chums of the Shell. His eyes alternately sought the sky and the earth. As Tom Merry's eyes fell upon him the swell of St. Jim's walked right into a tree growing beside the road.

He recoiled with a sudden exclamation, raised his silk hat, and bowed, and said gracefully:

"Bai Jove, I'm awfully sowwy! I beg your pardon!"

Then he walked on, without having even seen that it was a tree he had collided with.

The Terrible Three looked at one another.

"My only hat!" said Monty Lowther. "Mad!" said Manners, with a shake of the head. "Mad as a hatter! I always foretold this of Gussy."

The swell of St. Jim's came straight on towards them, but unseeing.

The Terrible Three exchanged a grin, and lined up in his path, so that he either had to stop or to run into them.

He did not stop. He did not see them until he had walked right upon Monty Lowther, and then he staggered back.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped. "Where are you going?" demanded Monty Lowther. "What do you mean by charging a peaceful citizen on the King's highway?"

"Weally, Lowther!" "If you wanted to charge anybody, why couldn't you play footer when we wanted you to?" queried Tom Merry. "Weally, Tom Mewwy! I warged you as thwee sillay asses, and I wathah suspect that you wan into me on purpose. I would give you all a feahful thwashin', but—" D'Arcy's face cleared, and he beamed smilingly. "Congwatulate me, deah boys!"

"Congratulate you?" "Yaas, wathah!"

"What are we to congratulate you for?"

"I have been accepted, deah boy!" Tom Merry staggered.

"What?"

"I have been accepted!"

"Accepted?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"By whom?" yelled the Terrible Three together.

"By Miss O'Neil. Congwatulate me!"

Tom Merry looked helplessly at Manners and Lowther. Then they all stared with equal helplessness at D'Arcy.

The swell of St. Jim's was beaming. "Isn't it wippin'?" he asked.

"What?"

"I'm engaged, you know."

"Engaged?" said Tom Merry faintly. "Yaas," said D'Arcy, with a nod. "Isn't it wippin'?" It's a secwet at pwe-

ent, as Clawah will have to wait for me



Stanton of the Mounted was missing—and Mick had been given the job of looking for him. "I wonder what's happened— Mick broke off as a riderless horse cantered towards him. "It's Stanton's horse!"

Mick's fears that something serious had happened were soon proved. Approaching a shack, a man wearing the uniform of a Mountie came out—and deliberately fired his revolver at Mick, wounding him.



In his amazement, McFee dropped the lighted match—and it fell among the shavings. In a moment flames were licking round the shack—while McFee and Eagle Eye fought desperately on the ground.

Thud! McFee, in a desperate position, brought his revolver down on the Indian's head. Eagle Eye collapsed. "I'm getting away—pronto!" muttered McFee, and taking Mick's horse, galloped off furiously.



Accompanied by Eagle Eye, who insisted on travelling on foot, the two reached Diamond City after darkness. "Here's the bank—careful, now!" whispered Mick, as he and the Indian crept along cautiously.

Silently Mick climbed through the window into the bank, and a shaft of moonlight showed him a man bending down in front of a safe. "Put 'em up, McFee!" snapped Mick, his revolver held steady.

(Mick's on the trail of fur robbers next week.)

MOUNTED!

OF THE WILD WEST!



Only half-conscious, Mick was dragged into the shack, where—already a helpless prisoner—was Stanton, the missing Mountie! "I must get them out of the way—for good!" said McFee, the Mountie impostor.



He surrounded the shack with oil-soaked shavings, and was about to light them when a lithe figure darted forward and leaped upon his back. Eagle Eye, Mick's Indian pal, had come to the rescue!



But Eagle Eye, though dazed, had been feigning unconsciousness. Now he leaped into the burning shack, and soon appeared with Mick slung across his shoulders, and dragging Stanton along the ground.



"McFee means to rob the Diamond City Bank to-night—he reckons my togs will help him get away!" gasped Stanton. "That's his little mistake!" said Mick, and raced off on Stanton's horse.



Crack! McFee had taken a chance in the knees and drawn his gun. Crack! That was Mick's weapon—and then began a desperate gun-fight in the bank, and the knees were split by the flashes.



McFee made a sudden bolt for the door, but Mick sprang forward and his fist lashed out, catching the robber on the jaw. McFee toppled through the doorway—into Eagle Eye's arms. Mick had got his man!

a little, you know. Of course, you fellows won't mention it?"

"Certainly not," gasped Manners.

"I am only tellin' my personal friends," said D'Arcy. "I don't want it to be known all ovah the school. The fellows might chip me."

"They—they might!" stuttered Lowther. "Come to think of it, very likely they would. So few fellows of the Fourth Form are engaged, you know."

"Besides, it would be disrespectful to the young lady to let the fellows make jokes on the subject, you know. And they might."

"My hat! They might!"

"I am goin' to get a wing," said D'Arcy, with much satisfaction.

"Eh?"

"I shall get a wing immediately."

"Well, I knew you were a downy bird," said Lowther, "but I didn't know you could sprout wings."

"Pway don't be an ass, Lowthah! I mean an engagement-wing."

"Oh, a ring! Ha, ha, ha! My hat!"

"Isn't it wippin', deah boys?"

"Oh, ghastly, ripping!" said Tom Merry. "I say, you'll send me some of the wedding cake, won't you?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, hang!" said Lowther. "As it's likely to be a long engagement, I think there ought to be an engagement cake instead of a wedding cake. What do you think of the idea, Gussy?"

"I think you are an ass, Lowthah, and I wufuse to discuss such a wickulous wemark."

"Now look here," said Tom Merry, taking D'Arcy by the shoulder, "do you mean to say seriously that you've had the awful nerve to propose to Miss O'Neil?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And she's accepted you?"

"Yaas."

"And you are engaged?"

"Yaas, wathah! Isn't it wippin'!"

Tom Merry could only stare. He knew that the swell of the School House was incapable of falsehood, and he could hardly have imagined a thing like this. What did it mean? Why had Clara O'Neil accepted him?

It dawned upon Tom Merry suddenly.

He knew Miss O'Neil, having often visited the vicarage, and he knew her merry Irish face, and her merry laugh, and her love of a joke.

It was certain that she had accepted D'Arcy only in fun. But the swell of St. Jim's was taking it seriously enough.

"Well, aren't you fellows goin' to congratulate me?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, yes!" gasped Tom Merry. "May you live a thousand years—I mean, may you have a thousand wives—no, that's not it—"

"May your shadow never grow whiskers!" said Monty Lowther solemnly. "Of course, you'll always keep a place at your fireside for Uncle Monty."

"Weally, you ass—"

"I can do you a photograph of the happy pair at a very reasonable rate," said Manners. "Cabinet size, standing hand-in-hand, smile on bride's face, bridegroom looking as if life wasn't worth living, as usual—highly finished and well mounted, suited to hang up in any gent's drawing-room, price—"

But D'Arcy was gone.

The chums of the Shell looked after him, watching the elegant figure disappear in the old stone gateway of St. Jim's.

Then their eyes met.

They smiled, they grinned, they laughed—and the laugh became a wild and irresistible roar.

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

They could not help it. The whole business seemed so utterly ridiculous. The seriousness with which D'Arcy took his engagement made it all the funnier. They roared, and Tom Merry staggered, grasping a tree, and Manners clung to a fence and shrieked, while Monty Lowther lay down in the grass beside the road and kicked up his heels in ecstasy.

It was thus that Blake, Herries, and Dig found them a few minutes later, almost in hysterics.

"What on earth's the matter?" demanded Blake.

Monty Lowther sat up, weeping.

"Ha, ha, ha! Go and ask Gussy!"

"But what is it?"

"Ask Gussy," sobbed Manners.

"What is it, Tom Merry, you ass?"

Tom Merry shrieked:

"Ask Gussy!"

And Blake and his chums, thoroughly mystified, went in to ask Gussy.

CHAPTER 10.

Gussy Gets Wrath.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY sat in Study No. 6 in the School House. He was glad that it was a half-holiday, and a fine afternoon, because it led to the House being deserted.

The old building was very quiet, and D'Arcy had the study to himself. He sat at the table, pen in hand. Sometimes the pen travelled quickly over the paper. Sometimes D'Arcy sat gnawing the handle of it, sometimes he tore up a sheet and started a fresh one. But he was not writing out impots—he was not doing exercises.

Three faces peered in at the open door. They belonged to his chums, but D'Arcy did not see them.



WHO PUNCHED PROUT?

Fifth Form master at Greyfriars School punched on the nose in the dark! Who did it? It's the "sack" on the spot for the offender! And everyone thinks it was Horace James Coker, the fool of the Fifth, who had threatened to do it. But was it Coker?—he protests his innocence. Read this magnificent book-length yarn of Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars. Amusing! Amazing! Exciting!

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He had just finished some scribbling, and he took up the paper and recited aloud what he had written.

"When stars are in the moonlit skies,
Then oft I think of Clara's eyes;
When music soft mine ear doth greet,
I think of Clara's accent sweet!"

"Bai Jove, that's not so bad!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a sudden roar of laughter from the door, and D'Arcy turned round in surprise and indignation. He hastily thrust the scribbled paper into his pocket.

Blake and Herries and Digby came in. Herries collapsed into the armchair gasping. Digby sat on the window and yelled. Blake held his sides.

D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass into his eye and surveyed them indignantly.

"Weally, you fellows——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What is the meaning of this intwusion?"

"My hat!" ejaculated Blake. "I should think fellows could come into their own study if they liked! Besides, we like poetry, don't we, Dig?"

"Oh, my hat! Yes! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't you like it, Herries?"

"Don't ask me!" sobbed Herries. "Oh, oh! Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah asses——"

"I think I could repeat it from memory, it's so ripping," said Blake dreamily.

"When cats are howling on the tiles,
Then most I think of Clara's smiles!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah chump!"

"Isn't that right?"

"When ere I see a red, red rose,
I often think of Clara's nose."

Digby and Herries yelled. D'Arcy cast a glance towards the poker.

"And when I see the carpet beat,
I seem to hear my Clara's feet."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blake, I wefuse to allow these wibald wemarks upon a sawwed subject," said Arthur Augustus.

"Rats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus rushed at the scoffer. Blake dodged round the table with the swell of St. Jim's at top speed after him.

"Stop, you uttah wottah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am goin' to give you a feahful thwashin'."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy stopped himself, breathless, and Blake stopped, on the other side of the table. The swell of St. Jim's glared through his monocle.

"I wegard you as an uttably wank outsidah!" he exclaimed. "Undahstand me, you fellows! I wefuse to allow any jokes to be made in this study about the young lady I am engaged to."

Blake almost fell upon the floor.

"The—the what?" he stuttered.

"The young lady I am engaged to!" said Arthur Augustus loftily. "I have the honah to inform you that Miss Clara O'Neil has kindly and gwaciously honahed me by acceptin' me!"

Blake stared blankly.

"My hat!" ejaculated Digby. "What larks!"

"Weally, Digby——"

"You don't mean to say——" gasped Blake at last.

"Pway don't wepeat all Tom Mewwy's wemarks," said D'Arcy, with a lofty wave of the hand. "Miss O'Neil has accepted me."

"Then that's what was the matter with those Shell bounders?" roared Herries. "I thought it was hysterics at first."

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"You ass, Gussy!" roared Blake. "You know Miss O'Neil—she's making fun of you!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"It's all a joke, of course."

D'Arcy's face was very frigid.

"I decline to have my engagement considahed in the light of a joke!" he said. "I twust you will not force me to bwreak our old fwendship, Blake."

"My hat!"

"If any more wibald wemarks are made on this subject I shall wetiah fwom the study and shall dwop your acquaintance."

"Gussy—"

D'Arcy waved his hand.

"Pway don't pwoolong the discush, Blake. Unless you can speak of the mattah in a tone of pwopah and becomin' wespoot, I beg that you will allow it to dwop."

And Arthur Augustus walked out of the room. Blake sank helpless into a chair.

"I always said that Gussy would be the death of me," he murmured. "I know he will. Oh, my Uncle James! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Digby and Herries.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther looked into the study, grinning.

"Have you got it?" asked Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes—Gussy's engaged!"

"Isn't it ripping?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"When stars are in the sunny skies,
I think of Clara's stunning eyes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"When all the world is in repose
I think of Clara's mouth and nose."

The juniors shrieked.

There was a quick step in the passage, and D'Arcy pushed into the study again, through the Shell fellows in the doorway. He had come back for his hat. He jammed his monocle into his eye and glared round at the juniors.

The juniors fled at top speed—or as near as they could get to top speed, for laughing.

Arthur Augustus pursued them half-way down the passage, with the fives bat waving aloft.

Then he returned to the study, satisfied that he had adequately chastised the irreverent youths who refused to treat his engagement with the seriousness so important a matter demanded.

Tom Merry & Co. gathered on the lower landing, too breathless with laughter to run any farther. They had several separate aches each, for D'Arcy had been very reckless with the fives bat. But they hardly felt them. They sat on the stairs and roared; and the sound of a slamming door above announced that their laughter had reached the ears of Miss O'Neil's fiancé.

CHAPTER 11.

Lines for Laughing.

TOM MERRY & CO. laughed and laughed till they hadn't another laugh left in them.

They were quite exhausted when they staggered out into the quadrangle at last. The absurdity of a junior of fifteen proposing to a lady of twenty-five, and of taking his engagement seriously, appealed very much to their sense of humour, though D'Arcy could not see it in the same light.

"But Gussy means 'business,'" said Blake, with tears of exhaustion in his eyes. "I don't know why Miss O'Neil

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"I wogard you as a set of wottahs!" he exclaimed.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"When stars in the sunny skies—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"When shines the moon at midday bright,
I think that Clara's perfect—quite!"

"You uttah ass—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus quivered with wrath. There was a fives bat in the corner of the study, and D'Arcy's hand grasped it. Without wasting time in words, he started on Blake.

"There, you uttah wottah! Take that—"

"Ow!" roared Blake. "Yow! Leave off! Yaroo!"

"And that—and that—"

"Hurrah!" roared Digby. "Give it him! Hallo! Leave off! Don't touch me with that fives bat, you ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Herries. "Ha, ha! Yow!"

The chums of the Fourth simply hopped as D'Arcy laid about recklessly with the fives bat. They made a rush to escape, knocking the Terrible Three out into the passage and falling over them.

But D'Arcy was not yet appeased.

He dashed out into the passage after them, flourishing the fives bat, and Monty Lowther gave a wild yell as it descended with a heavy thwack across his shoulders.

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Run for it!"

"Bai Jove! You boundahs!"

"Run!" yelled Blake.

"Take that—and that—bai Jove! You wottahs! Take that!"

has pretended to accept him, but so long as he believes it's all right, he'll take it seriously."

"Wally!"

Tom Merry called out the name as he saw the scamp of the Third come in at the gates.

Wally nodded coolly and surreptitiously licked a jammy finger.

"Hallo, kid!" he said.

"You went out with Gussy this afternoon?" said Tom Merry. "Do you know where he went—or what he was up to?"

"Oh, he's told you, has he?" said Wally, with a grin.

"Only us," said Blake. "It's a secret from the rest, and mind you don't make it the talk of the Third Form Room."

Wally chuckled.

"Not likely. I'll keep it dark. We don't want Gussy to be gayed too much, and we don't want jokes made about Miss Clara. She's a ripping girl. They had strawberry jam and plum cake at the vicarage for tea. Clara made the plum cake. That's something like a girl—one who can make jolly good cakes!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Never mind the cake. Is it true that Miss O'Neil has—"

"Accepted Gussy?"

"Yes."

"Quite true," grinned Wally. "Keep it dark from Gus, you know; but she did it on my advice—to cure him."

"Cure him!"

"That's it! He'll soon get sick of being engaged, you see, and it may be a lesson to him for years to come," said Wally sagely.

The juniors roared.

"And that's Miss Clara's idea?"

"That's it."

"Gussy's taking it quite seriously."

"Of course he is," said Wally. "Gussy takes everything seriously."

And Wally went on cheerily, with his ear-splitting whistle.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy issued from the School House. He did not take any notice of Tom Merry & Co. He crossed directly to the letter-box in the school wall and posted two letters. Then he walked away again, with his aristocratic nose held very high in the air.

Blake chuckled.

"Letter to Clara, of course," he remarked. "The other to a jeweller, I expect, on the subject of the ring."

"The ring! Ha, ha, ha!"

And there was a fresh explosion of merriment. Arthur Augustus presenting a young lady with an engagement-ring was comical to think of.

But, as a matter of fact, Blake was wrong about the second letter. It was addressed to a milliner in Rylcombe, on the subject of a new hat. D'Arcy had heard Miss O'Neil praise that hat in the milliner's window; it was a Paris hat which the milliner had had sent down for the purpose of astounding the natives, and she never expected to sell it. The price was five guineas—prohibitive in Rylcombe. But what was money when a fellow was in love, and newly engaged to the finest girl on earth? D'Arcy thought that that hat would make a very pleasant surprise for Clara, and he was certainly right about the surprise.

And so Arthur Augustus ordered the hat.

D'Arcy was never better pleased by anything than by a new topper, and so he could think of no better present for Miss O'Neil.

Whether she would be delighted or not remained to be seen.

That evening, and the next morning, Arthur Augustus was somewhat cold to his chums in the Fourth, and hardly spoke to the Terrible Three.

He seemed to suspect them of a desire to laugh at him, and indeed they had very great difficulty in containing their merriment at the thought of Arthur Augustus being engaged.

Whenever the idea crossed their minds they chuckled, and during the morning the Fourth Form master and the master of the Shell were both considerably surprised by mysterious cachinnations proceeding from their classes.

Mr. Linton, the Shell master, glanced up and down the class several times suspiciously, and at last detected Tom Merry in the act of chuckling.

He frowned at once. Mr. Linton was a somewhat severe Form-master, and much given to maintaining strict discipline.

"Merry!" he rapped out.

"Adsum!" said Tom Merry absently. "I—I mean, yes, sir!"

"Stand up!"

"Yes, sir!"

"You laughed just now, Merry!"

"Did I, sir?"

"Are you not aware that you did?"

"Ye-es, sir!"

"Will you kindly acquaint me with the cause of your merriment, Merry?" asked Mr. Linton, glowering.

"If you please, sir—"

Tom Merry paused in dismay. He could not tell Mr. Linton the swell of the School House was engaged to the vicar's daughter, but that was the cause of his merriment.

He stood silent, and Mr. Linton frowned.

"The class-room is not a place for unseemly mirth, Merry!" he exclaimed.

"No, sir!"

"You will take fifty lines."

"Yes, sir!"

"You may sit down."

Tom Merry sat down. He was glad that he had not been further questioned, and he did not mind the fifty lines so much. He tried hard not to think of D'Arcy and his engagement.

Manners and Lowther were feeling the same. But in the lull of the lessons Lowther's active imagination pictured Arthur Augustus purchasing a ring and slipping it on the finger of Miss O'Neil, and the picture was irresistible. Lowther burst into a chuckle that echoed through the class-room. The next moment he recollected himself, and sat reddening; but Mr. Linton's eyes were upon him, his sharp voice rapping out:

"Lowther!"

"Ye-es, sir!"

"Take a hundred lines for laughing in class."

"Thank you, sir!"

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Mr. Linton breathed hard through his nose. The Terrible Three exchanged sympathetic glances.

All went well till the end of morning lessons, and then Manners, being momentarily unoccupied, could think of nothing better than D'Arcy walking out of a church to the tune of the "Wedding March," and Manners shrieked.

Mr. Linton was upon him like a flash.

"Manners!" he shouted.

"Oh!" said Manners.

"This is a conspiracy, I suppose," said Mr. Linton angrily. "It is a concocted scheme for bringing my authority into contempt."

"Oh, sir!"

"Take two hundred lines, Manners!"

"Certainly, sir!"

"The next boy who laughs in class will be caned!"

There was no "next boy." Fortunately, morning lessons ended, or one or another of the Terrible Three would have offended again.

The chums of the Shell looked grim as the class filed out after lessons. The Fourth Form were already out, and Blake & Co. could be seen standing glumly in the passage.

The Terrible Three bore down upon them.

"Where's the champion ass?" asked Tom Merry. "Where's the unspeakable Gus? We owe him three hundred and fifty lines!"

Blake grinned.

"Oh, have you had it, too?" he said. "I was lined to the tune of a hundred for just giving a little giggle in class, and Herries got fifty for whispering to Dig."

Tom Merry laughed.

"We're all in the same boat," he remarked. "It's all Gussy's fault! Oh, here he is! Gussy, are you going to do our lines?"

"Wats!"

"I think we ought to bump him!" said Manners.

"Hear, hear!"

Arthur Augustus walked quickly away. When the juniors gathered in the dining-room for dinner, D'Arcy was not there. He did not turn up for dinner at all, and Mr. Linton asked Blake if he knew where D'Arcy was—a question Blake had to answer in the negative.

D'Arcy, however, came in as the juniors trooped out after dinner, and his hand showed a disposition to linger in his waistcoat pocket—from which the chums guessed that he had made a purchase which was deposited there.

Blake gave a sort of choking giggle.

"It's the ring!" he said.

"The ring!" murmured Tom Merry.

And he yelled.

CHAPTER 12.

The Ring and the Hat.

"BAI Jove! I weally think that will suit Clawah!" Arthur Augustus stood in Study No. 6, holding a ring up to the light. It was a really handsome ring, with three good-sized diamonds in it, all of the purest water. D'Arcy might be, as his chums averred, a duffer in some things, but he was not to be imposed upon in a matter of this sort.

The ring sparkled and flashed in the light.

"Bai Jove! I think Clawah will like it!"

Three grinning faces looked in at the door.

D'Arcy turned round quickly.

"Weally, you Shell boundahs—"

He thrust the ring hastily into his waistcoat pocket.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther came into the study.

"Let's see it!" said Monty Lowther. "I'm rather a judge of rings. I always make it rubie when I'm engaged."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"I prefer pearls," said Manners. "They're very delicate and nice, and suitable for a really nice girl—and cheap."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Are you really going to take that ring to Miss O'Neil, Gussy?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"My hat!"

"As you have seen it," said D'Arcy, "you may as well give me your opinion on it, deah boys."

He held the ring up.

"Splendid!" said Tom Merry.

"I was just a little doubtful whethah Clawah was quite old enough to weah diamonds," said D'Arcy. "She is a little oldah than I, of course, but—"

"A little!" roared Lowther. "Why, I know she was twenty-five last birthday."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"That's young enough for a Naval officer," said Manners solemnly, "but a little too old for you!"



As Gussy took the hat from the box, he simply staggered. Instead of the beautiful Paris hat that he had bought for Miss O'Neil, it was a battered old bowler that had evidently been discarded by some tramp! "Bai Jove!" gasped Gussy with dismay. "I am astounded!"

D'Arcy flushed scarlet. In his innocence, he did not know that his uneasiness with regard to that obnoxious sea gentleman was known to anyone else.

"You uttah ass, Mannahs—"

"Well, it's a ripping ring, and Clara can wear diamonds," said Tom Merry. "Of course, it's a little old for a girl of twenty-five—pearls would be better. But, then, you always were gorgeous."

"The jewellah assuahed me that it was quite the thing," said D'Arcy. "There was a wing with pearls at half the price, but he thought that wouldn't be so suitable."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you can't have paid for that ring," Manners remarked. "It can't have been less than fifteen quid."

"What a vulgah expression, Mannahs!"

"Oh, Gussy couldn't get engaged on tick," said Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I had a fivah ffrom my governah this mornin'," explained D'Arcy. "I told him I wanted it for a vewy special purpose, you know."

"I bet you didn't tell him what purpose!" shrieked Tom Merry.

"Well, no. I thought I had bettah put that off a bit. I shall go down to Eastwood and see him personally, to ask him his consent to the engagement."

"Won't that be rather late in the day?" grinned Lowther.

"Pewwaps it will. Howevah, I have no doubt it will be all wight. My governah is a vewy sensible old boy, you know."

"But you didn't get a ring like that for five pounds, surely?" said Tom Merry.

"Scarcely, deah boy. I had thwee-pounds-ten besides, and I gave the jewellah that and the fivah. Then that leaves me owin' ten pounds. He knows me," said Arthur Augustus, with a touch of dignity. "He knows the money's all wight."

"He oughtn't to have—"

"Wats!"

"By the way, we came to give you a message," said Tom Merry. "There's a messenger waiting for you downstairs."

D'Arcy started.

"A messenger—for me?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, it's nothing from the vicarage," said Tom Merry, guessing D'Arcy's thoughts from his fluctuating colour. "It's a chap in uniform—a commissionaire from the village. I think he's from the milliner's."

D'Arcy started.

"Has he a hatbox with him?"

"Yes."

"Bai Jove! It's the hat!"

"The hat?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He's not from the hatter's," said Tom Merry. "It's not the hatter's man—I know him—you have seen him here often enough. This is a milliner's man, and Binks thought there must be some mistake, and that he really wanted to see Mrs. Holmes."

D'Arcy coloured.

"No, it's all wight; Binks ought to have sent him up. Pway tell the chap to come up here, deah boys."

The Terrible Three quitted the study.

"It must be a present for Clara!" grinned Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus heard the Shell fellows laugh as they went downstairs. His aristocratic brows came together in a frown.

"Bai Jove! Those chaps are howwibly wuff in their ways!" he murmured. "They have never been in love with the sweetest gal on earth! Pewwaps they will look

at the mattah in a diffent light when they are a little oldah!"

And D'Arcy wagged his head, as if he himself were forty-five at least.

He placed the ring away in a little case, which he put in his pocket, and waited for the man from Rylcombe to come in.

Presently there was a tap at the door.

"Come in, deah boy!"

The man from the milliner's entered, with his bandbox in his hand. He touched his cap to D'Arcy.

"Master D'Arcy?" he said.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The hat, sir, from Madame Boni."

"Thank you vewy much, deah boy!"

The man handed the bandbox to the swell of St. Jim's, at the same time presenting him with a sealed envelope, which evidently contained a bill.

D'Arcy started. He had forgotten that little matter.

He laid the bandbox down and opened the envelope, and looked at the bill.

"Five guineas!"

He was not sure, but he believed he had a shilling. He

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certainly had no more. And on top of the bill was printed in large and terrifying letters:

"Terms strictly cash."

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy.

The man waited. He had evidently been instructed to wait.

Arthur Augustus glanced at him.

"Were you instwucted to wait for an answah?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Vewy good!"

D'Arcy crossed to the desk under the window, and laid the bill there. Then he came back towards the messenger and placed a shilling in his palm. It was his last shilling.

"Pway accept that, my man," he said. "And kindly inform Madame Boni that I will send her a wemittance."

"Very good, sir," said the man.

D'Arcy felt relieved. He had feared that the man had been told not to leave the hat without the money.

"Thank you very much," he said. "I will send the wemittance shortly."

"Thank you, sir!"

And the man, with a perfectly grave face, as if he had never suspected anybody of being short of money in his life, stepped out of the study.

Arthur Augustus turned to the hatbox, as it stood on the carpet, neatly tied.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured.

He thrust his hands into his trousers pockets, as if in hope that a solitary coin might be lingering there, and drew out the lining—only lining—merely that, and nothing more, as the poet remarks.

"Bai Jove! Stonay!"

The messenger gave a backward glance as he quitted the room, and his solemnity was gone from his face now. He was grinning, but he disappeared before Arthur Augustus turned round.

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The swell of St. Jim's stood with the lining of his empty pockets extended, looking in dismay at the hatbox.

The door closed.

What was to be done?

CHAPTER 13.

Coming to Blows!

"PWAY excuse me, sir!"

Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, paused on his way to the Fourth Form Room that afternoon. Arthur Augustus was standing in his path, bowing, and raising his silk hat in the most graceful manner.

"Yes, yes!" said Mr. Lathom, blinking at D'Arcy over his spectacles. "Yes, what is it?"

"Will you be so kind as to excuse me fwom classes this aftahnoon, sir?"

"What?"

"I have a most important mattah to attend to, sir."

"Really, D'Arcy—"

"I twust you will be kind enough to excuse me, sir," said Arthur Augustus earnestly. "It is weally a vewy important mattah."

"Very well," said Mr. Lathom, who was in a hurry. D'Arcy had never asked so big a favour before. "Very well, D'Arcy. You may absent yourself."

"Thank you vewy much, sir!"

The little Form master walked on.

Arthur Augustus was beaming with satisfaction. He intended to pay a visit to the vicarage that afternoon and present the object of his adoration with the ring. That was a most important function, and certainly deserved to have an afternoon devoted to it. What were lessons in comparison?

Less than nothing!

A chuckle made D'Arcy turn his head, and he saw the hopeful countenance of his minor, with a blot of ink upon his cheek and a blacklead smear on his eyebrow.

Arthur Augustus frowned.

"Wally, you young wascal—"

"Hallo, Gussy! So you're cutting lessons this afternoon?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I wish you could beg me off from old Selby," said Wally, with a sigh.

"I am afwaid that would be impos, deah boy."

"Going to the vicarage?"

"Yaas."

"Look here, if you stay to tea you might smuggle away some of the cake," said Wally. "Could you manage to hide some in your silk hat?"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Got the ring?" asked Wally.

"Weally—"

"You might let a chap see it," said Wally in an injured tone. "You're only accepted because I put it so nicely for you to Clara. As a matter of fact, I did the whole business for you. I ought really to be engaged to Clara, instead of you."

"If you speak of the mattah in that gwossly diswespectful way, Wally, I shall have no wesource but to give you a thwashin'." Howevah, you may see the wing. Come into the quad."

And in an angle of the School House building D'Arcy halted and produced a little morocco box from his pocket and showed the ring.

Wally uttered an exclamation of delight.

"Ripping!" he exclaimed. "How much?"

"Eighteen-pounds-ten."

Wally staggered.

"Eighteen-pounds-ten!" he exclaimed.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, you silly ass!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Miss O'Neil won't take it."

"Wats!"

"Hallo! What have you got there?" asked the voice of Percy Mellish, the sneak of the Fourth, as he came strolling round the corner. D'Arcy hastily restored the ring to his waistcoat pocket.

"Nothin' to intewest you," he replied coldly.

Mellish shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, keep your giddy secret!" he said.

"It is not exactly a secwet, deah boy, but I don't see why I should show you the thing. I wegard you as an inquisitive pwowlah."

"Go hon!" said Mellish.

"Yaas, and a spyin' beast!" said D'Arcy.

"Hear, hear!" said Wally.

Mellish grinned. Hard words break no bones, seemed to be his maxim.

"What could be fairer," he grinned, "than the beauty of Clara? What giddy delights could be richer and rarer?"

D'Arcy turned scarlet.

"You wottah!" he exclaimed. "I don't believe you found that papah at all, as you told me: I believe you got it out of my jacket pocket in my study!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Mellish, flushing.

"That's the sort of wotten thing you would do!" said D'Arcy. "Bai Jove! If you gwain at me in that pwovokin' way I will give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"Rats!"

"I wegard you with the pwofoundest contempt," went on D'Arcy, warming to his subject, and heedless of the fact that fellows were gathering round to listen to him. "Only ten minutes ago I found you in my study, meddlin' with the stwing on the hatbox there. You would have opened it and looked inside if I hadn't come in."

"Rats!"

"You are an inquisitive beast, and I considah you wathah dishonourable as well."

"Go it, Gussy!" said Figgins of the New House encouragingly. "Let him have it in the neck!"

"Pile it on!" said Blake. "He deserves it!"

Mellish chuckled.

"I don't mind," he said. "It's as good as a gramophone. I never see D'Arcy without thinking of a tailor's dummy with a gramophone attachment inside."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy simply bristled with wrath. This was too much. He rushed straight at the sneak of the Fourth and grasped him.

"Bai Jove!" he panted. "I'll wipe up the quad with you!"

There was a shout of encouragement. No one liked Mellish.

"Go it, Gussy!"

"Squash him, old son!"

"Give him a licking!"

Mellish stiffened up and closed with D'Arcy. The next moment the two juniors were going it hammer-and-tongs, D'Arcy minor holding his major's hat the while.

There was a sudden clang of the schoolbell.

"Hallo! There goes the bell!" exclaimed Blake. "Chuck it, you chaps!"

The juniors rushed off towards the School House.

"Let go!" muttered Mellish.

As D'Arcy had an exeat for the afternoon he need not have been in a hurry, and had the position been reversed Mellish would probably have held on to his opponent and made him late for classes.

But that was not like D'Arcy; he was always generous. He released Mellish as the bell clanged over the quadrangle.

The sneak of the Fourth dashed off. He did not seem to mind the rough handling he had received. He grinned as he ran into the School House.

"Good-bye, Gussy!" said Wally. "I shall have to buck up, or old Selby will jump on me. Good luck! And don't forget the cake!"

"Weally, Wally—"

But Wally was gone.

Arthur Augustus entered the School House to put some finishing touches to his attire before sallying forth. And while the rest of the Fourth Form were grinding Latin irregular verbs under Mr. Lathom's spectacles the swell of St. Jim's walked down to the vicarage.

CHAPTER 14.

A Present for Clara!

MISS O'NEIL was in the garden. She had been gardening for some time, and the autumn gardening was not light work apparently.

At all events, several tresses of her hair had come loose and were floating over her face, and her hands were encased in big, thick gloves.

She looked round and smiled brightly at the sight of D'Arcy with a handbox in his hand. The smile faded from her face the next moment. Perhaps at the sound of the footsteps she had expected somebody else and was surprised to see D'Arcy instead. But it took her only a second to work up a second smile as sweet as the first; and D'Arcy, whose eyes were shyly on the ground, noticed nothing of the changes in her countenance.

"Arthur!" exclaimed Miss O'Neil. "Faith, and it's you!"

"Yaas, wathah, Clawah!"

Miss O'Neil laughed.

"Oughtn't you to be at your lessons, Arthur?" she asked.

"I did not know you had a holiday at St. Jim's on Thursday."

"No, but—"

"I hope you are not playing truant, Arthur," said Clara, with a serious shake of her head, which set the loose tresses dancing.

Arthur Augustus coloured painfully.

Playing truant was quite out of keeping with being engaged to be married, and he felt that the remark was not so tactful as most of Clara's observations. He did not notice the dancing gleam of fun in the bright blue Irish eyes.

"Weally, you know," he remarked, "I have leave."

"How nice!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then you have come over to tea?"

"Yaas, deah gal—with your permish."

"How nice! Lieutenant Beamish is here to tea, and you will like his company so much, I am sure," said Clara brightly.

Arthur Augustus' face fell.

That obnoxious naval man was there, then. It was most annoying.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy.

"You like Mr. Beamish, don't you?" said Clara.

"I have a gweat wespsect for the naval pwofession," replied D'Arcy.

That was really a tactful answer.

"He has such nice eyes," said Miss O'Neil, rather dreamily.

"Weally, you know—"

"Dear me," Miss O'Neil exclaimed the next moment, "I must go in! I am so untidy."

"Bai Jove, I wegard you as lovely, deah gal!"

"But I must go in. You will come in, Arthur?"

"Yaas, wathah! I—I have a little pwesent for you, deah gal."

"Oh!"

"I think you will wathah like it."

Miss O'Neil glanced at the bandbox. She had noticed it before, and it puzzled her.

"What ever have you there, Arthur?" she exclaimed.

"A little pwesent."

"In a bandbox?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Really, Arthur—"

"You will not be so owuel as to refuse it, Clawah?"

Miss O'Neil laughed.

"Well, I don't know what it is yet!" she exclaimed.

"I will jolly soon open it."

The girl stood watching him as he untied the string, a somewhat slow and difficult process. But it was done at last, and Arthur Augustus loosened the lid of the cardboard box.

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Miss O'Neil's expression was very grave.

Her love for fun, added to the reasons Wally had given her for pretending to accept Arthur Augustus, had caused her to enter into the affair, but she had not foreseen that D'Arcy would expend money upon presents for her.

That sort of thing would not do; but how to stop him without wounding his feelings was a difficult question.

"I wathah think you will like this," said Arthur Augustus, looking up from the bandbox.

Miss O'Neil did not speak. She waited to see what would be revealed, wondering what D'Arcy could have purchased for her.

Arthur Augustus removed the lid. Thin white tissue paper was revealed.

"Faith, it cannot be a hat!" exclaimed Miss O'Neil.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Dear me!"

D'Arcy lifted the tissue paper, and stepped back, without looking into the bandbox again, his eyes on Miss O'Neil's face.

The girl glanced down at the box, and her face changed.

D'Arcy was surprised at her expression.

"It is a hat!"

"Yaas. Don't you like it?"

Miss O'Neil's eyes flashed.

"D'Arcy!"

"Weally, Clawah—"

"If this is your idea of a joke, Arthur, I must say that I quite fail to see where the humour enters into it!"

"Clawah!"

"I do not understand it in the least!"

"Don't you like it?" exclaimed D'Arcy, in dismay.

"Like it?"

"Yaas. I thought you would like it."

"I think you must be foolish to imagine that I could like an absurd joke of this sort!" said Miss O'Neil coldly.

"Joke!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"I suppose you did not bring this thing to me seriously?"

"Thing! I—I thought you'd like it."

"Nonsense!"

Miss O'Neil was not half so sweet as she had been. In fact, she was looking most decidedly annoyed. D'Arcy, for the first time, glanced down into the hatbox, thinking that perhaps the hat had been squashed a little in transit. It had looked all right when he had first opened the box in the study, but it had been left there for an hour or two since then, and might have been damaged.

He took the hat from the hatbox.

Then he simply staggered.

Instead of the beautiful Paris hat that had been the pride of Madame Boni's window in Rylcombe High Street, he had taken a battered old bowler-hat from the bandbox.

A hideous, dirty, battered old tile, evidently picked up from a dustheap, after being discarded as no longer wearable by some tramp.

D'Arcy gazed at it speechlessly.

It seemed like a hideous dream.

How had the object got there? He had tied up the bandbox, after looking at the milliner's hat to make sure that it was all right. It seemed like black magic. How had it happened?

The dismay in his face struck Miss O'Neil.

"Well, Arthur," she said more kindly, "you look surprised."

"Bai Jove, I am astounded, you know!"

His dazed expression showed that he had been a victim of a practical joke, if Miss O'Neil had not otherwise guessed it, and a smile dimpled her face.

"Thank you so much, Arthur!" she said demurely. "But I am really afraid that that hat would not suit me!"

CHAPTER 15.

The Missing Ring!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS replaced the lid upon the bandbox. His face was a study. Miss O'Neil's bright eyes were dancing with mirth.

"I—I'm vewy sowwy, Miss Clawah!" stammered the swell of St. Jim's. "I—I have been the victim of a wotten pvaactical joke, you know! I—I had a wippin' hat fwm the millinah's there—a weally wippin' hat—the one you admired the other day, you know."

Miss O'Neil looked very grave.

"You must send it back, Arthur," she said.

"What!"

"I could not possibly accept a present from you."

"Weally, Clawah—"

"My dear Arthur, you will hurt me if you mention such a matter again. You must return the hat to Madame Boni."

D'Arcy looked distressed.

"But I thought gals were fond of new hats?" he remarked feebly.

"So they are," she said. "But—but, really, Arthur, you must not make me any presents! It is impossible!"

"Vewy well, deah gal. Of course, your wishes are law to me, although I am vewy disappointed," said D'Arcy gracefully. "I twust I shall novah be found diswegardin' a gal's wishes. You can let your gardenah thwow that wotten thing away, and I will return the original thing to Madame Boni. Howevah, there is one pwesent you must weally allow me to make you."

"No, no!"

"Weally, deah gal, I must insist in this case!"

Miss O'Neil had taken off her gardening gloves. Arthur Augustus took one of her hands—in his confusion of mind he hardly knew which—and felt in his pocket for the little leather box containing the engagement-ring.

Clara realised at once what he wished, and she drew her hand away quickly.

"Arthur! No, no!"

"I insist, deah gal!"

Arthur Augustus fumbled in his waistcoat pocket. The little leather box did not seem to be there. He did not remember having changed it to another pocket, but he began to fumble in the others to make sure.

"Bai Jove! Where is that wing?"

"Have you lost it?"

"Imposs, but—but it seems to have gone!"

D'Arcy went through pocket after pocket. But he realised at last that he must have lost it.

He turned a crimson face upon Clara.

"Bai Jove, you know, it's gone!"

Miss O'Neil laughed.

"You have lost it, Arthur?"

"It seems so, deah gal!"

"Perhaps you will be able to find it at the school?"

"Yaas, wahah! Now I thing of it, I must have drowped it when I was havin' a tussle with that wottah Mellish! Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy, as a new thought struck him. "Of course, it's anothah of his wotten twicks! That's why he got up that wov with me, to pick my pockets!"

"Pick your pockets?" exclaimed Clara.

"Yaas, wathah; only a joke, you know! That's that wottah's ideah of a joke! Bai Jove! It is all wight! I shall get the wing!"

"You must tako it back to the jeweller, Arthur!"

"What?"

"I cannot accept it!"

"Nonsense, deah gal!" said D'Arcy, in a fatherly manner—a manner the swell of St. Jim's not infrequently assumed towards persons older than himself. "Stuff, you know! How can you be engaged to me without a wing?"

"But—"

"And we are engaged, you know. I want to speak to your governah this aftahnoon, Clawah!"

Miss O'Neil turned pink again.

"But—but, really—"

"I could not allow anythin' suwweptitious to exist about our engagement," said D'Arcy firmly. "It must be open and above board, you know!"

Miss O'Neil looked quite affectionately at Arthur Augustus for a moment. He was a foolish lad, perhaps, but there was something so kind and honourable about him that a girl must have been hard-hearted indeed not to have liked him.

"You are a dear boy, Arthur!" said Clara.

"If you like me, that is all wight!" said D'Arcy.

And he raised Miss O'Neil's hand to his lips in a very gallant way.

There was an exclamation in the shrubbery.

"By George!"

D'Arcy swung his head round, and Miss O'Neil coloured very much. She would have drawn her hand away, but D'Arcy held it firmly.

It was the naval gentleman who was looking at them, in great astonishment.

Lieutenant Beamish was a big, handsome man, with the sunburn of tropical skies in his cheeks, and a large, easy way a sailor has with him. His face was very pleasant and good-natured, his eyes bright and merry. But to D'Arcy, at that moment, he seemed about as unprepossessing as an ogre.

"By George!" he repeated.

D'Arcy still held Miss O'Neil's hand in his own. With the other hand he carefully adjusted his eyeglass in his eye.

"Bai Jove!" he remarked.

"I came to take you to tea, Clara!" said Mr. Beamish. D'Arcy flushed angrily. He didn't like this big, naval man addressin' his fiancée by her Christian name.

"Thank you, Harry!"

That was another surprise for D'Arcy. What the dickens did his fiancée mean by calling this man Harry?

D'Arcy eyed Lieutenant Beamish with great dignity.

"Miss O'Neil will come in to tea with me!" he said loftily.

The naval man stared at him.

"By George!" he said.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But I came to fetch Miss O'Neil," said the big naval man good-humouredly. "Is this one of your young brothers, Clara?"

D'Arcy almost snorted. The man must be as blind as a bat, he thought, not to see that his interest in Clara was far from brotherly.

"Weally, my deah person—" he began.

"This is Master D'Arcy, of St. Jim's," said Clara hastily.

"I shall be obliged if you will wetiah, Mr. Beamish!" said Gussy with dignity.

The naval man stared at him.

"By George!" he ejaculated once more.

The ejaculation seemed to be the only safety-valve Mr. Beamish possessed.

Clara looked half-alarmed and half-amused. Arthur Augustus was riding the high horse now, and at such times it was difficult to get him to dismount.

"You may not be awah of the fact, sir," said D'Arcy, with chilling dignity, "that this lady is my affianced!"

"Eh?"

"This young lady is engaged to me, sir!"

Lieutenant Beamish gave a sort of gasping sound. He seemed to be choking for the moment, and D'Arcy, thinking he was overcome with disappointment and emotion, and the pangs of unrequited love, felt sorry for him. But that was not what was the matter with Lieutenant Beamish. He was trying not to laugh.

But it was no use trying. He burst into a sudden roar that rang through the vicarage garden, and then fairly doubled up with merriment. Miss O'Neil looked strongly inclined to join in it.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lieutenant Beamish.

"Weally—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah wettian!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The naval man staggered away, still laughing, and for a considerable distance his laugh could be heard after he had gone.

CHAPTER 16.

The End of Gussy's Love Affair!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY turned to Miss O'Neil. The girl composed her face as well as she could.

"I am twuly sowwy that this scene should have occurred, Clawah!" said D'Arcy. "It is vewy howwid. But these sailormen are so wude!"

"Let us sit down for a few minutes," said Miss O'Neil.

"Bai Jove, yaas, wathah!"

They sat upon a garden seat under the drooping branches. Miss O'Neil pondered for a moment. She realised that the engagement had gone far enough, and that since Arthur Augustus took it so seriously, it would not do. But how to undeceive him without wounding his feelings? How to make him wish himself that the engagement would come to an end—die a natural death, as it were?

That was a puzzle!

But it had to be done. Clara would not have wounded the kind, honourable lad for anything. She would rather have suffered herself. But the absurd engagement must come to an end.

"Arthur!"

"Yaas, deah gal?"

"You are quite sure that you wish to be engaged to me?"

D'Arcy's look was reproachful.

"Of course, deah gal. Haven't I asked you? Of course, it will have to be wathah a long engagement. I am sowwy for that!"

"How long?" asked Miss O'Neil demurely.

Arthur Augustus reflected.

"It will be a few years before I go up to Oxford," he said reluctantly.

"Then you would want the wedding to take place before you went up to Oxford?"

D'Arcy coloured.

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"Yaas, wathah!" he said. "But—but I—"

"Of course, your father would consent?"

Arthur Augustus pictured himself for a moment telling Lord Eastwood that he meant to marry before going up to Oxford, and he turned cold at the thought. Miss O'Neil was the sweetest girl in the world, but surely she was also the most inexperienced and the most unreasonable.

"Have you written to Lord Eastwood?" asked Miss O'Neil.

"I—I thought I had better leave it for a personal intah-view!" stammered D'Arcy.

"Yes, perhaps. And does Lady Eastwood know?"

"Not yet."

"And your Cousin Ethel?"

"Not yet."

It was dawning upon D'Arcy what those various persons would say when they knew. He began to feel an inward tremor. He did not know it, but that was exactly Miss O'Neil's object.

But he was engaged now, and if he had to face a world in arms, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy would never have broken his word.

To ask a young lady to bestow her promise upon him, and then to calmly tell her that he did not want it after all—that might suit a cad and a bounder, but it would not do for a D'Arcy.

He looked bravely at Clara.

"It's awwanged now, Clawah," he said simply. "I shall nevah change, deah gal!"

Miss O'Neil smiled. She knew how many changes D'Arcy would probably experience before he reached her age, youthful enough as that was.

"Arthur, I know you would never break your word, if everything and everybody were against you—"

"Wathah not, deah gal!" said D'Arcy stoutly.

"I know that when you are grown-up, Arthur, and are seriously in love—no, listen to me—the girl you are fond of will be a very fortunate girl indeed. But that time is not come yet, Arthur. This fancy of yours—for it is only a fancy—will pass, though I hope your friendship will never pass from me."

D'Arcy looked at her blankly.

"But this engagement," said Miss O'Neil, touching his hand, "is all nonsense! And, faith, I think you must realise that yourself."

Arthur Augustus' features worked a little.

"Will you forgive me, Arthur dear, if I tell you that I—I was not serious? I thought that an engagement would make you realise that you were acting thoughtlessly; that is all. I thought it would cure you of a folly, my dear

boy. And—I know you will tell me the truth—I think it has."

The junior was silent again.

Clara pressed his hand.

"So it must be over, Arthur; and, on reflection, you will be glad of it. But you will always be my dear friend."

D'Arcy stood up.

"I suppose I am an ass," he remarked slowly, "and—and you have made me feel it myself. But—but—"

Miss O'Neil smiled.

"You are not sorry it is not serious, Arthur?"

"Yaas—and no. But you are wight, Clawah. I am sowwy I have evah bothered you in this way."

Clara rose, too.

"Nonsense, Arthur!" She took his hand. "It is all over now, and we are good friends. Will you come in to tea?"

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"No, deah gal, thank you! I think I will go."

Arthur Augustus pressed her hand, raised his silk hat, and was gone. Miss O'Neil walked slowly towards the house. Lieutenant Beamish joined her in the shrubbery path. He was looking perplexed.

"What did that young duffer mean, Clara?" he said.

Clara smiled a little sadly.

She explained in a low tone.

"By George!" said Mr. Beamish. "By George!"

He was silent for a few moments.

"He is a nice lad," he said at last, "a very nice lad. But I'm afraid I can't give you up to the nicest lad on earth, Clara! And you can't very well be engaged to two fellows at once, so it's just as well Master D'Arcy has retired."

And the lieutenant slipped his fingers into his waistcoat pocket, and—more successful than D'Arcy—produced a ring therefrom, which he slipped upon Miss O'Neil's finger.

Arthur Augustus walked in at the gates of St. Jim's with a thoughtful expression upon his face. He was disappointed. He could not help being so. But he realised that mingled with his disappointment was a sense of relief. The engagement had been a farce; but if it had been serious, he would have been in about the worst scrape of his life.

That had dawned upon him now, and he was glad that the girl had been so kind and nice as Clara, and had, in plain language, shown him what a duffer he had been.

He had lost his fiancée, but he did not feel gloomy. As a matter of fact, he was half-ashamed to realise that he was relieved.

There was a crowd of juniors near the School House door. The Terrible Three greeted D'Arcy as he came in. He gave them a nod, and passed on, and went up to his study.

There he threw himself into a chair—to think.

Two objects on the table caught his eye. One was a lady's hat, the other a little morocco box. He opened the latter, and the diamond ring flashed before him.

D'Arcy knew that Mellish had done the changing, and that he had replaced the articles in the study for D'Arcy to see when he returned. The swell of St. Jim's reflected for some minutes, and then wrapped the articles up, and called in Binks, the page, and sent them back to the shops where they had come from, with explanatory notes offering to pay either the full value of the articles, or to make any compensation agreeable to the owners, as he no longer wanted the articles.

Binks departed on his errand, and D'Arcy strolled downstairs. The swell of St. Jim's felt that he ought to be feeling sad and depressed; but, as a matter of fact, he did not feel so, and unconsciously he tried to. It dawned upon him all of a sudden that he was trying to humbug himself, and he broke into a sudden smile.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake, looking at him. "Wherefore this jolly grin? Are you thinking of the wedding-day?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"St. George's, Hanover Square, I suppose? Parish churches wouldn't do for you, of course?" Tom Merry remarked. "I hope you'll have me for a bridesmaid."

"Pway don't wot, deah boys! The affair is all off! I was thinkin' that you chaps might like to come and have a feed at the tuckshop," said D'Arcy.

"Hurrah!"

And they did. And Arthur Augustus drowned the last of his disappointment in ginger-beer.

THE END.

(See this page for details of next Wednesday's stupendous FREE GIFT number.)

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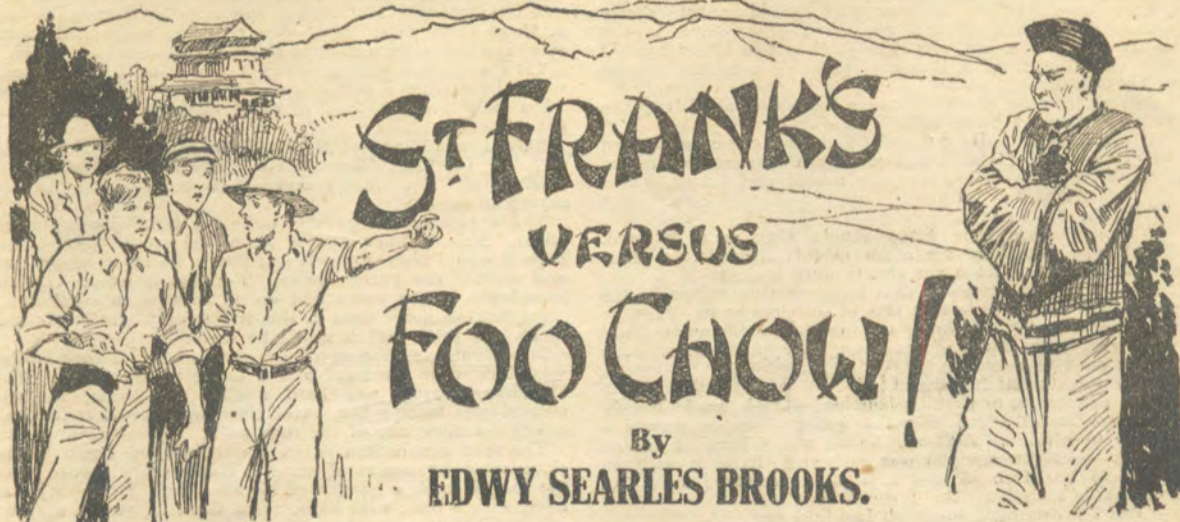
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A Chance in a Million!

THE boys and girls were ordered to go below. "Oh, let them stay!" muttered Lord Dorrimore, as he saw that Nelson Lee was looking worried. "What's the difference now? We're all booked, old man. It might be a bit quicker if we're on deck."

Lee was staring at the rocky wall of the canyon on the starboard side. It was about twenty feet from the end of the bridge to the rock, and down below the water was swirling by rapidly.

"What is it, Lee?" asked Dorrie acutely.

He could see that the detective was gazing at the rock fully ten feet below the edge of the descending mass. Dorrie looked at that great barrier, and could see the slow, insidious movement as it crept lower and lower. He boiled. Why couldn't Foo Chow give the order to let the thing down swiftly? This delay was the cruellest form of torture.

"What is it, Lee?" repeated his lordship.

"By James! I wonder if it would be possible?" murmured Lee, his voice trembling. "It's only a chance in a million, but, at a time like this, even a straw is better to grapple at than nothing."

Dorrie forced himself to be calm.

"What exactly is the idea?" he asked steadily.

Nelson Lee pointed.

"Do you see that ledge there?" he asked tensely.

"Yes."

"Do you see that crack in the rock wall extending upwards—in an irregular line?"

"Why, good gad, yes! But I don't understand—"

"Well, Dorrie, there's a similar crack about five feet farther on!" exclaimed Nelson Lee. "Don't you see how closely this towering mass of rock fits? Supposing we could force that loose portion of rock outwards and wedge it there with crowbars; wedge it so that it protrudes?"

Dorrie stared.

"Old man, you're mad!" he said quietly. "You mean get up to that ledge and then lever out the loose rock? Why, it couldn't be done in the time! An' even if it could, what would be the use?"

"It might mean our salvation," replied Lee.

"Man alive! You're not pretendin' to yourself that that little slice of rock—weighin' less than a ton—would stop this mountain?" asked his lordship, aghast. "Your mind's goin' wrong! This descendin' rock would crush that wedge into powder!"

"It wouldn't, Dorrie; it would jam the whole infernal contrivance!" snapped Lee tensely.

"I tell you you're dreamin', The very weight of the rock—"

"Precisely! The very weight of it will make our plan effective!" interrupted Lee. "If we can only get those levers to work in time! Don't you know, Dorrie, that the greater the weight, the more certainty of an immovable jam? If only we can wedge this descending mass, its own weight will fix it absolutely solid. But our fate will rest upon seconds!"

Lord Dorrimore was utterly incredulous. It seemed

impossible to him that any such scheme could work. Perhaps Nelson Lee was equally hopeless; but, at least, it was something to do—it was something to take the mind off the appalling danger.

A minute later a buzz sounded among the St. Frank's fellows.

"Look at Mr. Lee!" exclaimed Reggie Pitt, pointing. "My hat! What's he up to? There's something on the go, you chaps!"

"Oh, look!"

Nelson Lee was standing at the extreme end of the bridge, and he was in the act of throwing a rope. With a swish, it went curling across the intervening space, and the loose noose dropped over a rough projection of rock. In a flash it was drawn taut. Lee fastened the end to the bridge-rail.

"We shall have to chance the yacht drifting, and snapping the rope!" he said quickly. "Where are the men? Where are they? There's not a moment— Good! Give me one of those crowbars!"

Four men had come running up with heavy crowbars. Each one had a rope tied round it, so that the bar could be slung across the shoulders. Lee was soon swinging out, hand over hand.

"Hurrah!"

"There's something in the wind!"

"What did I tell you?" roared Handforth excitedly. "We're not finished yet! While there's life there's hope, my sons! St. Frank's for ever! Down with these beastly Chinese murderers!"

Fighting Against Seconds!

CRASH!

With a report that was like a minor explosion, accompanied by a rending of wood, the Wanderer's mainmast snapped like a twig.

"Look out, there!"

There was a wild rush for cover. Fortunately, only one or two sailors happened to be in the danger zone at the moment, and they succeeded in getting safely out of the way. With terrific force the smashed fragments of the mast thudded down, crashing into the deck and smashing headlong through one of the skylights.

The destruction had commenced!

In the excitement of watching Nelson Lee's mysterious act, nobody had seen the bending mast—bowed outwards by the relentless weight of the descending rock. That descent was continuous, and had been going on during every tense second since the yacht had been trapped.

This, indeed, was the very crux of the enemy's plan. To give their victims slow, lingering torture before the actual death blow was dealt! But was Dr. Foo Chow over-reaching himself? In order to satisfy his desire for torture, was he providing his intended victims with a loophole?

Nothing on earth could have saved them at the first moment of being trapped; and nothing on earth could save them now if that rock was suddenly released. But it was descending as slowly as ever. This was Foo Chow's plan. First the masts, then the graceful funnel, then the

bridge,*then the dockhouses, and so on, fraction by fraction, until everything was smashed and splintered and twisted into hopeless wreckage!

How much better to see that proud yacht slowly demolished than to witness one mere swift blow! It was as certain as the sun was shining that Foo Chow himself was watching from a distance, gloating over the success of his cunning.

But no member of the enemy could see what Nelson Lee and his helpers were doing!

It was gloomy under the rock, and from the outer canyon only the bulk of the Wanderer could be seen—with that descending death-weight creeping nearer and nearer.

"He's across!"

"Bravo, Mr. Lee!"

Although there were many shouts, they were subdued. There was something too acute in this situation to allow of raised voices. Even the shouts were hushed.

Nelson Lee had reached that ledge—a tiny hollow in the face of the rock wall, with a jagged slit close by it. Another man was already swarming outwards over the rope. And Lee, with every ounce of his strength, applied his crowbar to the cracked rock.

Now for the fateful second!

The chances were that the section of rock would merely crack off and descend into the water. But there was a chance in a million that this would not happen; a chance that it would remain slanting outwards, fixed at such an angle to the face of the cliff that it would form an immovable wedge.

"Am I dreaming?" breathed Lee huskily.

His crowbar had shifted perceptibly. The leverage was enormous, and Lee was exerting every ounce of his strength. Only a foot or two above his head the rock was coming lower, sending splinters of crag down continuously. But, unless the rate of descent increased, there might still be time.

Crash—crash!

The yacht's second mast was splintered like a match-stick—deadly enough proof that the rock was still coming down. Two men were hit by flying fragments, one of them badly gashed. The funnel would be the next to go. This wouldn't dramatically snap, but it would crumple slowly—buckling and bending as the dead weight exerted its full force.

And now that the peril was so close, the watchers stood there fascinated. There was something deadly in watching this slow, relentless descent of the rock. Nelson Lee did not relax his efforts for a moment. With every sinew straining, he wielded his crowbar, and, inch by inch, the loose rock was forced outwards.

Two other men had joined him by this time, and, although the ledge was cramped, they succeeded in adding their own strength to that of the master. Glancing upwards, Lee caught his breath in.

"It'll catch!" he muttered breathlessly. "This rock will foul the lowering bulk above. But will it hold?"

Such a thing seemed preposterous. For if these men, with their puny strength, could force the portion of rock out by means of crowbars, what would these thousands of tons do? Obviously, they would push the rock back into its original position, as though it weighed no more than a fragment of down.

But there was a difference.

The crowbars were forced behind that rock, and loose fragments of rock, too, had been cracked off. For the main section to go back into its original position was impossible. But surely the powerful weight would crumble everything to fine powder?

"It's the best we can do!" said Lee curtly. "Better get back, men—it will be fatal to remain here for another minute."

"You first, sir!" said one of the sailors.

"No, no!" retorted Lee.

It was no time to argue. One by one the sailors went back along the rope hand over hand. The rock was so near now that it was already slowly fouling that projecting fragment.

"Hurrah!"

"Mr. Lee's coming back!"

"But what's the good of it?" asked Handforth. "They've only moved a tiny chunk of rock. It can't help us! By George! Why shouldn't we make a quick rush for the boats, and chance the bullets? Anything's better than waiting here while that rock comes down to crush us!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's chance the boats!"

"Hold on!" said Dick Hamilton grimly. "There seems to be some activity outside—in the open. Look at the way those men are shouting and waving their arms! I'll bet they're making signals, telling the others that the gov'nor has been monkeying with the rock!"

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"My hat! It looks like it!" said Pitt breathlessly.

A good deal of excitement was in progress outside. Men were pointing, others were shouting, and during all this dramatic turmoil Mr. Stokes appeared on deck with two or three other men. They were carrying a clamped metal case, and there were coils of electric wires attached to it.

"It's a tin-pot sort of thing, but it'll certainly explode when the current is switched on," said Barry Stokes tensely. "I'm only praying that it won't explode before we can get it outside!"

"Good man!" panted Dorrie, as he ran up. "The bomb, eh? By the Lord Harry! We might make a dash for it even now! Foo Chow's slow-motion business may be the saying of us all!"

The explosive charge was indeed a hurriedly contrived affair. Nobody knew how it would expend its force. Perhaps it would blow upwards and fail in its object altogether and shatter the yacht's bows. Perhaps it would explode harmlessly in the water and do no damage to anything.

At such an acute time as this it was only possible to test it, and to pray that it would be successful.

Mr. Stokes and the men hurried forward. A rope ladder was slung over the bows and a sailor nipped down. The Wanderer's prow was hard against the chain, for the current was forcing her. Her stern was slewed round and nearly touching one of the rock walls.

The man commenced to fix the improvised bomb to the chain-cable by means of wires. Leads were craned over the rail to catch a glimpse of his activities. Everybody was filled with a new, wild hope. Was there a possible chance?

The Chinese were forgotten.

Nobody thought of those signals and the shouts. Would the bomb be effective? Would it succeed in shattering that chain? And, if such a miracle happened, would the yacht be able to slip out of this death-trap?

It was the latter possibility which seemed utterly and positively remote.

For the Chinese hordes at the rope would hear the explosion. The watching officers would see what had been done, and before the yacht could possibly glide free of that rock it would thunder down. So there seemed little or no possibility of escape.

But that one slim chance—that forlorn hope—gave everybody courage.

The bomb was fixed, and the men came swarming up the rope ladder. Shouts were passed along, and Nelson Lee now held a switch in his hand. But the wires were not yet connected to the electrical circuit.

"Hurry!" commanded Nelson Lee urgently.

"Look! Look!" screamed somebody, pointing upwards. The very thing that all had feared was actually happening. That deadly weight of rock was no longer creeping down imperceptibly, it was falling—falling to the accompaniment of a shrieking and grinding as the upper portion of the yacht was caught in the fearful descent.

By a Hairsbreadth!

IT happened in a flash—in a brief, split second. But so much occurred during that insignificant period of time that it seemed prolonged.

Crash—splinter—crash!

Surely the Wanderer was utterly doomed? There was every indication of absolute destruction. That falling rock pressed down with the strength of a sliding mountain. The yacht's graceful funnel was caught, crumpled and twisted into debris like a child's toy.

Captain Burton, on the bridge, uttered a hoarse shout—a shout that he was convinced would be his last. The rock roof was just over his head—falling, smashing down—

And then, accompanied by a fearful grinding of crags, magnified a million times by the tunnel-like nature of the spot, the air became filled with flying splinters. And Captain Burton wondered if this was death. He was crouching low, below the bridge rail.

A miracle!

The rock was still, hanging there with not a foot of clearance between its rugged massiveness and the rail of the bridge. It was even impossible to stand upright. The rock roof was right down upon the Wanderer, as though resting upon the mangled remains of the funnel.

But this, of course, was an impossibility.

Actually, the rock had jammed. When almost on the point of performing its deadly work the gigantic mass had become fouled. And there it remained, fixed, wedged, and—still.

Nelson Lee's desperate ruse had worked! But even Lee did not know why. That projecting portion of crag, so small in itself, had held up the whole diabolical project. But Foo Chow himself was to be thanked for this salvation.

By a sheer stroke of irony Foo Chow had saved every one of his victims!

Had he allowed that rock to descend by the same slow progress as at the beginning the projection would gradually have been crushed and powdered. It was the swift descent which had caused the jamming.

The Wanderer was saved!

When only a foot of space remained between that movable roof and the bridge, the fixture had occurred. And now these thousands of tons of matter hung suspended, as solid as the canyon itself.

There was still the chance that the Chinese hordes might tug and pull until they partially freed the rock, but it was a very slight one. And there was that bomb, too! If only the chain could be torn asunder now—

"We're safe!" shouted somebody. "We're still safe!"

"The rock's fixed!"

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

"We're saved!"

"Three cheers for Mr. Lee!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

Not only the St. Frank's fellows, but the Moor View girls and many members of the yacht's crew joined in the cheer. Pent-up feelings were released in that tremendous shout of joy.

What did it matter about a crumpled funnel and shattered masts? The yacht herself was still whole, still floating. Foo Chow's devilish plan had failed. And if only the chain could be smashed—

"Ready!" shouted Lee, his voice sharp with acute anxiety.

"Yes, sir! The wire's fixed!"

"Stand clear, there!" yelled Mr. Stewart.

Nelson Lee pressed the switch over, and held his breath. Boom!

The explosion was thick and muffled, and the sturdy Wanderer trembled through every deck and through every plate. Her bows heaved slightly, and a dense, pungent mass of smoke arose reekingly and spread over the decks. Several men ran madly to the bows, and looked over.

"The chain's still holding, sir!" came a yell.

"Just our luck!" said Lord Dorrmore, with a grunt.

"But she's weakened!" came another shout. "One of the links is broken, and she's twisted, too—"

"We'll try her!" muttered Captain Burton.

He reached for the engine-room telegraph, the handle of which was only just below the overhanging rock. The skipper was crouching all the time, and the pilot was near by—a ghastly colour with fright, but still sticking to his duty.

Clang-clang!

Full speed ahead! The yacht's propeller commenced plunging in the water, converting the river into foam. And then, with a shrieking rasp of snapping metal, the great barrier-chain came asunder.

"She's gone!"

"The chain's broken!"

But the shouts were scarcely heard in the terrific commotion from above. It seemed as though a million demons were screaming at the same moment. The wreckage of the funnel was scraping along the rock roof, and the noise created was stupefying in its intensity.

But one thing was proved—the Wanderer was moving!

Foot by foot she edged out of the terrible zone of death. Captain Burton was at the wheel now, and, in answer to his touch, the vessel swung slowly and majestically round, so that her stern cleared the rock wall. She went farther and farther out into the open canyon.

"Hurrah! We're out!"

"Saved, by George!"

"Down with old Foo Chow!"

There was such a burst of delirious excitement and joy that everybody went momentarily off their heads. Lord Dorrmore grabbed Nelson Lee's hand, and nearly tore his arm out of its socket. Handforth seized Irene in a fever of happiness, and kissed her.

"Sorry!" he gasped. "I thought you were my sister!"

"Oh, Ted!" breathed Irene.

"Absolutely!" ejaculated Archie. "I mean to say, here we are, sliding out under the good old azure! Foo Chow and his beastly foulness are somewhat biffed in the optic!"

The yacht was now completely clear, and her engines were shut off. She had quite sufficient way to take her onwards in safety. She was a pitiful wreck, with her masts reduced to splintered stumps, and with her once graceful funnel now a crumpled heap of debris. Fumes were pouring out and spreading over the decks in the most suffocating way.

But who cared?

By a hairsbreadth the vessel had succeeded in scraping out of that trap. And from overhead came a tumult of voices as the countless Chinamen were urged to strain at

the ropes. They were only just realising that it would now be too late.

Crack-crack! Zurrh! Crack-crack!

Intermingled with the sharp rifle reports came the deadly rattle of machine-gun fire. A bullet or two spattered thuddingly against the Wanderer's plates. The enemy, foiled in the original purpose, was firing upon the yacht.

"By glory! We can answer this sort of stuff!" roared Dorrie.

"Everybody get below—at once!" shouted Nelson Lee urgently. "There's no need for us all to face this hail of bullets!"

"We want to see the fun, sir!" yelled an excited junior.

"Get below—all of you!" commanded Lee harshly.

Whether they wanted to or not, they were hustled into safety, for the lower decks of the Wanderer were now virtually secure. But Handforth managed to stay on deck.

The yacht's machine-guns were soon at work, and streams of bullets were sent spurring along the rock paths and up among the crags, where the snipers were hidden. The commotion was terrific.

"They're bunkin'!" shouted Dorrie contemptuously. "Of all the infernal scam—"

He paused, a surprised look coming into his face. His revolver crashed from his right hand, and his arm hung limp.

"That's funny!" he said blankly. "I'm hit!"

"Dorrie, old man—" began Lee.

"It's all right—only a nasty hole through the forearm," said his lordship lightly, as he rolled up his sleeve. "H'm! Pretty sight!"

His arm was bleeding seriously, the bullet having passed clean through, miraculously missing the bone. Handforth saw it, and came running up.

"Downstairs—and be quick about it!" snapped Lee. "There's Handforth—you ought to be below, my lad! Help Lord Dorrmore below! Get some of the boys to patch you up, Dorrie—they're experts in first-aid. Hurry!"

"Hang it, I'm stayin' here—"

"You're doing nothing of the sort!" interrupted Lee. "You might bleed to death unless you're quickly doctored. Don't argue, old man, for goodness' sake!"

Dorrie went below with Handforth without another word, and Unlozi looked out to the shore, spear in hand, a picture of utter misery and wild fury. All these enemies, and he couldn't get his spear at work!

The shattering din continued, but most of it came from the yacht's own machine-guns. The Chinese were fleeing, scrambling up the rock face of the canyon with miraculous agility. And the Wanderer, now under perfect control, was gliding on her course down-stream.

But even now the final excitement had yet to come.

The Last of Dr. Foo Chow!

WILLY HANDFORTH chuckled.

"Clever chap, Ted," he said, with approval. "I didn't know you were so jolly smart!"

"Who, me?" asked Edward Oswald, staring.

"Yes."

"You spoofing young ass—"

"Fact!" interrupted Willy. "The way you kissed Irene was a treat, but it was brainy to say that you thought she was sis!"

Irene Manners' pretty face was red.

"It was just in the excitement," she said hurriedly.

"That's what makes it all the cleverer," agreed Willy, nodding. "My hat! You surely don't think Ted would kiss Ena on purpose?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I can imagine a few miracles—such as stopping that rock barrier from falling—but I can't imagine a miracle like Ted kissing sis!" said Willy firmly. "Whoa! Hi! What the— Steady, Ena, you chump!"

Ena Handforth was setting about Willy with grim effect, and everybody else was yelling with laughter. There was so much relief that the slightest thing was sufficient to make everybody shout. The Wanderer was safe! And she was proceeding down the gorge on her voyage homeward bound!

And it soon became safe for the younger members of the party to go on deck again. That section of the canyon guarded by rifles and machine-guns was left in the rear. Dorrie had been hit in the arm, two sailors were laid low, and two others were slightly wounded.

On the bridge, Nelson Lee had a telescope in his hand, and he was staring back along the great gorge—to that spot where the lowered rock-barrier looked like the entrance to a tunnel. Lord Dorrmore, his arm bandaged, had come up again.

"It is Foo Chow!" said Nelson Lee.

Through that telescope he could see clearly. The figures in the distance were brought up close—brought into sharp

relief. And on the rock ledge stood Dr. Foo Chow himself—a tattered and travel-stained figure. But there was no mistaking the defeated war lord.

"Yes, I can see Foo Chow," said Lee. "We can well imagine his feelings, Dorrie. The cur! I marvel at the fact that he has escaped his deadly—"

"Hallo!" interrupted Barry Stokes. "Look there!"

He pointed. A puff of white smoke had shown high up on the rocks, quickly followed by another and another. Three dull reports came echoing down the canyon.

"If that's not artillery fire, I'm a Dutchman!" said Dorrie.

"Yung Li Chang's army is counter-attacking!" said Lee, nodding.

Puff! Puff!

Other shells were exploding among those rocks. And then Nelson Lee caught his breath in a quick gasp.

Two shells had exploded simultaneously overhead. And, curiously akin to slow-motion photography, the whole top of the canyon was falling away! Thousands of tons of rock were collapsing.

"By James!" breathed Lee huskily.

He could see Dr. Foo Chow, and then he couldn't see Dr. Foo Chow. There was nothing but a mass of smoky powder and great cascades of foam. The spot where Dr. Foo Chow and his officers had been standing was gone—obliterated.

"Good gad!" breathed Dorrie. "The whole gorge has caved in!"

"Yes, and Foo Chow is dead," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Look, Dorrie!"

His lordship took the telescope and looked. The haze had cleared. Piles of rock were fouling the canyon, and the river was now rushing there with the speed of tormented rapids, owing to the sudden restriction of space. The fact that the river was still flowing was a good sign. For a dam at that spot would have reduced the level of the water in the lower reaches, and the Wanderer might have grounded.

"H'm! Nothin' but rock!" said Lord Dorrimore. "Millions of tons, I should say—an' Foo Chow is underneath the lot. Well, Lee, I've seldom known a man to be in a more fittin' position."

"I've got to agree, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee quietly.

They could now see swarms of figures—hordes of Chinamen. There could be no doubt that Yung Li Chang's real

soldiers were giving battle to the enemy. The last picture of this tumultuous region was one of battle.

Dorrie took a deep breath.

"Well, do you think anything can happen to us now?" he asked. "Are we likely to meet any more snags?"

"I rather fancy we have got to the end of our excitements," replied Lee fervently. "Foo Chow is dead, and without a leader his soldiers will be a mere rabble. I think we can assume that these provinces will now be peaceful."

The reaction after the peril was marked. Now that there was no more danger, everybody felt utterly listless. But there was a quiet contentment within every heart.

Edward Oswald Handforth kissed the tips of his fingers, and waved his hand.

"Good-bye—and good riddance!" he said severely.

He and a number of other juniors were leaning over the starboard rail of the Wanderer. The yacht was in the open sea, heaving gently to the swell—a motion which caused universal satisfaction. And away in the distance was a blur on the horizon—the last sight of the coast of China.

The homeward voyage was now started in earnest.

The Wanderer was scarcely herself, although a kind of twisted funnel had been rigged up to do service until a big port could be reached. She was mastless, and her wireless was out of commission—but, in the main, she was the same old, lovable Wanderer.

And the holiday party, feeling thankful that they had escaped from China with whole skins, were keen upon enjoying the quiet voyage home. Their impressions of China were grim ones.

It is possible to visit China and come away with pleasant memories. But this particular trip had been so fraught with peril that not a single member of the party felt the slightest inclination to make another trip to the land of the Dragon.

THE END.

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