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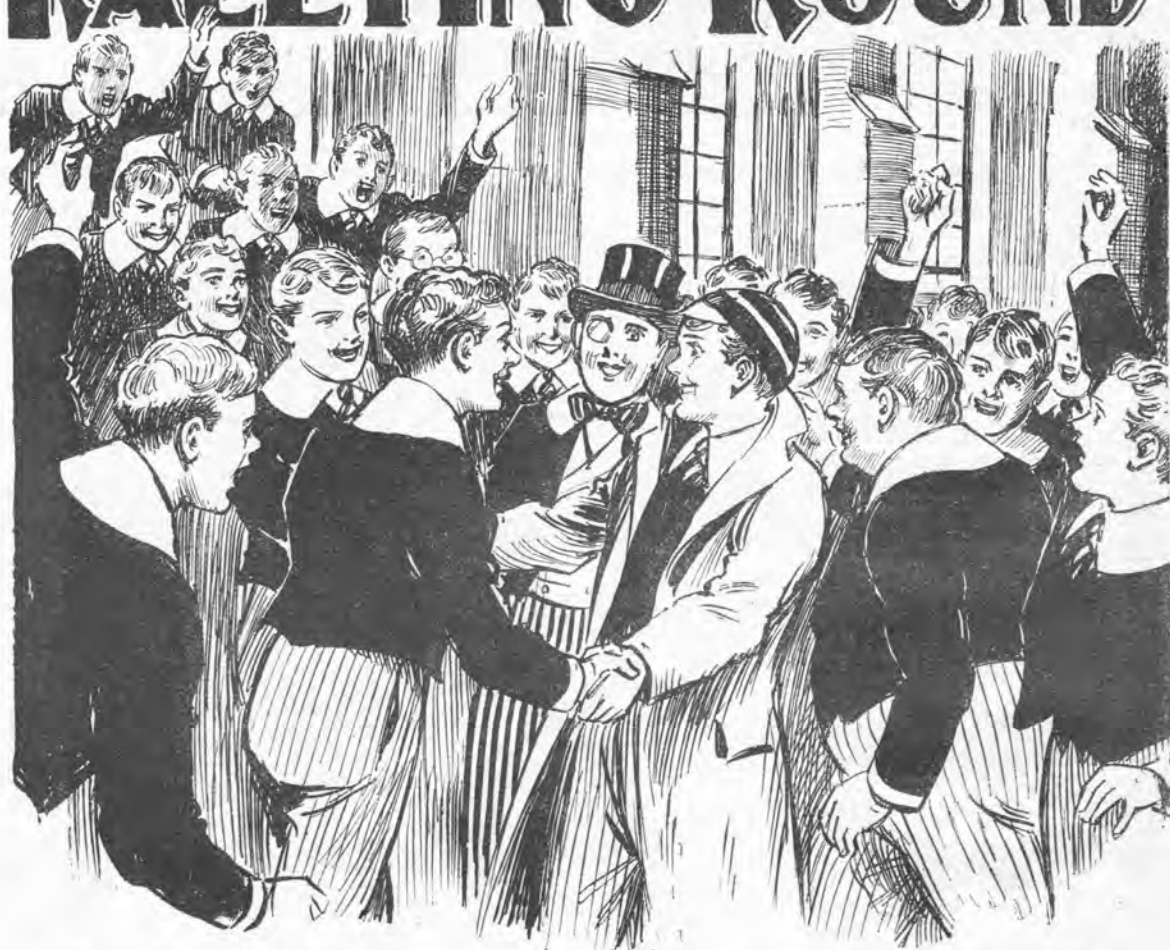
**8 GRAND
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PICTURES**



An Amazing Incident from the Thrilling Story of the Chums of St. Frank's—"The WHITE GIANTS of EL DORADO!"

TOM MERRY, NOW PENNILESS, RETURNS TO ST. JIM'S IN—

RALLYING ROUND



To help Tom Merry without wounding his pride is a problem that's got the Chums of St. Jim's guessing. But not so Gussy! He gets going on a noble idea—with amazing and amusing results!

CHAPTER 1.

Gussy Gets An Idea!

"I 'VE been considewin' the posish, deah boys."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's made that statement with a very serious expression upon his aristocratic countenance. He jammed his eyeglass into his right eye, and took a survey of the fellows in Study No. 6.

Jack Blake grunted.

Blake was wearing a worried look. So were Digby and Herries. They were worried about Tom Merry, and there were others in the School House at St. Jim's who were in the same state of mind.

"I've been considewin' the posish," repeated D'Arcy, with more emphasis, as if he regarded Blake's grunt as a challenge.

"Then for goodness' sake consider it quietly!" said Blake peevishly.

"Weally, Blake—"

"And ring off!"

"I refuse to wing off!" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I've been considewin' the whole posish, and have decided that we ought to do somethin' or othah to help our

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old fwiend Tom Mewwy, as he is in awfully low watah just now."

"I've thought of something," said Herries, in his slow way.

"I was about to say, Hewwies—"

"Oh, Herries first!" said Blake. "Go ahead, kid!"

"I wefuse—"

"Oh, dry up! Go on, Herries!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass in turn, with deep indignation, upon each of the juniors in Study No. 6, but they did not seem to feel any withering effect. Herries went on, in his slow way:

"Tom Merry's in a rotten fix. He's lost all his money, and he's got to look for work. He won't be able to come back to St. Jim's, and he won't let anybody give him any tin. It's a rotten position altogether. But there's one thing I can do, and I've made up my mind to do it."

"What is it?"

"I'll let him have Towser."

The three chums stared at Herries as he made this announcement. The expression upon Herries' face showed how much it cost him to say the words. Towser, the bulldog, was the apple of Herries' eye. But it did not occur to Herries that the bulldog would not appear so priceless to another as it was to him.

—THIS GRAND STORY OF FOOTBALL, FUN AND ADVENTURE!

TOM MERRY!

By
**MARTIN
CLIFFORD.**

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy at last.

"My word!" said Digby.

"Great Scott!" murmured Blake. "And is that your idea?"

"Yes," said Herries, with a touch of defiance in his tone, "and a jolly good idea, too, I think!"

"I should think Tom Mewwy would refuse to have that dog planted on him."

"You utter ass—"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

Of course, Tom Merry will be feeling rotten and low down, and that's just the time you want a dog with you," said Herries. "I don't know what I shall do without Towser. But I'm willing to let Tom Merry have him."

"You chump—"

"Towsah has no respect for a fellow's twousahs," said D'Arcy. "Now, as Tom Mewwy is poor, it stands to reason that he won't have vewy many pairs of twousahs. Therefore, you see, if Towsah were to ruin any of Tom Mewwy's twousahs it would be a sewious mattah."

"Ass!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Blessed if I see how Towser's going to solve Tom Merry's difficulties," said Jack Blake. "And if he gets a job somewhere, a bulldog would be a disadvantage. I've often seen advertisements for people wanted with no children, and Towser would be more trouble than a heap of children of all sizes."

"Ass!"

"I vegard that as an oppwobwious expression, Hewwies—"

"Chump!"

"Weally, you know—"

"Oh, don't you chaps begin to argue!" said Blake crossly.

"If you've got something sensible to suggest—"

"I have considahed the posish—"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"I vegard that as a vulgah noise, Hewwies! I have considahed the position, and I have decided that we've got to help Tom Mewwy."

"But how, ass?"

"I have thought of a plan."

"Oh, go ahead!" said Blake, in a tone of resignation, which implied that he did not feel very much faith in D'Arcy's plan.

"Well, you see, Tom Mewwy is wuined," said D'Arcy. "He is actually short of money. So now is the time for his friwnds to wally wound him."

"To what?"

"To wally wound him."

"Oh, to rally round him!" grinned Blake. "Yes, certainly, we will all do that like a shot, if we can find anything to do."

"What-ho!" said Digby.

"I myself am goin' to wally wound him, in any case," said D'Arcy. "You fellows can help if you like. Now, Tom Mewwy's old governess, Miss Fawcett, has gone to stay with Cousin Ethel, so that's all wight. Tom Mewwy is lookin' for a job, and I undahstand that he is stayin' at present with Mr. Dodds, the cuwate of Hucklebewwy Heath. Now, his only source of income is Lauwel Villah, if he can let it."

"So he said in his last letter."

"Well, then, Lauwel Villah will have to be let."

"I suppose he's trying to let it, but it's a rotten season for lettin' a house in the heart of the country," said Blake.

"That's where we come in."

Blake stared.

"Blessed if I can see how!" he exclaimed. "We can't let the house for him, can we?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"How?"

Arthur Augustus smiled serenely.

"That's where I'm awfully deep," he remarked.

His chums grinned. They knew that Arthur Augustus prided himself upon being awfully deep, but they had never been able to see where the depths came in.

"Yes, we know you're as deep as—a frying-pan," said Blake. "But go on with the washing."

"You wemembah," said D'Arcy, "that I am about the best membah of the Amateur Dwamatic Society—"

"I don't remember anything of the sort!" said Blake warmly. "I remember you can't act for toffee, if that's what you mean."

"Weally, Blake—"

"But what has the Amateur Dramatic Society to do with this matter, anyway?" demanded Digby. "Stick to the point."

"I'm sticking to it. As the best actah in the Juniah Dwamatic Society, I shall be able to play the part in the most wippin' way!"

"What part?"

"That's where the ideah comes in."

"But what's the idea?" yelled the three chums together.

"Oh, it's simply wippin'! I'm goin' to disguise myself as a person. I have not decided what kind of a person, but any person would do. I am goin' to disguise myself as a person and go down to Hucklebewwy Heath—"

"What?" roared Blake.

"And take the house as a tenant, and pay a jolly big wunt for it."

"Eh?"

"Tom Mewwy won't have the slightest suspish, and, of course, you fellows will keep it awfully dark—"

"My hat!"

"What do you think of the ideah, deah boys?" asked Arthur Augustus, beaming round upon the chums of Study No. 6 with great satisfaction.

Blake rose to his feet.

"Think of it!" he said.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What I think of it is, that a chap who can propound such an utterly idiotic and howlingly fatheaded wheeze is wasting time and ought to be bumped!" said Blake wrathfully. "Collar the chump!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Bump him!"

"Ow! Leggo! Yow! You will wuin my twousahs! I wufese to be bumped!"

"Bump him!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy struggled desperately in the grasp of three indignant juniors, but his struggles were unavailing.

He was whirled off the floor and bumped.

Bump, bump, bump!

"Yawwooh! Oh! Yawwooh!"

CHAPTER 2.

Tom Merry's Letter!

BUMP!

"Yawwooh! Stop it, you duffahs! Oh!"

Arthur Augustus wriggled out of the hands of the chums at last. He scrambled to his feet, very red and breathless, very wrathful and dusty.

EIGHT MORE COLOURED PICTURES FOR YOUR ALBUM

IN THIS NUMBER.

ANOTHER SPLENDID SET NEXT WEDNESDAY!

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"You uttah asses——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you uttah wottahs! I will shake the dust of the studdy twom my feet!"

"You can't shake it from your clothes in a hurry!" chuckled Digby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus, bursting with indignation, swung away towards the door. He walked through the doorway blind with wrath, and stalked into two fellows who were just about to knock at the door.

"Oh!"

"What——"

"Weally——"

Manners and Lowther of the Shell grasped D'Arcy and shoved him back into the study. They glared at him indignantly.

"What do you mean by buzzing into us just as we were coming in?" roared Monty Lowther wrathfully.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"You howling, frabjous chump!" roared Manners. "You've trodden on my beastly foot! You fathead! Ow!"

"Weally, Mannahs!"

"Oh, bump him!" said Jack Blake. "We won't interfere. We've just been bumping him for making a burbling, frabjous suggestion, but another one will do him good."

"Hear, hear!"

"I uttally wufuse to be bumped, you wottahs!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, retreating into a corner and putting up his fists. "I wegard you with pwofound contempt! I defy you all to come on!"

Monty Lowther chuckled.

"Run and get your camera, Manners!" he said. "I should like him in the attitude of Ajax defying his laundress."

D'Arcy dropped his fists at once.

"You uttah ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you——"

"I've had a letter——" began Monty Lowther.

"You are intewwuptin' me!"

"I've had a letter from Tom Merry," said Lowther. "If Gussy ever leaves off talking I'll read it to you. I came here to show it to you fellows."

"Bai Jove!"

"Go ahead!" said Blake.

Monty Lowther read out the letter from his absent chum: "Dear Lowther and Manners,—I have some news to tell you. Miss Fawcett has quite recovered from her illness——"

"Hear, hear!" said Blake.

"Bai Jove, I'm glad to hear it, deah boy!"

"And has gone to stay with Cousin Ethel at D'Arcy's governor's place," went on Lowther. "D'Arcy's governor has been very kind indeed."

Arthur Augustus adjusted his eyeglass.

"I'm glad to hear that," he said. "That's one thing about the governah, ha, does play up when he's expected to, you know. I was suah the governah would be decent. Go on!"

"Sure you've finished talking?"

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"I am staying with Mr. Dodds at the rectory here," proceeded Lowther. "I am staying here until I have succeeded in finding a tenant for Laurel Villa. That is all that remains to Miss Fawcett and me—the house—and the only income we shall have is what it lets for. So long as it brings in enough to provide for my old nurse, I shall be satisfied. I shall see all you fellows again, I hope, before I leave for London——"

"London!" exclaimed Blake.

"Bai Jove!"

"When I leave here it will be to look for work. But I hope to come to St. Jim's and have one jolly day first. There is a chap coming to see about the house soon. If it turns out all right, well and good. If not, I shall leave the letting in Mr. Dodds' hands, though I don't want to trouble him if I can help it, for he's a jolly busy and hard-worked chap. I've no doubt I shall pull through all right, and when I've made my fortune I shall come swanking down to St. Jim's in a waistcoat as gorgeous as one of Gussy's——"

"Bai Jove!"

"I think you ought to make Blake or Figgins captain of the junior eleven. But I suppose you'll settle that in committee."

"Good-bye, my sons, and be good!"

"Always yours,

"TOM MERRY."

"P.S.—Kind regards to Towser."

"My hat!" said Herries. "Does he really say that?"

"Look!"

"Good! That makes me think my idea was a really

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jolly one, though it will come a bit of a wrench," said Herries, with a sigh.

"Hallo! Have you been having ideas, too?" asked Manners. "Is it an epidemic in this study?"

"Hewwies' ideah is wathah wotten——"

"I was thinking of letting Tom Merry have Towser," Herries explained. "I think he deserves it."

"Why, what has he done?" asked Lowther innocently.

Herries glared at the humorist of the Shell.

"Look here, you silly ass——"

"Tom Merry's letter sounds cheerful enough," Blake remarked thoughtfully. "I suppose it's a great weight off his mind to have his old governess quite well again. The poor old chap's had a rough time lately."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But it's jolly rotten if he doesn't come back to St. Jim's," Blake went on. "We shall all miss him a lot. Then there's the footer eleven. Of course, I shall have to be captain, but I'd rather Tom Merry were back in his old place."

"He mentions you and Figgins."

"Oh, he only mentions Figgins as a matter of form, of course. But never mind that," said Blake hastily. "Look here, you chaps, we've been discussing this matter, and we want to find some way of helping Tom Merry out of his fix."

"Yaas, wathah! I have been considewin' the mattah——"

"Cheese it, Gussy!"

"I wufuse to cheese it! I have been——"

"Order! If we could do anything to help Tom Merry, I'd jump at it," said Blake. "Can't you Shellfish think of anything?"

"Jolly well wish we could!" said Manners.

"I have been considewin' the mattah, and I have an ideah——"

Blake held up his finger warningly.

"You've been bumped for that idea once," he exclaimed.

"Are you looking for another bumping?"

"I should uttally wufuse to have anothah bumpin'. My ideah is this—and I put it to Mannahs and Lowthah, who have more sense than you chaps——"

"Good!" said Lowther. "Right so far!"

"Why, you ass——"

"Shut up, and let Gussy speak."

"Thank you, Lowthah. Tom Mewwy is twyin' to let his house, and if he gets a smacking high went he will have lots of tin. Now, I have asked my governah to help me in doin' somethin' for Tom Mewwy, and he has replied that if Tom Mewwy will accept anythin' he is only too willin' to find the cash."

"But Tom Merry won't," said Manners. "If he would, we could all do something. But the obstinate boulder is as proud as Lucifer."

"Yaas," said D'Arcy, with a superior smile. "But what is wequahed in this mattah is a fellow of tact and judgment. I was thinkin' of disguisin' myself as a person and takin' his house at a smackin' big went, and not sayin' a word to him about it."

"Ass!" roared Manners and Lowther.

"Weally, you know——"

"Chump!"

"I wegard it as a wippin' ideah——"

"Oh, bump him!" said Blake. "We won't interfere."

Manners and Lowther rushed at the swell of the Fourth. Arthur Augustus dodged out of the study just in time, slammed the door behind him, and ran.

CHAPTER 3.

Gussy Means Business!

"I WANT you to do me a favah, Kerr, dear boy!" The Scots junior stopped. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had been looking for him in the quadrangle, and he stopped Kerr as the latter came out of the New House.

House rows at St. Jim's had been a little "off" of late. Figgins & Co. of the New House were thinking just as much about Tom Merry as Blake and the rest were in the School House, and, as D'Arcy had said, it was a time to rally round, and not to indulge in the playful little alarms and incursions which usually enlivened things at St. Jim's. So Kerr, after debating whether he should give D'Arcy a dig in his gorgeous waistcoat, or knock off his silk hat, decided to do neither.

"Go ahead, Gussy," he remarked.

"I suppose you know what we ought to do at a time like this," D'Arcy remarked.

Kerr looked a little puzzled.

"A time like this?" he repeated.

"Yaas, wathah!"



"I thay!" exclaimed Mr. Solomonson, waving his hands in the air as he hurried after Tom Merry. "Young thir!"
 "Well?" said Tom, turning back. "I think we might thay eighty-five poundh for the rent of the outh," "Nothing doing!" said the junior. "Good-morning."

Kerr looked round the quadrangle. He glanced at the sky, and then at the ground, and then at his watch.

"Have tea, I suppose," he said at last.

"Weally, Kerr—"

"Well, it's tea-time. I suppose there's nothing else special that ought to be done, unless you've got an impot to do."

"I was not wefewwin' to the pwesent moment especially, but to the time genewally—the time of misfortune for a vewy valued fwend," said D'Arcy. "My ideah is that we ought to wally wound Tom Mewwy."

"My dear chap, I'm ready to rally at a moment's notice," said Kerr. "If there's anything I can do to help Tommy, I'll rally round like a shot. But what can I do?"

"I want you to help me. You are a wathah clevah chap—"

"Thanks awfully," said Kerr, with great gravity.

"You are the best actah at St. Jim's—exceptin', pewwaps, one person," went on D'Arcy. "You are awfully skilful in disguisin' people, and so on."

Kerr stared.

"Surely you School House chaps aren't going in for theatricals just now?" he exclaimed. "I shouldn't think it was just the time for Christmas celebrations now."

"I wasn't thinkin' of Chwistmas celebrations, Kerr. I was thinkin' of disguisin' myself as a person."

"As a what?"

"As a person—an ordinary, avewage, normal person."

"My hat!"

"I am goin' to cawwy out a plan to help Tom Mewwy," D'Arcy explained. "As it is wathah a delicate mattah, I cannot acquaint you with all the details, deah boy, but I twust you will give me your assistance. It will be necessary for me to pwocceed to Hucklebewwy Heath in disguise."

Kerr chuckled.

"I weally fail to see any cause for mewwiment," said Arthur Augustus. "If you decline to help me, I shall have to seek assistance elsewhere, of course. But I should weally be vewy glad of your aid."

"But what's the wheeze?"

"Undah the cires, as it is a vewy delicate mattah, I am compelled to keep it dark."

"Have you told Blake?"

"Yaas, but he received the suggestion in a wibald spiwit, and I shall wefuse to entah into any discush with him on the subject again," said D'Arcy. "I should weally be glad if you will help me. The plan will have the effect of pwovidin' comfortahly for Tom Mewwy."

"Rats!"

"Weally, Kerr—"

"But I'll help you, right enough," said Kerr. "I'll rally round, if that's what you want. I only hope you won't get into trouble."

"I twust not, deah boy; but I am perfectly pwepared to get into twouble, if necessawwy, to help Tom Mewwy out of a feahful fix"

"But—"

"It will be necessary for me to pwocceed to Hucklebewwy Heath at once, and I shall go to-mowwow mornin'—"

"Got leave?"

"Certainly not. I cannot vewy well ask the Head, as he would want to know all about it, don't you see?"

Kerr grinned.

"I've no doubt he would! Look here, you'll get yourself into trouble, Gussy. You'd better drop the whole idea—"

"Wats! I shall go in any case, and if you wefuse to help me—"

"Oh, I'll help you!" said Kerr, somewhat perplexed. "What sort of disguise are you idiot enough to want?"

"I want to be disguised as an ordinawy person—a gentleman of middle age, if poss—in ordah not to attwact undue attention."

"All right," said Kerr. "But you'd better drop it."

"Wats!"

"Well, I'll help you if I can; but I think you're an ass."

"More wats!"

And so they parted.

Arthur Augustus strolled into the School House. Jack Blake met him in the passage. He grinned at the swell of St. Jim's.

"Got any more ripping ideas?" he asked sarcastically.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Still sticking to the same one?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good! You can go ahead!"

"Thank you—I have gone ahead!" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

He went on to Study No. 6, where he spent some considerable time in writing a letter—a mystery letter that was not written in D'Arcy's hand, and which was signed by John Smith. When it was finished Arthur Augustus sealed it in an envelope and addressed it to Tom Merry. Then he went out to post it.

CHAPTER 4.

Not Taken!

"NEWS, Tom?"

Mr. Dodds, the curate of Huckleberry Heath, asked the question as Tom Merry looked up from a letter he was reading at the breakfast-table in the rectory.

Tom Merry was looking perplexed.

"Yes," he said. "Another application for the house."

"Oh, very good!"

"There was a chap who wrote before coming to-day," said Tom Merry—"Mr. Solomonson. Now, here's another man wants to come to-day, too."

"It never rains but what it pours," said the curate, with a smile. "It begins to look as if Laurel Villa will go easily, though it is a bad season of the year for letting."

"Yes, sir; but I can't quite understand the letter. Will you look at it?"

"Certainly."

Tom Merry handed the letter across the table to Mr. Dodds. The curate's face assumed a somewhat puzzled look as he perused it.

The letter was written in a backward, sloping hand, but the letters in some places assumed an upright position, and in others sloped over to the right—as if force of habit had been too much for a writer who was trying to disguise his hand.

Why a man should try to disguise his hand in writing about the letting of a house was a puzzle, and the curate could only conclude that the impression was a mistaken one. But it certainly looked very like it.

The letter ran as follows:

"Dear Sir,—Having heard that you have a very desirable house in the country to let, I am prepared to take it for any term of years you may choose to fix, at a smacking big rent. I will call in the morning to see the house and arrange the matter.

"Yours faithfully,

"JOHN SMITH."

The curate pursed his lips.

"This is a very curious letter, Tom."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Yes, Mr. Dodds! The chap describes the house as if he were a house agent, trying to let it. An incoming tenant, I believe, generally runs it down a little."

"And then the offer of a big rent—"

"It's very odd, sir."

"And the adjective," murmured Mr. Dodds. "Really, I should imagine that someone had asked his little boy to write this letter for him and left to him the choice of language."

"Looks like it."

"It may be a hoax," Mr. Dodds observed. "Some lad in the village may be taking advantage of this matter to puzzle you."

"Nobody in Huckleberry Heath, sir."

"No?"

Tom Merry held out the envelope.

"The postmark is Rylcombe, sir. Rylcombe is the village near St. Jim's, where the station for the school is. I imagine

that someone there has heard the fellows talking about having a house to let, and so has written—as for a hoax, some chap at Rylcombe might have done it, of course."

"Well, Mr. John Smith says he is coming down to see the house to-day," Mr. Dodds remarked. "There is no harm in seeing him and letting him view the house."

"No, I suppose not."

"You are to meet Mr. Solomonson at the house at ten o'clock," said the curate. "You had better come back here and wait for the new applicant, after disposing of him. If you settle with Mr. Solomonson you will bring him here to go through the arrangements with me."

"Yes, Mr. Dodds."

And after breakfast Tom Merry walked over to Laurel Villa. It was a fine, bright, winter's morning, and Tom Merry could not help feeling cheerful as he strode along breathing in the crisp air.

Misfortunes had fallen heavily of late upon the nero of St. Jim's, and yet he never lost sight of the fact that matters might have been worse. Tom Merry was born to look upon the bright side of things.

Only once had he almost given way and that was when Miss Priscilla Fawcett was in danger and Tom had feared that he might lose his affectionate old guardian.

That danger had passed, and a weight had gone from Tom Merry's heart. Lighter troubles, he felt, he could bear with courage.

He was ruined, so far as money went. His career at St. Jim's was cut short, his dream of a college life was to remain only a dream. He had to turn to and work for his bread—he was ready for the fight.

After all, it would be very hard if there was not work to be found for willing hands, and money for one who was ready to earn it.

He had health and strength, and true friends, and so long as he had those what right had he to grumble at Fate, when there were so many fellows in the world who had none of those advantages?

That was how Tom Merry tried to look at it, and he succeeded pretty well. One thing was certain—there was nothing "soft" about him. When Fate rained blows upon him he had no inclination to surrender but only a keen desire to be up and doing.

Tom Merry had not visited Laurel Villa since the day he had moved out with Miss Fawcett. As he entered the silent, deserted house a strange feeling came over him.

Many a happy day had he spent there, many a happy holiday with his chums from St. Jim's, in a time which already seemed to him to be long past.

The deserted, unfurnished rooms struck him with a chill as he entered. He was ten minutes early for the appointment, and he occupied his time in strolling about the grounds and looking at the old scenes so familiar to his eyes.

The sight of a tall, angular man with a dark complexion and an aquiline nose, and a tall silk hat that added to his appearance of great height, drew Tom Merry to the house again. This was evidently Mr. Solomonson, who was to view Laurel Villa that morning with the intention of ascertaining whether it suited him to take.

Tom Merry ran up, raising his cap.

The dark-complexioned gentleman looked at him inquiringly.

"Mr. Solomonson?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yeth, that ith my name," said the visitor. "I expected to meet Mither Merry here."

"I am Tom Merry, sir."

The visitor pushed a pair of gold-rimmed glasses upon his nose and stared at him.

Tom Merry bore the stare of the dark gentleman with equanimity.

He knew that Mr. Solomonson was surprised to find a mere boy in charge of the property, and he was taking stock of Tom Merry, examining him from head to foot.

Tom Merry could not help smiling.

"Ah! Thith ith a joke, I suppose?" Mr. Solomonson remarked.

"Not at all, sir. The fact is Miss Fawcett, who owns the place, is too delicate in health just now to see about it, and she has placed the matter in the hands of Mr. Dodds," said Tom Merry. "If you like the place, sir, I am to take you to Mr. Dodds to make arrangements."

"Oh, I thee!" said Mr. Solomonson.

"Shall I show you over the house, sir?"

"Thertainly, my lad."

Tom Merry led the way indoors. He was not very much impressed with Mr. Solomonson. That gentleman certainly gave an impression of wealth, but he gave an impression, too, of being a man who would not be very easily induced to part with any of his wealth.

Mr. Solomonson was, in fact, the kind of tenant who expected a first-class house, with every possible appointment

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and convenience, at a nominal rent, and with a landlord always ready to rush in with architect and plumbers and decorators at a moment's notice, free of charge.

And with a view of depreciating the property he intended to take, Mr. Solomonson found fault with everything he saw. The rooms were either too large or too small, and the bath-room was inconveniently situated, and the access to the garden was not what he wished, and the windows were not where he wanted them.

He doubted if the soil was gravel, and he expressed an opinion that it would require quite a good sum to get the garden in order.

He sniffed at the greenhouse, and sneered at the lawn, and snorted at the fruit-trees.

Tom Merry was very patient.

He wanted to let the house for his old governess, and he was shrewd enough to guess that Mr. Solomonson was finding endless faults with a view to lowering the price he was to pay.

So he said nothing.

"Dear me," said Mr. Solomonson, "I thuppose the decorations will all be renewed, from ground to roof, my lad?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Nothing will be done to the house, sir," he said.

Mr. Solomonson threw up his hands in horror.

"Nothing?"

"No, sir."

"But that is abthurd!"

"You see, sir, Miss Fawcett has no money to spend,"

Tom Merry explained. "The tenant must take the house just as it is. The rent is being made purposely low for that reason; and the house is in excellent condition."

"Abthurd!"

"Very well. Have you seen enough, sir?" asked Tom Merry, beginning to lose patience. "I have to meet another gentleman this morning about the house."

Mr. Solomonson winked.

"That cock won't fight, my dear," he remarked. "I have been in thith line of bithness mythelf. I know that other applicant, you know."

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed.

"But it is true, Mr. Solomonson."

"Abthurd!"

"There are people who tell the truth, even in business, though you may never have heard of them, sir," said Tom Merry. "Have you seen enough?"

"Yeth, thanks!"

They left the house. Mr. Solomonson was pursing his lips in a very thoughtful way. He turned suddenly to Tom Merry at the front door.

"Vat is the rent?" he asked.

"One hundred pounds a year, sir!"

Mr. Solomonson threw up his large, shiny hands.

"Oh, abthurd!" he exclaimed.

"That is the rent, sir."

"But that ith impothible!" said Mr. Solomonson. "I do not want to buy the houth, my young friend!"

Tom Merry smiled.

"The selling price would be one thousand pounds, sir," he said.

Mr. Solomonson gasped.

"My dear young friend—"

"I suppose we needn't discuss the matter any longer?" Tom Merry suggested. "If the price doesn't suit you, it's no good discussing it."

"Quite!" said Mr. Solomonson.

"Then, good-bye, sir!"

"Stay a minute, my young friend. Don't be hathy," said Mr. Solomonson. "I might offer Mith Fawcett fifty poundths."

"Thank you; that would be useless."

"Quite utheless, do you think?"

"Quite, sir!"

"Thuppose we thay theventy-five poundth?" said Mr. Solomonson persuasively. "I am thure Mith Fawcett would be pleathed to conthider that thum."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"One hundred pounds is the rent, sir, and it is cheap."

"Nonthenth!"

"Very well, sir. Good-morning!"

Tom Merry raised his cap and walked away to the garden gate.

Mr. Solomonson looked after him for a full minute, debating whether Tom Merry was bluffing and meant to come back again. But the hero of St. Jim's went out of the gate, and it clicked behind him.

Then Mr. Solomonson ran down the path.

"I thay!" he called out.

Tom Merry was walking down the lane.

"I thay, young thir!"

The junior looked round.

"Yes?" he said.

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"Thuppose we thay eighty poundth?"

"Impossible, sir!"

"But, I thay—"

"Good-morning, Mr. Solomonson!"

Tom Merry strode away.

Mr. Solomonson waved his shiny hands in the air, and smote his palms together. Then he walked after Tom Merry. He had almost overtaken the hero of the Shell by the time he reached the rectory gate.

"Young thir!" he called out.

Tom Merry stopped. The pertinacity of Mr. Solomonson rather amused him.

"Well?" he said.

"I think we might, thay eight-five," murmured Mr. Solomonson.

"Nothing doing, sir!"

Mr. Dodds came out of the house.

The tall, hook-nosed gentleman turned to him with a bow, raising his silk hat.

"Ah, Mither Doddth, of course!" he exclaimed. "I am delighted to make your acquaintance, Mither Doddth. I have come down about the houth."

"I hope you have found it to your satisfaction," said Mr. Dodds, with a somewhat puzzled glance at Tom Merry's smiling face.

Mr. Solomonson waved his hands.

"Hardly, thir, hardly! I was really thinking of taking the houth to help a very ethteemable lady in a time of mithfortune."

"Indeed!"

"Our young friend hath made thome miltake about the rent," went on Mr. Solomonson. "You thee, I take it that the rent ith fifty poundth."

"One hundred pounds," said Mr. Dodds.

"You mean theventy-five?"

"I mean what I say."

"Eighty, I thuppoth, would be all right?"

"Not in the least."

"Then I'm afraid we cannot do bithineth together," said Mr. Solomonson, smiting his fat shiny hands.

"I am sorry," said Mr. Dodds. "Good-morning! Tom, there is a visitor waiting for you in the dining-room—a Mr. John Smith. He has come down about the house. I wish you a very good-morning, Mr. Solomonson!"

The curate walked away, and Tom Merry entered the house. Mr. Solomonson stood rooted to the ground.

The dining-room window was open, and a few minutes later he could see Tom Merry in that room, when the junior had gone to see the new applicant for Laurel Villa. Mr. Solomonson crossed to the window and blinked in.

"Theventy-five poundth, my young friend?" he said.

The window snapped shut so suddenly that Mr. Solomonson jumped back. Then, with a mournful expression upon his olive countenance, he took his departure.

CHAPTER 5.

D'Arcy in Disguise!

"KERR, deah boy, I'm weady, if you are!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The quadrangle at St. Jim's was alive with juniors.

They had turned out from the class-rooms for the brief morning recess, and were making the most of it.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, full of the idea in which Kerr was to help him, had sought out the Scots junior at once. He found him in the quad, talking to his chums—Figgins and Fatty Wynn.

Both the latter looked at D'Arcy as he spoke.

"Hallo! What's on?" exclaimed Figgins.

Kerr grinned.

"Only another of Gussy's little wheezes," he said.

Fatty Wynn pricked up his ears.

"A feed, I suppose," he remarked. "Well, I don't care if I come with you, you fellows. I'm feeling a little peckish—I'm always hungry in December, I've noticed that. Perhaps a bit of a pick-me-up would do me good."

"It's not a feed," said Kerr.

The fat Fourth Former's face fell.

"Oh, rats!" he said. "Look here, let's bump that School House duffer. What does he want to come bothering for?"

"Weally, Wynn—"

"Cheese it, Fatty!" said Kerr, laughing. "You can come into the study and help. Gussy is going to disguise himself."

"To—to which?" stammered Figgins.

"To disguise himself."

"As what?"

"As a person."

"Look here, you ass—"

"Fact!" said Kerr. "Ask Gussy!"

"It's certainly quite twee," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Kerr is so obliging as to help me to disguise myself as an ordinary person."

"Well, you'll want a lot of changes!" grinned Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!" D'Arcy agreed innocently. "I know I am wathah a distinguished-looking chap, and I want to become absolutely ordinawy—like one of yourselves, in fact."

"What?" shouted Figgins.

"Pway don't woaht at a fellow like that, Figgay. It throws me into quite a fluttah. I am weady, if you are, Kerr."

"Come on!" said Kerr.

He led the way to the New House, and Arthur Augustus accompanied him.

Figgins and Fatty Wynn followed, in a state of considerable astonishment. From the twinkle in Kerr's eye, they guessed that there was a humorous side to the matter, although Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was in the deadliest earnest.

They entered Figgins' study in the New House.

Kerr soon had his make-up box out, and had brought various garments out of his well-stocked theatrical wardrobe. Kerr had been the founder of the amateur theatricals of St. Jim's, and as his father was a famous actor, he had a great many "props" which were beyond the reach of the other fellows.

"What sort of a chawactah are you thinkin' of?" asked D'Arcy.

"Suppose we say a railway porter?"

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"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins and Wynn.

Arthur Augustus turned his monocle upon them with a very severe expression.

"I twust you fellows will weserve your mewwiment for a more suitable occasion," he remarked. "This is an extremely sewious mattah."

"I should jolly well say so!" exclaimed Kerr. "It's not every day that a real, genuine, blue-blooded, non-skidding D'Arcy disguises himself as an ordinary person."

"Weally, Kerr—"

"Suppose we say a shunter, or a porter?" said Kerr. "I could make you a postman, or a policeman, if you like, only you would be rather small for a policeman."

"No good, deah boy. I must appeah to be a somewhat pwospewous chap, the kind of chap who could be entwisted with pwoperty."

"How old?"

"Oh, feahfully old—about thirty or forty!"

"Good! That's all right. Suppose we say a city clerk?"

"Can city clerks afford houses in the countwy at a wental of say two hundwed pounds?" said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully.

"Ha, ha, ha! Not as a rule, I believe."

"Then that won't do. I must appeah pwospewous."

"Suppose I make you a stout, rich City gent?"

"I object to the word gent. It is vulgah to use such words as gent, or any of those howwid expwessions."

"Absolutely," said Kerr. "I mean exactly. Well, we'll say a rich City gentleman. I suppose we can manage to disguise D'Arcy as a gentleman, you chaps?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins.

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Come on, then!" said Kerr briskly. "No time to be lost. The bell goes for classes in a quarter of an hour."

"Gussy isn't going into class disguised, surely!" exclaimed Figgins, in amazement.

"Ha, ha, ha! No!"

"But if you rig him up now—"

"I'm leavin' St. Jim's tempowawy," explained Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Have you got leave?"

"I have taken it."

"Oh, French leave!" said Figgins. "There'll be a row."

"I twust I shall be able to explain satisfactorily to Dr. Holmes," said Arthur Augustus. "Anyway, I am goin'." It's for Tom Mewwy's sake.

"How are you going to help Tom Merry by disguising yourself as a gentleman?" demanded Figgins.

"Weally, Figgay, that is wathah an invidious way of puttin' it."

"But what good will it do Tom Merry, anyway?"

"I am unable to explain at present; and, besides, I have no time to talk now. I have to leave St. Jim's when you fellows go into class again."

"Blessed if I think we ought to let the duffer go!" growled Kerr.

"I wefuse to be called a duffah. And I twust you will wemembah that I placed myself on your honah by comin' heah, and you cannot possibly intahfere with my actions," said D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity.

"But you'll be missed!"

"Vewy likely."

"And searched for."

"That's all wight."

"But—but—"

"I shall wish to the Head fwom Huckleberry Heath, explaining that I have gone down there on account of Tom Mewwy, so that will be all wight."

"I jolly well think it won't be all right!" growled Figgins. "But I suppose you're your own master, so if you won't take advice, go ahead."

"I am weady, Kerr."

"So am I. Here goes!"

In a very short time D'Arcy's elegant school clothes were changed for dark clothes of a less conspicuous cut, and his slim figure had been padded out to a respectable, middle-aged size.

D'Arcy was somewhat tall for his age, and in a man's clothes, and padded out to stoutness, he passed for a man very well, so far as his figure went.

His face was easy to disguise under Kerr's manipulation.

The beloved monocle had to be sacrificed, and Kerr suggested a pair of blue glasses for the more complete hiding of the features.

Whiskers, a short beard, and a straggling moustache so utterly changed the character of D'Arcy's face that his affectionate governor would never have recognised him.

A somewhat shabby overcoat was added, and a silk hat, and, with a fat umbrella in his hand, Arthur Augustus was complete.

The chums of the New House looked at him in great admiration.



Mr. Dodds suddenly strode towards Mr. John Smith, grasped his beard and jerked. The beard came away, the moustache with it, and at the same time the glasses slid down, revealing a youthful face! Mr. Dodds gasped and Tom Merry gave a yell. "Gussy! You awful spoofer!"

D'Arcy looked like an extremely commonplace and somewhat eccentric gentleman of about forty-five.

He gave quite a jump as he viewed the result of Kerr's handiwork in the glass.

"Bai Jove!" he exclaimed. "That's stunning!"

Kerr chuckled.

"You'll have to change your voice, too!" he exclaimed.

"My voice?"

"Yes, rather! It sounds like a boy's voice, for one thing, and it sounds like—like Gussy, for another."

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that. Tom Mewwy will recognise my voice unless I am vewy careful, I suppose."

"Ha, ha, ha! I rather think so."

"I suppose I could speak through my nose, pewwaps!"

"Better have a cold, and keep your handkerchief to your face as much as possible," said Kerr reflectively. "Keep on coughing, you see, and ask them to excuse you, and speak in a base, growling voice."

"Yaas, wathah! That's a jollay good ideah!"

"Well, let's see you try it."

D'Arcy snuffled.

"I twust you will excuse me," he said.

"Hem!"

"How's that, deah boy?"

"Rotten!" said Kerr.

"Weally, you know—"

"Make it like this," said Kerr. "I hobe you will egscuge me."

"I hobe you will excuge, deah boy!"

"Leave out the deah boy, uss!"

"Vewy well. I think I must be off!"

"You must be, to go out in that rig," said Fatty Wynn.

"Off your rocker!"

"Weally, Wynn—"

"There's the bell for classes," said Figgins.

"Bai Jove!"

The juniors hurried down.

"Of course, you will keep this dark, you fellows?" said D'Arcy, as they went downstairs. "Not a word to anybody, you know."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Figgins.

"Honah bwight, you know?"

"Honour bright."

"Thanks awfully."

They quitted the New House.

Arthur Augustus walked down to the gate. Taggles, the porter, was outside the lodge, and he glanced curiously at the stranger; but, taking him for a visitor of one of the masters, he took no further notice.

Blake met the chums of the New House as they hurried towards the Fourth Form Room.

"Where's Gussy?" he asked.

"Gussy?" repeated Figgins.

"Yes, Gussy!"

"How should I know?" queried Figgins.

"Oh rats!" said Blake. "He went into the New House with you. Kangaroo saw you together. Have you been japing him?"

"My hat!" exclaimed Kerr. "We shall be late! Come on!"

And the three New House juniors rushed into the Form-room without replying to Jack Blake's question.

Blake followed them in and looked round. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not there. The rest of the Fourth Form had turned up for the resumption of morning lessons, but the swell of St. Jim's was conspicuous by his absence.

CHAPTER 6.

A Tenant in a Thousand!

TOM MERRY turned away from the window after snapping it down in the face of the persistent Mr. Solomonson. Tom had had quite enough of that gentleman, and he had not had time yet to look at his new visitor.

He turned to Mr. Smith.

The latter had risen to his feet. He had a handkerchief in his hand, with which he sometimes rubbed his somewhat red nose.

His silk hat and umbrella lay upon a chair, and his hair was so untidy that Tom Merry suspected at once that he was wearing a wig. That, however, was no business of the

junior's. If a bald-headed gentleman chose to cover his pate with fictitious hair, it was surely his own affair.

The gentleman, who seemed short and fat, blinked at Tom Merry through his smoked glasses.

"Master Merry, I presume?" he said, with a cough.

"Yes, sir. You are Mr. Smith?"

"I have been waiving a little while," said John Smith.

"I am sorry. I was occupied with showing another gentleman over Laurel Villa," said Tom Merry. "I am quite at your service now, if you like."

"You are very kind," said the gentleman, blowing his nose with a loud report, which quite startled Tom Merry.

"I am sorry you had to wait."

"Nod at all. But are you the person who has the letting of the house, sir?"

"Mr. Dodds will make arrangements if you are satisfied with the house, sir."

"Very good. Are you the owner?"

"My guardian, Miss Fawcett, is the owner."

"And you—"

"I am here to show tenants over it at present," said Tom Merry.

The gentleman put his hand up to his smoked glasses and tried to jam the right lens more tightly into his eye, as if he were accustomed to an eyeglass. Then he coughed violently.

"You have a bad cold," said Tom Merry sympathetically.

"Oh, that is nodding!"

"Perhaps you do not care to go out in this cold wind with such a cold," Tom Merry suggested.

"Id is all right!"

"Very well, sir. I am ready."

Mr. Smith followed Tom Merry from the house.

The junior could not help glancing now and again at his companion curiously during the walk to Laurel Villa.

Mr. Smith's letter had been very curious, both in the writing and in the expressions used, as well as in the fact that no address had been appended to it.

Tom Merry hardly regarded the gentleman as a likely tenant, and his experience with Mr. Solomonson that morning was not encouraging. But Tom Merry was determined to do the best he could.

If this tenant did not turn out to be a success Tom Merry had already arranged to leave the matter of letting Laurel Villa in the hands of Mr. Dodds, and to take his departure from Huckleberry Heath and face the world. It was useless to waste time lingering in the little village.

Tom Merry hoped very fervently that Mr. John Smith would be satisfied with the house, and he meant to do his best to point out all the advantages of it. A hundred pounds a year would be sufficient to place Miss Fawcett above want while Tom Merry was fighting his way in the world.

Mr. Smith did not speak a word during the walk to Laurel Villa. He blew his nose loudly several times, but that was all.

Tom Merry unlocked the door and let him in.

It was well past noonday now, and the sun was at its brightest—a most favourable time for viewing the house.

But that was hardly sufficient to account for the admiration Mr. Smith showed for the place. He uttered an exclamation of great admiration as soon as he saw it.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed. "I thig this will suit me all right."

"I am glad of that, sir!"

"What is the rent, please?"

"One hundred pounds."

"Nodsense!"

"Really—" began Tom Merry, somewhat nettled, and thinking that he had another Mr. Solomonson to deal with, after all.

"Nodsense!" repeated Mr. Smith. "You could nod possibly let this splendid property for one huddred bounds. You mean two hundred bounds."

Tom Merry laughed.

"No, sir, one hundred!"

"Two huddred!"

"My dear sir—"

"Two huddred," said Mr. Smith, blowing his nose. "I shall refuge to take it for less!"

Tom Merry stared.

Mr. Solomonson's method of fixing the rent of the house he had been prepared for, but Mr. Smith was a surprise to him.

For a prospective tenant to insist upon paying twice as much rent as his landlord asked was surely a novelty.

"The place—I mean, the place," said Mr. Smith hurriedly—"the place is worth id, you see."

"We are letting it at a low rent because none of the decorations can be renewed," said Tom Merry. "Miss Fawcett cannot afford to spend any money on it, and it goes just as it stands."

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"Quide so," said Mr. Smith. "That is all right." He coughed. "I suppose the property is worth two hundred?"

"One hundred and fifty, certainly!" said Tom Merry. "But Miss Fawcett is willing to let it for one hundred pounds for the reason I have given you."

"I suppose you are prepared to sign an agreement?" asked the stout gentleman.

"Certainly, sir!"

"For whad period?"

"Any period you like."

"Say for seven years."

"Certainly!"

"Very well, at two hundred bounds rend."

Tom Merry could not help laughing.

"If you insist upon paying that figure, sir, I suppose Miss Fawcett will make no objection," he said. "I must say that you are very unusually generous."

"Nod at all."

"Then you are satisfied with the house?"

"Quide satisfied."

"You will come back to the rectory, then, and see Mr. Dodds, sir?"

"Certainly!"

And they walked back to the rectory together. Tom Merry felt very cheerful and light-hearted. It was only his second attempt to let the house, and he had succeeded in letting it at double the rent asked. It crossed his mind that he might do worse than take up a house-agent's business as a profession.

CHAPTER 7.

Figgins is Funny!

MR. LATHOM, the master of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, blinked round the class through his spectacles.

"Where is D'Arcy?" he asked. "D'Arcy is not present."

There was no reply.

"Dear me! D'Arcy is late!"

Lessons went on. First lesson was over, and D'Arcy did not appear. Jack Blake was growing anxious. He could see grins exchanged by Figgins & Co., and he more than once suspected that a New House jape was detaining the swell of the School House from the Form-room.

"Kerr," he whispered, when Mr. Lathom's back was turned, a little later—"Kerr, do you know where Gussy is?"

"I can't see him."

"But do you know where he is?"

"How should I know?"

"You jolly well do!" growled Blake.

Kerr grinned.

"Then why ask me?" he said blandly.

"Look here! If you've been japing Gussy, it's too bad to keep him away from his lessons!" said Blake. "He will get it in the neck, you know!"

"We haven't kept him away from the lessons."

"Then where is he?"

"Don't talk in class; Lathom's looking round!"

"Look here, Kerr—"

"Dear me!" said Mr. Lathom. "You are talking in class, Blake. I cannot allow you to talk in class. Take fifty lines!"

And Blake snorted and relapsed into silence.

Morning lessons were over at last, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had not put in an appearance in the Form-room.

"D'Arcy has not come," said Mr. Lathom, making a note of it. "You may tell him, Blake, that he will be punished. Dismiss."

The juniors crowded out of the Form-room.

"Where on earth can Gussy have got to?" exclaimed Digby. "I suppose he hasn't carried out that dotty wheeze of going off to Huckleberry Heath?"

Blake shook his head.

"Those New House bounders know where he is!" he exclaimed.

"How do you know?"

"Kangaroo told me he saw Gussy go into the School House with them, and I know jolly well that he never came out again."

Digby looked startled.

"But Figgins wouldn't make a chap miss lessons," he said. "That would be carrying a jape too far."

"Well, Gussy missed lessons, didn't he?"

"Yes; no doubt about that."

"I tell you what," said Herries. "I'll go round the kennels for Towser, and we'll let him track Gussy down."

"Oh, blow Towser!" said Blake crossly.

"Look here, Blake—"

"Here's the Shell coming out; let's speak to Kangaroo." Kangaroo, the sturdy Australian boy, whose real name

was Harry Noble, came out of the Shell Form Room with Lowther and Manners and Clifton Dane. He stopped as Blake came up to him.

"You told me you saw Gussy go into the New House with Figgins & Co., Kangy!" Blake exclaimed.

The Cornstalk nodded.

"Yes, rather," he said.

"You didn't see him come out?"

"No; but I didn't look," said Kangaroo.

"Well, I did, but I didn't see him," said Blake. "I noticed Figgins & Co. come out, and nobody came out at the same time, excepting an old chap in spectacles, a friend of old Ratty's, to judge by the look of him. Gussy's still in the New House somewhere, and they've made him out lessons for a rotten School House jape."

Kangaroo whistled.

"That's rather rough on Gussy," he remarked. "I should hardly think that Figgins would play a jape like that."

"Well, where is Gussy?"

"Gentle shepherd, tell me where?" sang Lowther softly.

"He must be in the New House," said Blake. "Figgins & Co. have shut him in a study for a lark, I expect, and they hadn't time to let him out before lessons, perhaps."

"Better ask Figgins."

"Well, I suppose we've got to rescue Gussy," said Blake. "No good asking Figgins. We'll collar the bounders in the quadrangle, and bump them till they let out where Gussy is."

"Good egg!"

"I suppose you Shellfish are going to stand by us?"

"Oh, we'll see you through," said Manners.

Blake sniffed, and led the way into the quadrangle. The chums of the School House looked round for Figgins & Co., and Blake sighted them at the gate, talking to three fellows in Grammar School caps.

The three were Gordon Gay, Frank Monk, and Jack Wootton of the Fourth Form at Rylcombe Grammar School. The School House chums walked towards them, and the Grammarians nodded cheerily. They had ridden over, and were holding their bikes as they talked to the New House fellows.

"We've run over to see about the match on Saturday," said Gordon Gay. "Is it coming off, or do you want it to be postponed?"

"Oh, I suppose it had better come off," said Blake. "Tom Merry has promised to come back and see us, but whether he will be here on Saturday I don't know. If he's here, of course he'll play for us."

"Of course," said Figgins. "Otherwise I shall captain the team."

Blake gave him a freezing glance.

"You'll what?" he demanded.

"Captain the team," said Figgins.

"Joking, I suppose?"

"Quite serious," said Figgins. "I don't see who else can do it, unless it's Kerr. Kerr could manage it all right."

"Oh, I'll leave it to you, Figgy," said Kerr.

"Right," said Figgins. "I'm going to captain the team. I want you School House chaps to keep hard at practice."

"Ass!"

"Look here, Blake—"

"Look here, Figgins—"

"Well, if it's settled that the match is coming off all the same we'll buzz off," said Gordon Gay, laughing.

"Oh, buzz off, then!" said Blake. "We're playing you on Saturday—that's settled—though I haven't made up my mind about the team. I don't know whether I shall play any of these New House fellows."

"I haven't fixed up the eleven," Figgins remarked, "but I suppose I shall have to put a few School House bounders into it. But I don't know."

"Rats!"

"Scat!"

Gordon Gay laughed.

"Well, we'll leave you to settle that for yourselves," he said. "It's all right: we'll be along on Saturday. Kick-off at half-past two."

"Right!"

And the three Grammarians mounted their bicycles and pedalled away cheerfully through the frosty lane.

Jack Blake turned wrathfully to Figgins.

"Look here what do you mean by this rot about captaining the eleven?" he exclaimed. "You know jolly well that a New House chap couldn't do it."

"Rats!"

"If you want a thick ear—"

"All you can give me," said Figgins, squaring up.

"I'll jolly soon—"

"Come on, then!"

"Here, chuck t!" exclaimed Kangaroo, interposing. "Suppose you leave that question till Saturday to be

(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.

TOUGH!

Lady: "How did you like that pie I gave you? I cooked it myself."

Tramp: "Don't apologise, ma'am; I was once a sword-swallower in a circus!"

A football has been awarded to L. Richardson, 15, St. Mary's Street, Eccles, near Manchester.

NOT FAIR!

Jenkins: "That new barometer I bought is a fake."

Jenkins: "Why is that?"

Jenkins: "I set the hand at 'fair,' and it rained all day!"
A football has been awarded to L. Pymbalist, 1, Grayling Road, Stoke Newington, London, N.16.

SEZ SHE!

Mistress: "It seems to me that the worst mistresses get the best cooks."

Useless Sarah: "Aw, go on, ma'am; you're flattering me!"
Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Pye, The Oaklands, Preston Brook, Cheshire.

NO CHANGE.

Having extracted a bar of chocolate after putting a coin in, the little boy watched the slot-machine with puzzled interest. Noticing this, the shop-assistant said:

"Well, sonny, you've got your chocolate—what do you want?"

"I'm waiting," replied the little boy, "for my two-and-fivepence change!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss D. Martin, 31, Stanley Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent.

GETTING HIS OWN BACK.

Jiggs: "Hallo! Bought a saxophone?"

Jaggs: "No; I borrowed it from the man next door."

Jiggs: "But you can't play it."

Jaggs: "No—and neither can he, while I have it!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Kimberley, 57, Henry Street, Nunceaton.

TIT FOR TAT!

First Boy: "I'd punch your head, on'y I'm frightened of getting a splinter in my hand!"

Second Boy: "Oh, yeah! I'd punch yours, only it's so red I might burn my fist!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to I. Hutt, 21, Cranleigh Road, Buckland, Portsmouth.

THE BAD "DRIVER."

Dentist (to youngster who has broken a tooth): "How did you do it?"

Motorist's Son: "I was changing gears on a bullseye!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss M. Aikman, 78, St. Patrick's Road, Port Elizabeth, South Africa.

ONE REMEDY!

Mistress: "Bridget, you've broken as much china this month as your wages amount to! How can we prevent this occurring again?"

Maid: "I don't know, ma'am—unless you raise my wages!"
Half-a-crown has been awarded to G. Luke, 7, Massareene Street, Antrim, Co. Antrim.

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settled? If Tom Merry's here I take it he'll take his old place, and both of you will sing a little smaller."

"Hear, hear!" said Manners and Lowther together.

"Oh, all right!" said Blake. "We'll leave it till Saturday. Of course, if Tom Merry's here, he'll skipper us, but if not—"

"If not—" began Figgins.

"Oh, leave the 'ifs' till Saturday!" said Digby. "That's all right! What about Gussy?"

"Blessed if I hadn't forgotten Gussy!" exclaimed Blake, with a start. "And that's really what I was going to speak to Figgins about. Figgins, where's Gussy?"

Figgins shook his head.

"Don't ask me," he said.

"Does that mean that you don't know?"

"It means anything you like."

"Look here, do you know where Gussy is?"

Figgins looked up at the sky.

"Looks like being a fine afternoon," he remarked.

"I didn't ask you to be funny, Figgins!" shouted Jack Blake wrathfully. "We get enough of that in the School House from Lowther. Have you seen Gussy?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Lots of times."

Blake breathed through his nose.

"Collar them!" he cried. "They know where Gussy is, and they won't tell. Collar the New House rotters!"

And Figgins & Co. were promptly collared.

CHAPTER 8.

A Bumping for Three!

FIGGINS struggled in the grasp of Manners and Digby, Blake and Herries had collared Kerr, while Fatty Wynn was grasped by Kangaroo and Lowther.

The New House trio struggled, but their struggles did not help them much.

"Here, fair play!" exclaimed Figgins indignantly. "We'll tackle you man for man, and knock you sky-high!"

"Rats! Where's Gussy?"

"Find out!"

"You know where he is."

"Nice weather, ain't it?"

"Oh, bump them!" roared Blake, exasperated. "That's what they want. Bump them!"

Bump!

The three New House fellows were promptly bumped. Three separate and distinct roars rang out on the frosty air.

"No other one!"

Bump!

"Ow!" roared Fatty Wynn. "Rescue!"

"Rescue, New House!" yelled Figgins.

New House fellows ran up from all sides to the rescue. But School House juniors rushed up, too, and there was every prospect of a general row.

Figgins & Co. were in a rather awkward position.

They had no objection, as far as they were concerned, to tell Blake where Gussy was, or where they believed him to be, but they had promised D'Arcy that not a word should be spoken as to his expedition.

That promise held them silent.

Pratt and French and several other New House fellows rushed at the School House chums, and Reilly and Hancock and Gore and Glyn of the School House joined in, and fellows were running up from all quarters.

Fortunately, Kildare, captain of the school, came up with the rest.

"Stop that at once!" shouted the captain of St. Jim's. Kildare's word was law. The tussling ceased at once, and Figgins & Co., looking very dishevelled, were released.

"Now, what is this row about?" demanded Kildare.

"A-about?" stammered Blake.

"Yes. What is it?"

"It's about over!" ventured Monty Lowther.

There was a giggle, but Kildare took no notice of Lowther's little pun. He glanced sternly at Blake and Figgins.

"You two are the ringleaders, as usual," he exclaimed. "You'll bring me fifty lines each this evening, and if there are any more rows in the quad to-day you'll be caned. Be off!"

Figgins & Co. walked away, grinning. Kildare shook his finger warningly at Blake, and walked away. The School House fellows remained looking at one another.

"Well, of all the rotten luck!" said Blake wrathfully. "We should have bumped the facts out of those bounders in another minute or two!"

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"Yes, rather!"

"What on earth can have become of Gussy?" exclaimed Digby. "These chaps must know where he is, or they'd say they didn't know."

"Quite so! He's shut up in the New House somewhere, I suppose."

"Well, we can't rag them again, after what Kildare said," Manners remarked.

"Kildare said no more rows in the quad," replied Blake.

"Well, that settles it."

"It doesn't. We can look in the New House, can't we?"

"Pshaw!"

"Come on! Figgins has just gone into the gym, and we shall have the place to ourselves. Let's go and look for Gussy!"

The School House fellows hesitated. To raid the rival House in broad daylight was a big undertaking. But Blake was marching off, and the other fellows could not do less than follow him.

Just as they reached the doorway of the New House, however, a lean figure in cap and gown appeared there. It was that of Mr. Ratcliff, the master of the New House. He gave the crowd of juniors a sour look.

"What do you want here?" he asked.

Blake coloured.

"We—we were just going to look in at Figgins' study, sir," he exclaimed.

Mr. Ratcliff smiled sourly.

"You will not enter the House," he said. "I disapprove very strongly of these endless rags, as you call them. Kindly keep to your own House."

The juniors turned away.

There was no disregarding the Housemaster's orders, and the raid upon Figgins' quarters had to be postponed till a more favourable opportunity.

"Never mind," said Blake. "We'll get another chance later."

"Oh, Gussy is bound to turn up for afternoon school!" said Digby.

"I don't know."

D'Arcy was missing from his place at the dinner-table. Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, noticed it, and questioned the Fourth Formers. No one could tell him any news of D'Arcy. The New House juniors, of course, were dining in their own House, and so were not present to be questioned.

Mr. Railton looked very puzzled, and concluded that D'Arcy had absented himself for some reason of his own, and made a note of it, with the intention of interviewing the swell of St. Jim's when he did turn up again.

At afternoon lessons D'Arcy's place was empty again.

The rest of the Fourth Form took their places in the big Form-room, but one was missing, and that one was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Jack Blake would have been alarmed about his chum but for the looks of Figgins & Co., which convinced him that they knew what had become of the swell of the School House, and that, therefore, no real harm could have befallen him.

But where was he?

It was almost incredible that Figgins & Co. would carry a tape so far as to keep D'Arcy away from lessons and make him incur the severe consequences.

But Blake could think of no other explanation.

Mr. Lathom again remarked upon D'Arcy's absence, and noted it down. Blake began to wonder whether the swell of the Fourth would turn up again that day or not.

When the Fourth Form was dismissed, Figgins & Co. went to the gym for some kicking practice, having rigged up goalposts there, for it was at this season too dark for footer practice out of doors after afternoon school.

Blake saw them go, and he gathered his chums together.

"Now's our chance for raiding the New House and looking for Gussy," he remarked. "Figg's busy, and I saw old Ratty go out. Come on!"

"What-ho!" said Digby.

"Shall I fetch Towser?" asked Herries.

"No, ass!"

"Look here, if Gussy's hidden away in some box-room or other, Towser will smell him out in next to no time," declared Herries.

"Rats!"

"Look here, Blake, if you're determined to be a silly ass—"

"We'll have Kangy and Clifton Dane and Manners and Lowther, and Towser can be drowned," said Blake.

"I'm going to fetch Towser!"

"Oh, blow Towser!"

Herries snorted, and started off in the direction of the

(Continued on page 14.)

HERE WE ARE AGAIN FOR ANOTHER CHAT, CHUMS!



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

HALLO, chums! With the addition of the eight stunning pictures presented with this number, your albums are beginning to look just dandy. Our office boy is collecting the pictures every week, as he is those given with "The Magnet," "The Ranger," and "The Modern Boy," and mighty keen he is to add them to his album. He's always asking me how many pictures he will get with the next GEM, and when I told him this morning that there will be thirteen given with next Wednesday's number his face beamed with delight. I've seen his four collections, and I must say he's taken great pains in cutting the pictures out and sticking them in the albums, for they look really handsome—and I expect yours look the same.

"DOWN ON HIS LUCK!"

Well, chums, how do you like the theme of the powerful series of St. Jim's stories, the second one of which appears in this number? It's some little while since we had a long series, but I think this one beats anything we have had before. Poor old Tom Merry has had rough luck so far, but he has yet to experience worse. In next Wednesday's stirring story, Martin Clifford tells of his dramatic adventures in the great Metropolis—his set-backs in looking for a job, and the ups and downs of a rough-and-ready life, with barely enough to eat and a dingy room in which to live. It's a hard struggle for Tom, and he thinks longingly of his chums at St. Jim's, who are breaking up for the Christmas holidays. This grand yarn is easily the best of the series so far, and you'll enjoy it immensely.

"THE WHITE GIANTS OF EL DORADO!"

What of the St. Frank's adventurers whose exciting adventures in this week's

instalment makes such thrilling reading? They are up against formidable enemies in the White Giants and that arch crook, Professor Cyrus Zingrave. Fortunately, however, the whole party has escaped—but they are not yet out of the wood. What has happened to startle so suddenly the chariots' "steeds"? You will learn the answer in the next all-thrilling chapters, when they are faced with the most perilous situation of their lives!

To round off this tip-top issue you will see in a thrilling climax how Mick finally brings the fur robbers to book. The Jester will have another batch of the best jokes of the week, and your Editor will have some interesting news for you about our coming Christmas number.

SQUATTING.

How would you like to be a squatter? You know, one of those fellows who settles down on unclaimed land and hopes that no one will claim it for twelve years. In that case, if he lives there undisturbed for twelve years the land becomes his property. There is a chance for a squatter in London. Just off Tottenham Court Road there is a plot of land which has been left unclaimed for the past twelve years. The plot, which is between two shops, originally had a building upon it, but this was condemned by the L.C.C. and pulled down, as they were unable to find the owner. They are still unable to discover the illusive gentleman to whom the property belongs, but in the meantime here is a great chance for a squatter to obtain possession of a piece of land for which already £1,000 has been offered.

TRICKING THE CARD TRICKSTERS!

The Rev. W. H. Haslam, of Brockenhurst, is an expert at sleight-of-hand. He recently gave an exhibition of his talents at a charity concert, and kept the audience amused for some time. On one occasion the padre was travelling by train when he

found himself in the company of some cardsharps. They invited him to play, and he decided that here was a chance to teach these dishonest "gentlemen" a lesson. Accordingly he accepted their offer, and the game started. By clever manipulation of the cards the padre succeeded in scooping the pool. Then he handed his winnings back, and with them a severe lecture to the crestfallen cardsharps. On another occasion he dealt himself a hand consisting of one complete suit when playing bridge. This was entirely accidental, but I bet he felt a bit awkward when he saw what had happened.

FIREMEN TO THE RESCUE.

A cat was clinging to a swaying branch of an elm at Mitcham some fifty feet above the ground. Several men had attempted to reach the cat by climbing the tree, but all attempts to rescue the stranded cat were unavailing. For two days the cat remained in this precarious position, and at length, in desperation, someone sent for the fire brigade. The fifty-foot fire escape was run up, and a fireman went to the rescue of poor pussy. He was almost at the top and was reaching out to pick up the cat when it jumped to the ground. The cat landed on its feet and immediately disappeared over a six-foot garden fence. Ungrateful creature!

Talking of firemen and animals, here is a rather interesting thing. A dog was trapped in a burning loft and attracted the attention of a passer-by, who gave the alarm. For some time the dog could be heard barking, while the firemen were busy rescuing two people from the burning building. Finally the dog's bark ceased, but a plucky fireman fought his way through the smoke and rescued the dog, who was in a state of collapse. Artificial respiration was tried and eventually the animal recovered consciousness!

AN ECHO.

Here is a strange echo of the War. When the War broke out in 1914, the stained glass windows of Canterbury Cathedral, which are worth £50 a foot, were removed. This was done in case of damage by air raids. Mr. Caldwell, the expert engaged for this task, completed it in three weeks. The windows were stored in a special dug-out at the back of Mr. Caldwell's house, and closely guarded.

After the War the job of putting the windows back again was started and Mr. Caldwell and six employees began work. That was fifteen years ago, and now the colossal task of fitting the windows together is nearly finished.

Incidentally, these windows were painted by twelfth and thirteenth century monks, and no one has yet succeeded in discovering the secret of the colours used, for to-day it is impossible to produce such beautiful colouring.

THE EDITOR.

D. Sifton, 49, Clifford Avenue, East Sheen, S.W.14, wants to hear from collectors who have specimen or cancelled stamps.

William Stow, 171, Corporation Road, Grimsby, Lines., wants correspondents interested in photos and magazines.

Peter Boyle, 27, Buckingham Street, Davenport, Stockport, Ches., wants correspondents in France, Channel Islands, South Africa, South America, and Australia.

R. Jordan, 79, George Street, Oban, Argyleshire, Scotland, wants correspondents interested in stamps, magazines, and curios.

Miss Patricia Dent, 1, Burke Road, Spanish Town, Jamaica, West Indies, wants girl correspondents, ages 13-17.

F. B. J. Champion, 126, High Street, Queenborough, Kent, wants correspondents overseas—Europe and Dominions.

Miss Margaret Patzer, 9, The Paragon, Blackheath, London, S.E.3, wants girl correspondents interested in camping, books, and motor-cycling.

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PEN PALS

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

R. E. S. Lough, 10, Broomhall, Chobham Road, Sunningdale, Berkshire wants correspondents in Germany, Ireland, Italy, and England.

Miss Nancy L. Stembridge, 15, Hazwell Road, Putney, London, S.W.15, wants girl correspondents.

Miss Joyce Harbottle, 8, Uppingham Road, Wallasey, Ches., wants girl correspondents.

Keith Brick, 5, The Orchard, Wallasey, Ches., wants correspondents in Africa, America, and the West Indies, interested in boxing, wrestling, and stamps.

Rallying Round Tom Merry!

(Continued from page 12.)

kennels. Blake was quickly on his way to the New House with half a dozen fellows. Herries joined them near the rival House—with Towser.

Blake breathed hard as he saw the bulldog. But it was useless to say anything to Herries on the subject. Herries could be very obstinate, and he had a touching faith in the powers of Towser to track down anything or anybody. The School House juniors hurried into the New House, and Herries dragged Towser in after them. Pratt sighted them in the Hall, and gave a yell—and Towser gave a growl, and Pratt fled! Blake & Co. rushed upstairs to Figgins' study.

The search for D'Arcy in the enemy's quarters had begun. Meanwhile Pratt was sprinting across the quad at top speed to fetch Figgins & Co.

CHAPTER 9.

The Spoofer!

MR. DODDS was sitting down to his lunch when Tom Merry came in. The junior's face was so bright that the curate at once guessed the news.

"So Mr. Smith has proved satisfactory, Tom?"

"Yes, sir; I've let the house."

"Very good!"

"He liked the place immensely from the first, and never ran it down at all like Mr. Solomonson," said Tom Merry.

"That is better still."

"And he has insisted upon paying twice as much rent as I asked."

Mr. Dodds jumped.

"What?"

"It's odd, isn't it?" said Tom Merry.

"I should say so! You asked—"

"A hundred pounds."

"And he has offered—"

"Two hundred."

"The man must be—well, very eccentric," said Mr. Dodds. "I have certainly never heard of such a thing before. It is incomprehensible."

"He insists upon it, sir."

"Extraordinary!"

"I suppose we shall be justified in accepting it, sir," said Tom Merry. "The house is worth much more than we asked, only we never expected to get more than a hundred pounds. If it is worth two hundred to Mr. Smith, I suppose he has a right to pay it if he chooses?"

"I suppose so. But—"

"But if you see him, sir, to make the arrangements, you can judge for yourself."

"Certainly. Ask him to lunch, by all means, Tom, and I shall be able to judge of this extraordinary gentleman."

Tom Merry returned to the hall, where Mr. Smith was waiting, toasting his toes at the fire.

"I hope you will stay to lunch, sir?" said Tom Merry.

Mr. Smith hesitated.

"Weally," he began—"I—I mean—cough—ah! I weally don't wad to drouble you, you see—"

"Not at all, sir. Mr. Dodds wishes you to stay to lunch—and, anyway, you will have to stay some time to see about the agreement for the house."

"Thad is drue."

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Sent out after fur robbers, Mick Ray, of the Mounted, falls into their hands. He Eagle Eye. Mick then discovers a clue, and sets out for Fort Murdock.



The blizzard raged and roared with unabated fury as Mick staggered on through the whirling snow. The wind almost swept him from his feet, and again and again he stumbled into deep drifts.

But pluckily the Mountie kept on, knowing that once he dropped he would be frozen to death. Then, when almost at his last gasp, a dark shape loomed through the snow. "An aeroplane!" panted Mick.



When Mick removed his covering of furs the following morning, the blizzard had died away. He and Eagle Eye soon recovered from their ordeal, and they built a camp in a near-by pine forest.

Leaving Eagle Eye at the camp, Mick set out for Fort Murdock, taking his direction from the sun. Reaching the outpost, a man whispered to him. "I can give you information about the fur robbers!"



The two men thrust Mick into an adjoining room. Through the half-open door the Mountie heard them talking: "We'll hold up the stores, take all the furs—and escape in the plane!"

"I must prevent them getting away in the plane!" muttered Mick, after the men had gone. He managed to struggle over to the window, broke it, and then cut his bonds on the jagged edges of glass.

Mick comes to a show-down with the fur robbers.

MOUNTIED!

DRY OF THE WILD WEST!

and to a tree and left to the mercy of wolves, but he is rescued by his Indian chum, Eagle Eye is captured by the gang, and meanwhile Mick is lost in a blizzard!



Reeling with exhaustion, he reached the plane, subconsciously realising it had been abandoned by the fur robbers. Inside one of the cockpits he discovered Eagle Eye, bound and half frozen.

Groping in the plane, Mick found a pile of furs, and with his last remaining strength he managed to cover some of these over the Indian, and then himself clambered into the other cockpit.



He took the Mountie to a cabin some distance from the outpost, but no sooner had Mick entered than—"Put 'em up!" snapped his companion, and Mick found himself covered by a revolver.

Menaced by the gun, Mick stepped backwards—and next moment a rope was looped round his shoulders and drawn cruelly tight. Spinning round, he recognised his new foe as one of the fur robbers.



Reaching the outpost, he learned that the robbers had stolen a valuable load of furs and made off in a sledge. Quickly Mick secured another dog team, and set out in pursuit.

Over the snow raced the sledge, with Mick driving his dogs to their utmost. Topping a ridge, he saw a sledge in the distance. The fur robbers!—but would Mick be able to reach the plane first?

"Please stay to lunch, sir!"

"I suppose I had, better. Thank you very much."

"This way, sir."

Tom Merry took his new friend's hat and coat, and then led him into the dining-room.

Mr. Dodds greeted him very politely. The new tenant of Laurel Villa sat down so that his back would be to the light as far as possible, and Mr. Dodds did not fail to notice that circumstance.

The offer of double the rent had naturally excited the curate's suspicion. He could not help suspecting that he had to do with someone whose eccentricity amounted to lunacy, or else with some swindler—though how a swindle was to be effected by paying out money for nothing was past his power of guessing.

But there was no doubt that the circumstances were suspicious, and pointed to something of a hidden and secret nature in the matter.

Mr. Dodds meant to make a very searching examination of his visitor before he signed any agreement transferring Laurel Villa to his tenancy, and to make a keen investigation, too, into his references.

Mr. Smith appeared to be ill at ease.

Perhaps it was his cold—though his cold was a curious one, too. For sometimes he appeared to have no cold at all, and then all of a sudden he would begin sniffing and coughing and blowing his nose with great activity, as if to make up for lost time. He managed to eat a pretty good lunch, all the same—the keen wintry air having evidently sharpened his appetite.

"You have a very bad cold, sir," Mr. Dodds remarked sympathetically.

The stout gentleman coughed by way of reply.

"Have you had it long?"

Another cough.

Mr. Dodds rose from the table, his lunch finished.

"We might now go into the library and settle the preliminaries about the house," he remarked.

"Yaa—I mean"—cough, sniff—"yes, certainly!"

Mr. Dodds placed a chair for his visitor in the library so that the light from the window fell upon his face.

Sitting with his own face shadowed, the curate watched the countenance of Mr. John Smith while he talked.

It was a critical test for Mr. Smith.

Mr. Dodds was quite certain, in a few minutes, of two things—that Mr. Smith's hair was false and that his wrinkles were artificial; in short, he was in disguise.

The curate's brow darkened at the knowledge.

Who was this man? What was his object in coming there disguised? That he was a criminal of some sort was the obvious explanation. The pretence of taking a house was probably a mere blind to cover some attempt to rob the rectory. Possibly he had some articles of value in his pockets already.

"You have decided to take Laurel Villa?" said Mr. Dodds, in spite of himself a stern note creeping into his voice.

"Yaa—yes."

"You like the place?"

"Very mudge."

"You are willing to pay double the rent demanded?"

"Certainly!"

"And to sign an agreement to that effect?"

"Certainly!"

"May I ask for your references?"

"Lord Eastwood is one."

The curate started.

He had never met Lord Eastwood, but the name, of course, was familiar.

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See his thrilling adventures next week.

Tom Merry had often met D'Arcy's father, and he looked at Mr. Smith with new interest.

"You know Lord Eastwood?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, certainly!"

"I know him well," said Tom Merry. "His son is a great friend of mine—a chap named D'Arcy, at St. Jim's. You know him?"

"Certainly!" said Mr. Smith, coughing.

"You wish me to communicate with Lord Eastwood?" asked Mr. Dodds.

"Oh, certainly! You see, Lord Eastwood will guarantee me, and it will not be necessary to go into odder references," sneezed Mr. Smith.

"Quite so, if his lordship answers for you," said Mr. Dodds, almost staggered in his belief that he had to do with a rascal. "I suppose you are aware that Lord Eastwood lives within a drive of this village, and that I could see him this afternoon to put your statement to the test?"

"Quite so!"

The curate was silent for a few moments. Tom Merry, who saw something unusual in his manner, watched the two in silence. Mr. Dodds rose finally, crossed to the door, and turned the key in the lock.

Tom Merry started to his feet. For the moment he thought that Mr. Dodds had taken leave of his senses.

Mr. Smith jumped up, too—very actively for a gentleman of his age and girth.

"You give me Lord Eastwood's name, and tell me that he will answer for you, Mr. Smith?" said the curate sternly.

"Quite so!"

"And you represent yourself as a genuine tenant for Laurel Villa?"

"Certainly!"

"Then why," said Mr. Dodds quietly—"why have you come here with false hair and a false beard and a made-up face?"

Mr. Smith staggered.

Tom Merry uttered a cry of astonishment.

"Mr. Dodds!"

"It is a fact, Tom," said Mr. Dodds quietly. "The man is disguised, and his real appearance is nothing like that which appears to us now. I ask you again, Mr. Smith, what do you mean by that?"

"Bai Jove!"

Mr. John Smith uttered that ejaculation involuntarily.

Tom Merry jumped.

The words, the accent, all were familiar, and had he been in the dark he would have sworn that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's, was present. But he could see all who were in the room, and the only persons there beside himself were Mr. Dodds and Mr. Smith!

Tom Merry seemed to feel his head turning round.

Mr. Dodds seemed thunderstruck, too, for a moment. Then he strode towards Mr. John Smith and laid a grasp upon his beard, and jerked.

The beard came off, and the straggling moustache with it, and at the same time the smoked glasses slid down. Then, in spite of the wig and the make-up, the face was easily to be recognised.

Mr. Dodds gasped.

"D'Arcy!"

Tom Merry gave a yell.

"Gussy! You awful spoofer!"

CHAPTER 10.

Towser on the Track.

G-R-R-R-R! That was Towser's remark as Herries dragged him upstairs in the New House at St. Jim's. Towser didn't like stairs. He regarded them probably as a human invention which was the outcome of the fact that human intelligence wasn't quite up to the doggy mark. He had to go up, as Herries had a tight grip on his collar, but he protested.

"Keep that beast quiet, Herries," said Blake.

To which Herries retorted:

"Rats!"

Gr-r-r-r!

"Here's Figgins' study," said Digby, throwing open the door of that apartment. "It's not fastened up, and D'Arcy's not here."

That much was evident. The room was empty.

Blake looked round it.

Arthur Augustus certainly wasn't hidden in Figgins' study, but Blake had not abandoned his belief that his elegant chum was secreted in the New House somewhere.

"We'll look along the studies, and then into the box-room," he said.

"Good egg!"

"Buck up, then," said Kangaroo. "We shall have the whole crew of those blessed larrikins here in a few minutes."

The School House fellows hurried along the Fourth Form passage, looking into the studies. D'Arcy was not to be seen. But a good many New House fellows were seen, and they hurled remarks that were far from polite at the intruders.

The School House juniors were not slow to retort in kind, and they upset a few tables and desks as a warning to the inmates to be more civil.

But the swell of St. Jim's was not to be found.

And now the alarm was all over the House. Figgins & Co. had rushed back from the gym, and New House juniors were gathering from far and near.

"If you'd get something that belonged to D'Arcy, and let Towser smell it, he'd track him down in no time," Herries declared more than once.

To which the unanimous reply was an ancient and classic monosyllable:

"Rats!"

Suddenly Towser tugged at his collar, and bounded along the upper passage, dragging Herries after him.

Herries turned an excited face towards his chums.

"It's all right!" he shouted. "Towser's on the track! Come on!"

Towser was dashing off to the box-rooms.

"Well, we want to look in the box-rooms, anyway," said Blake. "Come on!"

And they followed Towser.

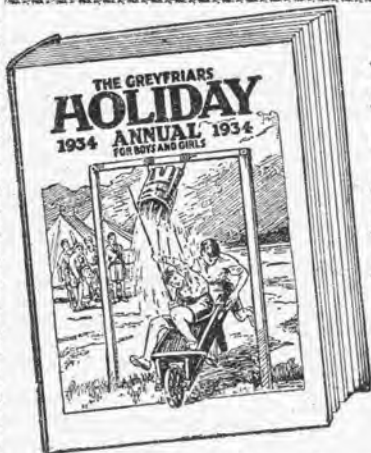
Towser dashed into a room, and began scratching fiercely at a big trunk. It was a very large trunk, with the initials "L. W." painted upon it—Llewelyn Wynn, the full name of Fatty. It was the trunk Fatty used to come and go from St. Jim's, and during the term it remained stored away in the box-room. It was a very large trunk, and quite large enough to hold a human being. Towser was tearing at it excitedly, and the School House juniors gathered round in alarm.

Even Blake was impressed by Towser's excitement.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated. "They can't have been idiots enough to shut Gussy up in that trunk?"

"He'd be suffocated!" said Kangaroo.

"Open it and see—quick!"



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But here arose a difficulty. The trunk was locked, and the key was not there.

Blake knocked on top of the big trunk with his fist.

"Gussy! Gussy, are you there?"

The trunk gave a hollow ring, but there was no reply.

"He couldn't answer," said Digby in a low voice, "if he's shut up in that trunk. He's fainted long ago, or—or——"

He broke off.

"Impossible!" ejaculated Kangaroo. "Don't be an ass!"

"Well, look at Towser!"

Towser's excitement was certainly great. He ran round the big trunk, growling and whining incessantly.

There was a rush of footsteps in the passage outside. The plump form of Fatty Wynn appeared in the doorway; plump as he was, the Falstaff of the New House had out-distanced the others.

"Look here!" he shouted. "You——"

"Shut the door!" muttered Blake.

Kangaroo and Lowther seized Fatty Wynn and hurled him spinning along the passage. He collided with Figgins and Kerr and sent them reeling.

Manners slammed the door and locked it.

The moment the key had turned in the lock the New House juniors were hammering outside.

"Open this blessed door!" roared Figgins.

"Rats!"

Hammer, hammer! Bang!

Crash!

"Oh, you can go and eat coke!" said Blake through the keyhole. "We're not going to open the door, and you can't batter it down, either, I fancy!"

"Now let's get the chest open," said Herries. "My belief is, that they've been idiots enough to shut Gussy in this trunk, and he's fainted or been suffocated! I knew Towser would track him down!"

"We can't open it!"

"Burst it!"

There was a fresh rain of blows on the door.

Fatty Wynn's voice bawled through the keyhole in most excited tones:

"Don't you fellows touch my trunk!"

"There, that's pretty clear!" said Herries.

Blake wrenched at the trunk. But it was impossible to force the lock that way. Digby looked round for a weapon. He found a chisel, and it was thrust under the metal flap of the lock, which was then wrenched upwards.

It was hard to break, however. Fatty Wynn, on the other side of the door, guessed what the scraping and straining meant.

He banged hard on the door.

"Let that trunk alone!" he roared.

"Rats!"

"Yah!"

Hammer, hammer, hammer!

Blake wrenched at the trunk. The other School House fellows stood round him with startled faces. It seemed impossible that the New House fellows could have been so utterly stupid as to shut a boy up in a trunk which was not even perforated. If D'Arcy was shut up there, D'Arcy was dead, or very near it. It was incredible, but——

But what did Towser's excitement mean, and Fatty Wynn's frantic opposition to the opening of the trunk?

Herries was sniffing suspiciously, too.

"There's a curious smell about," he said. "I noticed it when I came into the room—and it comes from this trunk!"

Blake shuddered.

"Oh, draw it mild!" he exclaimed.

"I tell you——"

"Hang it all, I can notice it myself!" said Kangaroo, sniffing. "And it certainly comes from the trunk! I don't see that it means anything."

"If there's a body——"

"Oh, shut up, Herries!"

"Well, it's suspicious!" said Herries.

"It smells like—like onions to me!" said Clifton Dane.

"Oh, don't be an ass, Dane!"

Towser was growling and trying to tear at the trunk. It was clear that the curious smell had attracted Towser to it. But——

Wrench! Crash!

The lock came to pieces under Blake's powerful wrenching.

There was a shout from Fatty Wynn outside. The Falstaff of the New House had heard the lock break.

"You—rotters! Don't you dare to open that trunk!"

"Rats!"

Blake threw up the lid of the trunk.

The tray within was empty. In spite of himself, Blake trembled as he made a move to lift out the tray. What was to be disclosed underneath it? The curious, penetrating smell was stronger than ever now!

The juniors stood with tense faces, looking. Blake dragged out the tray. There was a general craning forward of necks, and then a yell:

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 11.

Steak and Kidney!

IT was not a body that was disclosed by the removal of the tray in the trunk. It was not Arthur Augustus, fainting, suffocating, or bound hand and foot. It was nothing so terrible.

It was a large dish, nearly full of a most savoury compound of pastry, beefsteak, kidneys, and other ingredients, with a smell of onions very pronounced.

Fatty Wynn's anxiety was explained now.

That was the treasure trove.

The School House juniors stared at it. They roared with laughter, with the exception of Herries. Herries was looking rather sheepish.

All was clear now.

Fatty Wynn had had that savoury compound cooked at Mrs. Taggles. He had taken it to the New House to eat, when Figgins and Kerr had heartlessly dragged him off to the gym for footer practices. Fatty had been in great anxiety about his feed. He had not left it in the study, because other fellows knew that he had it, and he was in fear of it being raided in his absence. It had been a brilliant idea to lock it up in the empty trunk in the box-room. Nobody was likely to look for it there.

But the unexpected had happened.

Towser had not tracked down Arthur Augustus, but that savoury scent had reached his keen nostrils, and he had tracked down the steak and kidney pie.

Towser was more excited than ever. He made efforts to leap into the trunk.

Herries dragged him back angrily. Herries was nearer at that moment to being angry with his favourite than he had ever been before.

"Down, Towser!" he grunted.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "Good old Towser!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's tracked down the pie! Do you remember the time when he tracked down the kippers, Herries? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Poor old Fatty! No wonder he was alarmed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We haven't found Gussy," Lowther remarked.

"Oh, he can't be in the House!" said Blake. "He would have heard us by this time, and called out, I think. He's not here, so goodness knows where he is! The trouble is, that we're here, and the New House bounders are in a pack outside."

"And we can't get out!"

"Exactly!"

There was a furious hammering at the door again.

"You School House rotters!"

"Hallo, Fatty!"

"Have you opened that trunk?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes!"

"Don't you touch that pie!" roared Fatty. "If you touch that pie, we'll—we'll scalp you baldheaded!"

"We'll scalp them, anyway!" said Figgins' voice. "We'll wait here for 'em to come out, if we have to wait till bed-time!"

Fatty Wynn kicked at the door hard.

"Let us in, you School House rotters!"

"Rats! Look here, Figgins, we came here to look for Gussy, and all we've found is a steak and kidney pie!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We're willing to make it pax, if you are."

Figgins gave a whistle of astonishment.

"Well, I like that! You've raided our House, and upset half the studies, and now we've got you cornered, you're willing to make it pax! Rats!"

"We're willing to let you off, I mean," said Blake.

There was a howl of wrath from the New House juniors. There were twenty or more of them crowded now in the passage outside the box-room door.

"You'll let us off, will you?" said Figgins. "Well, you won't get off so easy yourself. We'll duck every blessed man jack of you in the bath-room when we get hold of you, and send you back to the School House with your chivvies done up in butter and soot!"

"How nice!" murmured Monty Lowther. "We've got a great leader in Blake—I don't think!"

"Oh, rats!" said Blake.

"Faith! And how are we going to get out of the fix entirely?" asked Reilly.

Blake rapped on the door.

"Figgy! I say, Figgy!"

"Going to open the door?"

"Not unless you make it pax."

"Rats!"

"We're willing to pay ransom," said Blake.

"Eh? What do you mean? What ransom?"

"A steak and kidney pie."

"What?"

"That's the ransom," said Blake coolly. "We've got a ripping steak and kidney pie here—nuff for a whole family, and we'll hand it over to you for a safe passage to the quad."

"Rats!"

"That's all right!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn eagerly. "We accept! We accept, don't we, Figgins? Look here! That's my pie, and—"

"No, we don't accept, Fatty," said Figgins grimly.

"Oh, I say—"

"Offer taken?" demanded Blake, through the keyhole.

"No! Fifty noes!"

"Look here—" began Fatty.

"Stuff! Do you think we're going to let your rotten pie make any difference in making terms with the enemy?" demanded Kerr.

"It's not a rotten pie!" said Fatty Wynn indignantly. "It's a splendid steak and kidney pie, and the biggest one we've ever had in the study. Mrs. Taggles cooked it for me, and it only wants heating up in a saucepan. I—"

"Oh, blow your pie!"

"I'm jolly well going to—"

"Are you going to keep us here?" demanded Blake.

"Yes, rather!"

"Then we'll eat the pie."

Fatty Wynn gave a yell.

"You—you pirates! Don't you dare to eat my steak and kidney pie!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll—I'll scalp you!" roared Fatty Wynn. "I—I—I'll pulverise you! I—I'm fearfully hungry now. I always get extra hungry in this December weather. Look here! You gimme my pie. Do you hear?"

"I'm not deaf!" chuckled Blake. "You can have your pie in return for a safe passage to the quad."

"That's only reasonable, Figgy," urged Fatty Wynn. "Do be a reasonable chap. It would be a sin to risk that pie."

"Blessed if you aren't like the chap who sold his birth-right for a mess of pottage!" exclaimed Figgins wrathfully.

"Are you going to sell the honour of the New House for a steak and kidney pie, you fat bouncer?"

"Oh, I say!" murmured Fatty Wynn feebly.

"But I'll tell you what we will do," said Figgins considerably. "If they touch that pie we'll give them a coat of marmalade over their hair, as well as the soot and the butter. Now I can't say fairer than that."

"Certainly not," said Kerr.

Fatty Wynn grunted.

"If you gave 'em a swim in lard and jam, it wouldn't bring back the steak and kidney pie," he mumbled.

"Pooh! Bosh!"

"Well, what's the verdict?" demanded Blake.

"We'll wait here till you come out."

"Then we'll eat the pie."

"We'll make you sit up if you do."

"Oh, rats! We'll eat the pie, and then we'll come out and lick you bouncers."

There was a shout of wrath at this remark. The New House fellows would have waited hours to get at Blake & Co. after that.

Jack Blake turned to his comrades in the glimmer of gaslight in the box-room.

"Look here! We look like being shut up here for some time," he remarked. "We'd better have tea. There's nothing but steak and kidney pie, but there's plenty of that, and you're welcome to all you can eat."

"Well, it looks jolly nice," said Digby, lifting the pie out of the box.

"I think it's as nice as it looks. We know how our esteemed friend, Wynn, does these things. We shall have to use our pocket-knives for forks and knives and spoons, but that is one of the little inconveniences of these informal meals," said Blake blandly.

"But how on earth are we to get out?" demanded Manners.

"We'll think that out after we've eaten the pie."

"Good egg!" said Kangaroo heartily.

And the School House juniors commenced operations on the pie. Fatty Wynn, with an anxious ear to the keyhole, heard the sounds of feasting, and almost wept.

"There goes the pie!" he groaned.

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"Never mind the pie. Wait till you're sticking their top-knots with marmalade," said Figgins encouragingly.

But Fatty Wynn only looked despondent. Even the prospects of sticking the School House fellows' top-knots with marmalade failed to console him for the loss of that delicious pie.

Within the box-room the School House fellows were enjoying themselves. The pie was still quite warm; it had a lovely smell, and a lovely taste, and as the fellows had not had their tea yet, they were hungry. Fatty Wynn's pie was large, but it vanished at last under the attacks of the hungry juniors.

"Ripping!" said Blake when it was finished.

And Towser, who had come in for his share, licked his chops.

But outside in the passage could be heard movements and whispering voices. Figgins & Co. were still on the watch.

CHAPTER 12.

Back to St. Jim's!

"Gussy! You spoofer!"

"D'Arcy!"

"You bouncer!" shouted Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood revealed.

He presented a curious sight in the library of Huckleberry Heath rectory, with the smoked glasses sliding down his nose and his wig awry and Mr. Dodds holding the beard and the moustache that was still partly attached to his face.

D'Arcy was overwhelmed with confusion for the moment. He could only stand blinking and blushing in a guilty way. Mr. Dodds burst into a laugh.

"So it is you, D'Arcy!" he exclaimed.

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

It was the swell of St. Jim's natural voice once more.

"What on earth have you come in this rig here for, you young ass?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Have you got leave from school?"

"I have not."

"Then you'll get into a row."

"I am perfectly pwepared to face a wow undah the circumstances."

"But what does it mean?" Tom Merry exclaimed. "What have you done it for? What have you been spoofing me for, you dummy?"

"I decline to be called a dummay!"

"You've made me believe that I'd let Laurel Villa," said Tom Merry. "Now, hang it all, Gussy, this is a bit too rotten!"

"But you have let it, deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus eagerly.

"Yes, to you."

"It's all wight."

Tom Merry laughed.

"What! You're not thinking of really taking on Laurel Villa, are you? I suppose this is a jape from beginning to end."

"Not at all, deah boy."

"Then what on earth is it?"

"You see," D'Arcy explained, recovering his composure a little, "I had wesolved to help you, old man."

"But how?"

"So I wote to my governah and asked him if he would stand the tin if I found a way of settin' you on your feet."

"My hat!"

"My governah agweed at once. He's an awfully good old sort, you know, my governah! He expwessed some doubt as to whethah I should think of a plan; you know, he doesn't weally undahstand what an awfully deep chap I am."

Tom Merry grinned.

"Well, this was the plan, and — was gettin' along famously when Mr. Dodds spoiled ewewythin'," said Arthur Augustus. "I was goin' to take your house at two hundred a year, you see, and my governah would find the tin."

"You ass!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"You chump!"

"I wefuse to be called a chump!" exclaimed D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity. "I wegard it as a weally wippin' plan!"

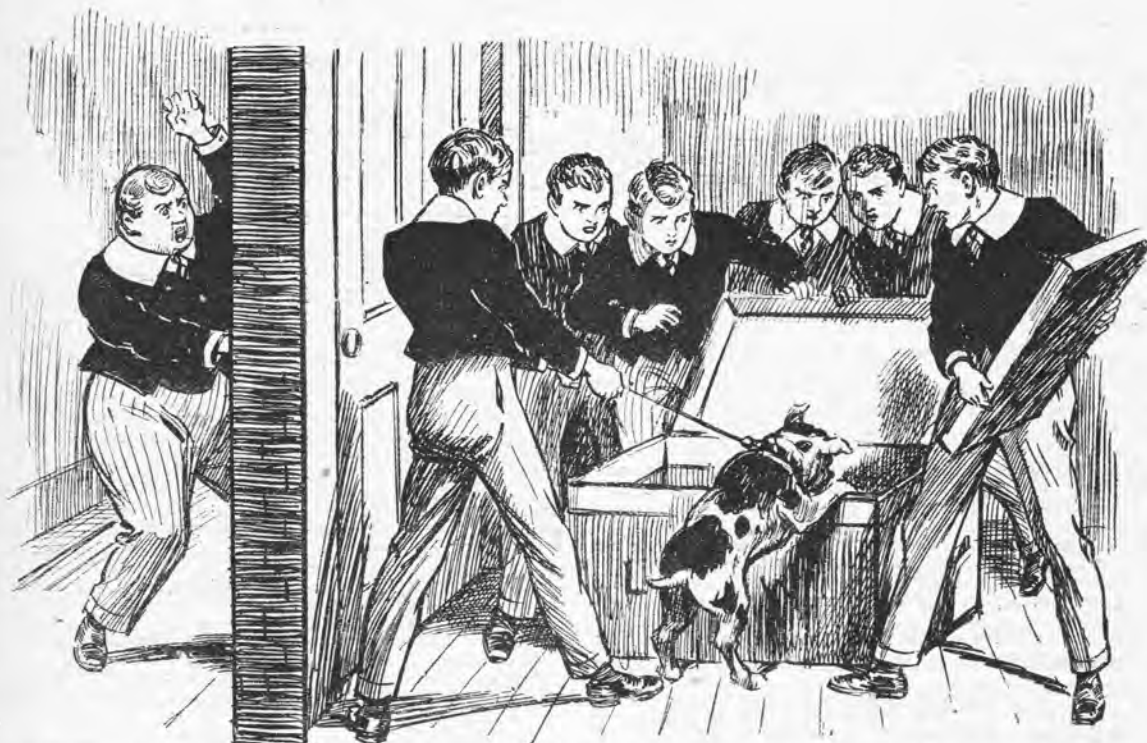
"Fathead!"

"If you have nothin' to say exceptin' oppwobwious expwessions, Tom Mewwy, I think this discush had bettah cease."

"Ass!"

"You see, you wefuse to have any tin fwom anybody, so I had to think of this dodge," said D'Arcy. "I wegard it as jollay good!"

"Oh, you duffer!" said Tom Merry. "I should have



"You—you rotters!" yelled Fatty Wynn, thumping on the door. "Don't you open that trunk!" "Rats!" came the reply. Blake lifted up the lid, and the juniors craned forward with tense faces as he removed the tray. Then there was a yell. "Ha, ha, ha!" Inside was a steak and kidney pie!

bowled you out, you chump! And I'm not going to let you give me money, you fathead!"

"Weally, you know—"

"But you're a good old duffer, Gussy, and it's all right!" said Tom Merry. "I'll take the will for the deed, anyway."

"I twust," said Arthur Augustus, "that Mr. Dodds will advise you to pwoceed with the mattah, and let me have the house."

"Rats!"

Mr. Dodds shook his head.

"I am afraid I cannot advise anything of the sort, D'Arcy. Tom is quite right in refusing to take monetary help from his friends."

"Of course, I should not ventuah to put up my opinion in opposition of that of a clergyman," said Arthur Augustus. "But I am extwemely sowwy that the mattah has fallen through. It will be, howevah, a gweat comfort to get widd of these things. I am feelin' most uncomfortable hot and stuffy!"

"Come up to my room and change, you chump!" said Tom Merry. "I'll lend you some clothes."

"Thank you vevy much, deah boy."

Tom Merry took D'Arcy up to his room. Mr. Dodds, smiling vevy much, left about his business. Tom Merry, after the first surprise, and the disappointment in not having secured a tenant for the house, after all, was delighted to see his chum again.

He had not been very long away from St. Jim's, but it seemed a long time to him. He felt as if he had grown vevy much older since he left all his chums behind, and D'Arcy with him again was like a ray of sunshine and youthful cheeriness.

Arthur Augustus, with Tom Merry's help, stripped off the clothes and the paddings and the rest of the disguise, and the things were packed up carefully to be returned to Kerr at St. Jim's.

Then the swell of St. Jim's washed the make-up off his face and dressed himself in a suit of clothes belonging to Tom Merry.

The clothes fitted him a little loosely, and did not show off the elegance of his figure to its full advantage; but Arthur Augustus remarked that he was very glad to look "respectable" once more.

"Well, of all the chumps, I think you take the cake!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "But it does me good to see you again, old chap."

"Does it weally? Then, in that case, deah boy, I ovah-look all these oppwobwious expwessions you have used."

"How are they all getting on at St. Jim's?"

"We all miss you vevy much, but othahwise things are vevy much the same as usual," said Arthur Augustus, brushing his hair vevy carefully before Tom Merry's glass. "The Gwammah School footah match comes off to-morrow—Saturday—you know."

"Yes, I hadn't forgotten it. Who's captaining St. Jim's?"

"Blake or Figgins, unless you come back, deah boy."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I can't come back to St. Jim's," he said

"But your fees are paid there till the end of the term," said Arthur Augustus. "Even if you are wuined, deah boy, you can have the west of the term."

Tom Merry smiled.

"But we're close on the break-up for the Christmas holidays now," he said. "It would only be a few days, Gussy."

"Yaas, but—"

"I'm coming back to see you all, anyway, and then I'm going on to London," said Tom Merry.

"You are comin' to Eastwood House for Chwistmas?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Thanks awfully, Gussy, but I can't come."

D'Arcy's face fell.

"Why not?" he asked.

"Things are changed. I'm poor now—as poor as the poorest boy on your father's land," said Tom firmly. "I can't come to your place as I used to, Gussy. You don't understand; you've never wanted for money. But—but I shall have nothing in my pockets; and that's not all. I've sold most of my clothes to pay expenses, and I have precious little more than the two suits you and I are standing up in at the present moment. I can't dress the part for a Christmas party at Eastwood House, old chap."

"I am suah we should all be glad to have you, if you came in a sack, Tom Mewwy."

"I know you would, Gussy, old son, but I'm not going to impose upon you, all the same. Besides, I've got to be up and doing. I think I have a chance in London. I've heard of something, and I ought not to let it slip."

"When are you going?"

"At once, I think. I was staying here till I had seen whether there was any chance of letting Laurel Villa. It's pretty clear now that it won't let till after Christmas, and Mr. Dodds has promised to take charge of the matter. I'm living on Mr. Dodds while I'm here, Gussy, and he's a poor man. I can't stand it; I must go. He is all kindness, and I

know he'd let me live here for ever if I liked. But I've got to keep my self-respect, and taking advantage of the kindness of friends is the way to lose it."

"I suppose you're wight, Tom Mewwy."

"Well, every cloud has a silver lining, you know," said Tom Merry, smiling, "and I hope things will turn out all right for you."

He paused and reflected for a moment.

"Blessed if I don't come back to St. Jim's with you," he said. "You're the last tenant I had to show over Laurel Villa. I've got to see the fellows once more, and then leave for London. And I'll play in the match with the Grammarians to-morrow, Gussy—shove on the St. Jim's colours for the last time."

"That will be wippin', deah boy! Bai Jove, how the fellows will shout when they see you again!" exclaimed D'Arcy, with eyes glistening.

"Then they shall shout this evening!"

"Wippin'!"

"You left St. Jim's without leave, didn't you?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, if I come back with you, I think the Head will very likely overlook it. He has been kindness itself to me, and I'll tell him you were trying to help me!"

"Jollay good ideah!"

The juniors descended. They found Mr. Dodds, and Tom Merry explained to him what he had decided to do—with the curate's approval, of course.

Mr. Dodds nodded thoughtfully.

"Quite right, Tom," he said. "I shall be sorry to lose you, and you know that you always have a home and a friend here when you want them. But you're quite right to try and make your way in the world. Heaven bless you, lad!"

And the next train from Huckleberry Heath bore Tom

Merry and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in the direction of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 13.

The Return of Tom Merry!

"HALLO, there!" Blake shouted through the key-hole of the box-room in the New House. And from Figgins & Co. and the crowd of New House juniors came an answering growl.

"Hallo!"

"Oh, you're still there?" exclaimed Blake.

"Yes, rather!"

"We've finished the pie," said Blake.

"Good! We'll finish you soon," said Figgins.

Fatty Wynn grunted.

"It was a ripping pie!" he said. "There was steak and kidney and my dodge with the onions, you know! Oh, it was a ripping pie!"

"Never mind; we'll make 'em sit up!"

"We're willing to make it pax!" said Blake.

"Rats!"

"Well, then, we'll stay here and you can sit out in the passage!" said the Fourth Former of the School House. "Don't you find it draughty?"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

The School House fellows shut up in the box-room were looking rather serious. They had been very pleasantly occupied with Fatty Wynn's steak and kidney pie. But now that the pie was finished, the confinement in the box-room was far from pleasant.

It was cold, and it was uncomfortable. They thought of their cosy studies in the School House, and growled.

"This is what comes of letting a Fourth Former lead us about," Monty Lowther remarked, addressing space.

"Oh, rats!" said Blake.

"We really owe it to Towser," said Digby. "Towser's wonderful gift of tracking down steak and kidney pies, I mean!"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Herries.

"I wonder how long we're going to stay here?"

"Jolly cold, ain't it?"

"Suppose we rush 'em?"

"They're three or four to one, and more on the stairs!"

"Oh, blow!"

Jack Blake went through gymnastic exercises to keep himself warm. Kangaroo stamped up and down. From the outside of the box-room came a sound of stamping, showing that the New House juniors were similarly engaged.

"Blessed if I'm going to stand this!" exclaimed Reilly at last, going to the door. "Let's rush the spalpeens!"

"Good!"

"Come on, then!" said Lowther.

Blake held up his hand.

"Hark! What's that?"

It was a ringing shout from the quadrangle, audible even in the box-room high up in the New House. The juniors listened.

"Blessed if I know!" said Kangaroo.

"Listen!"

From the dusky quadrangle came a louder yell.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

"What on earth is it?"

There was a sound of sudden scampering in the passage. Figgins & Co. were gone!

The School House juniors looked amazed.

There was no doubt about it; the crowd had rushed away out of the passage, and scampered down the stairs.

From the quad came a ringing shout again. Blake jammed his face against the window, but it was high up, and the quad was in darkness.

"Something's happened!" exclaimed Digby.

"But what?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"Hark!" shouted Kangaroo.

From the quad came up a roar.

"Hurrah! Tom Merry! Hurrah!"

Jack Blake gave a yell.

"It's Tom Merry come back! Come on, you chaps!"

He unlocked the door and tore it open, and rushed from the box-room. The passage was deserted. Not a thought did Blake and his chums give to the New House juniors. They would have rushed out just the same to greet Tom Merry if Figgins & Co. had been ever so grimly on the watch. But Figgins & Co. were gone.

Blake and his chums rushed down the stairs and out of the New House.

There was no one to stop them.

All the New House juniors had rushed out of the House at the news that Tom Merry had returned!

In the dusky quadrangle was a shouting crowd.

Blake and the rest rushed out towards the School House. Figgins & Co. were already there. In the radius of



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Tight east from the windows and the open doorway, juniors of both Houses were mingled in a crowd.

Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy were in the midst of the throng.

Figgins was shaking Tom Merry by one hand, while Kerr gripped the other, and Fatty Wynn was thumping him on the back.

"Tom Merry! Hurrah!"

Monty Lowther and Manners rushed up and pushed the New House juniors aside and fairly hugged their old chum in their arms.

Figgins grinned at Blake.

"Pax, now!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, rather, Figgy!"

"I should say so!" exclaimed Kerr. "Tom Merry doesn't come back every day. Good old Tommy! Still looking just the same!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, yes, we'll make it pax," said Fatty Wynn. "I suppose all the steak and kidney pie is gone, Blake?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes!"

"Here's Gussy, too!" exclaimed Herries. "Where have you been?"

"Keep that wotten beast away, Hewwies, please! That wotten bulldog has no respect whatever for a fellow's twousahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you know—"

"Where have you been, Gussy?"

"I've been to Hucklebewwy Heath," said D'Arcy. "I've brought Tom Mewwy back with me. It's all sewene!"

"Staying for good, Tom Merry?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No; only for a few days, kids—till Monday, in fact!"

Lowther's face fell.

"You're not coming back, Tom?"

"Can't be done."

"But—but—"

"But I'm staying over to-morrow and Sunday, and I'll play in the match against the Grammar School to-morrow afternoon, if you fellows like."

"If we like?" said Blake. "Of course we like! You're going to skipper us, and if Figgy says anything against it—"

"Don't be an ass!" said Figgy. "What could I say against it? Tom Merry's the only School House chap who can captain an eleven!"

"Look here—"

"Rats!"

"Weally, deah boys, don't begin to wow now," said Arthur Augustus. "I wegard this as a most auspicious occasion, and I think you youngstals ought to behave yourselves!"

"Yes, rather!" said Kangaroo. "Order, please! Shut up!"

Tom Merry moved on to the School House door in the midst of an enthusiastic crowd. Fellows of both Houses were crowding round to see him, and even Goro was seen to be grinning in a pleasant sort of way. Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, met him at the door.

He shook hands heartily with the hero of the Shell.

"So you have come back, Merry!" he exclaimed. "I hope for good."

"I'm afraid not, sir; only for a few days."

"Well, well, I am glad to see you again, at all events; and it appears that your school-fellows feel the same," said Mr. Railton, with a smile.

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry happily. "It's almost worth while becoming poor, I think, to see what jolly good chaps one's friends are."

"Bai Jove! I wegard that as vewy well put, deah boy."

Mr. Railton glanced sternly at Arthur Augustus.

"Ah! It is you, D'Arcy! You have returned, then?"

"Yaas, wathah, sir."

"Will you kindly explain your absence?"

"Certainly, sir. You see—"

"D'Arcy came down to see me, sir," ventured Tom Merry. "He came to try to do me a service, and—and it wasn't any good. But I hope you will be as lenient to him as you can, sir."

"Ah!" said Mr. Railton. "You should not have left without permission, D'Arcy. Under the circumstances, however, I shall let the matter drop for the present."

"Thanks awfully, Tom Mewwy!" said D'Arcy, as Mr. Railton went back to his study. "I wathah think you've got me out of a waggin'!"

"Here, where are you taking Tom Merry to?" demanded Blake, as Lowther and Manners marched the hero of the Shell off.

"Our study," said Lowther. "He's our property, isn't he?"

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry was marched off.

CHAPTER 14.

The Game with the Grammarians!

TOM MERRY had tea with his old chums in his old study in the Shell passage, and he had never enjoyed that cosy meal there more.

The Terrible Three were together once again, and peace and comfort reigned in the study. That they had met only to part again very soon was a thought they drove from their minds as much as possible, making the most of the present while it lasted.

They had much to tell and to hear.

Tom Merry was keenly interested in the smallest scrap of news about the school; and even the short time he had been away had been sufficient to place him somewhat out of touch with matters there.

Fellows dropped in to see him, many seniors as well as juniors, and he held quite a reception for some time in his study.

That was a very happy evening to Tom Merry.

He went to bed with the Shell, in his old bed, with his old friends round him, very tired, but in a very happy frame of mind.

He slept like a top that night.

The familiar old rising-bell clanged out in the grey dawn the next morning, and Tom Merry was one of the first out of bed.

Manners and Lowther jumped out at once, and very soon the three were out in the frosty air of the quad, strolling round the old school.

"By Jove! I feel as if I'd been months away, instead of only a week or two!" Tom Merry exclaimed. "How jolly it is to be here again!"

Tom Merry's face was very bright that morning. He turned up in class as if he had never left St. Jim's at all, and it was noticeable that Mr. Linton was very kind to him. And after morning lessons he turned up on the footer field, once more in the St. Jim's colours, to meet the Grammarians, and looking all his old self.

"They're late, the bounders!" said Lowther, looking at his watch. "But we'll beat them to-day—what?"

"What-ho!" said Tom Merry. "Hallo! Here they are! Gay, old son, how are you?"

Tom Merry had turned out just in good time. It was all very well for the Grammar School lot to be late, but St. Jim's were always on time.

It wasn't Gordon Gay's fault that he, and his men were late. But spectators cannot be expected to reason. Another five minutes, and they would probably have raided the dressing-rooms. Nearly all St. Jim's were on the ground to see Tom Merry play in his last match for the school.

The St. Jim's team looked in the pink of condition as they turned out. The spectators indulged in the usual chipping as the players had a preliminary kick about. Gussy was the butt of most of the fun, and a roar went up when he was seen to brush carefully a speck of mud from his elegant shorts.

The Grammar School fellows bounded into the field in another minute.

"Naughty boys!" yelled Wally D'Arcy. "Keeping us waiting like this!"

Gordon Gay laughed and waved his hand. Tom Merry greeted him in midfield, to general applause. Then up went the coin. Conversation sagged perceptibly while it fell.

"Merry wins it!"

St. Jim's gave a cheer. It was a good augury.

"Why, what on earth is he doing? He's actually playing against the wind! The champion ass!"

"Ring off, ass!" said Lefevre of the Fifth. "Can't you see he prefers playing against the wind to having the sun in his eyes?"

The whistle sounded as he spoke. The footballers were facing one another, keen and eager.

Gordon Gay kicked off.

He opened with a short pass to Jack Wootton. Dribbling past Lowther, the Australian had it back to his chief in a trice.

But Tom Merry saw what was intended. He was on it as quickly as Gordon Gay. Tom trapped the ball and passed it to D'Arcy. Catching it delightfully on his upraised left, Arthur Augustus whizzed out a first-time pass to Manners.

(Continued on the next page.)

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The Shell fellow was up. He saw the opening coming and was ready for it. The whole St. Jim's forward line had seen it, in fact, and everyone swung forward to the attack.

The wind was a sore trial, however. Short passes became much shorter. The game was not old enough for anyone to have a real measure of its strength.

Frank Monk saw this. He knew a chance must come. And it did.

Manners took D'Arcy's pass splendidly.

Harry Wootton was practically waiting for him on the wing. Manners centred. It was a valiant effort, but it did not reach Tom Merry, waiting in the goalmouth.

Thinking to counteract the wind, Manners sent in a raking centre, but he only got half the force under it which he intended.

The ball travelled very slowly. D'Arcy rushed in to make the pass good; but Monk got there first, and the whole Grammar School attack moved forward again as he put them out of their difficulty.

Passes with them, of course, tended to the reverse of the St. Jim's case. The wind was likely to serve them well. Monk interpreted a look from Gordon Gay correctly.

"Save ourselves for the next half," it said as distinctly as any spoken words. "Play the long-passing game."

And out went the ball to their wing men.

But Tom Merry had seen that look, and he gave his men orders to mark the opponents well.

Blake suddenly robbed Higgs of the leather, and St. Jim's cheered as the Fourth Former set off to give a solo performance on the left wing.

But he found the wind very trying, like Manners, and the effort petered out. Both teams settled down for a muddling time of it.

The going was fairly heavy. As Wally D'Arcy, in the crowd, was saying:

"The goalkeepers might go home for a sleep; they wouldn't be wanted."

But all at once Gordon Gay got going. He had actually beaten Tom Merry for possession, and the whole Grammar School line was seen sweeping forward towards the St. Jim's goal. For the moment the running was undoubtedly theirs.

Their timing was excellent. The St. Jim's fellows seemed quite at a loss. Gordon Gay and his men were having it all their own way.

But, quick as Frank Wootton and Higgs and the wind got the ball to the right corner, the St. Jim's half-back line—Figgins, Kangaroo, and Reilly—were ready.

Higgs was rather excited, and his centre—meant to be a swerve right into the goalmouth—was a miskick. The ball rolled over the line.

Fatty Wynn restarted the game, but it took his full weight to put the ball really well up. Then the game was very evenly contested.

The middle of the ground was beginning to wear one of those dark patches that bespeak a stern tussle.

Arthur Augustus had more mud on him than anyone had ever seen there before. The swell of St. Jim's had not made a mistake. His play was faultless.

While everyone else was alternately slipping and diving, Arthur Augustus kept his feet as if he were playing on the best of turf.

"Here they are!" cried the crowd suddenly. "In with it, Tom Merry!"

Tom Merry had at last instituted what seemed like a certain score. Passing to D'Arcy, that elegant youth electrified everyone by suddenly putting in a magnificent long pass to Blake, who was flying down the left wing.

"Go it, Blake!" yelled the crowd, as they saw him overhaul Higgs.

Blake was "on the ball" in a flash.

But Carboy and Lane were on him. Blake was equal to the occasion. Lowther and the whole of the St. Jim's line had taken good care to back him up.

He passed to Lowther. Carpenter the Grammar School right full-back, went for the ball, too. But Monty Lowther was just quick enough, and Tom Merry had it again.

"Offside!" yelled some deluded Grammar School spectator.

"Rats!" said Wally. "He beat the man. Ever seen a game before?"

When the Grammar School halves saw Tom Merry in possession, they tore across, but they might have saved their wind. He had no idea of trying to beat the other back himself.

Arthur Augustus had taken another pass when they arrived, and the St. Jim's followers cheered lustily as they saw him extend the back in brilliant fashion.

"Now, D'Arcy," they shouted, "one for St. Jim's!"

Arthur Augustus steadied himself for a brief space; then he went the leather.

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"Oh!" cried the crowd. "Hard lines, old son!"

Lane, the centre-half, if too late for Tom Merry, had raced in front, in the nick of time.

D'Arcy's shot would have beaten any goalkeeper, being a rising hot volley.

But the very fact of its rising gave Lane a chance to get his head to it.

"Well done, sir!" shouted St. Jim's, sportsmen or nothing. "Jolly good! Bravo!"

Carboy managed to get it from Lane, and the Grammar School half-back line made off at once. They certainly played splendidly.

But Tom Merry and his men were in amongst them again quite as quick, and the ball did not travel far beyond the Grammar School half. Kerr being well up, and, though rather pressed, easily finding touch.

"Sons of toil," said Monty Lowther to Tom Merry.

"Tons of soil, ye mane!" grinned Reilly. "Look at your tops!"

From the throw-in, Manners put in a good run down the right, but no score resulted; and a few minutes later the whistle went for half-time.

The spectators cheered the players as they came off. Conditions were bad for good footer, but the players were doing wonders, and their supporters were not slow to see it. "Lemons are a good vegetable, faith!" grinned Reilly, taking the refreshments round.

"Keep it up, Gussy!" cried the crowd. "On the ball!"

"Well played, St. Jim's! Well played, Tom Merry!"

Tom Merry laughed. He was satisfied with his team. The next half would be work, he well knew. The sun had gone down, and they would have the wind. But Gordon Gay's men were good players. They would face the wind with no more than a thought, he knew. St. Jim's would have to go for all they were worth.

Hardly had the second half started when St. Jim's had a bad shake. The Grammar School had rushed all before them for the first ten minutes. Fatty Wynn was not asleep now. Gordon Gay & Co. had made three incursions since the restart, when Monty Lowther had the ill-luck to handle inside the penalty area.

"Penalty—penalty!" yelled the Grammarians in the crowd.

There was no question of it, of course, and Tom Merry & Co.'s hearts went into their boots. Fatty Wynn was their only hope. If Carpenter beat him—and why shouldn't he?—the game was lost. Once the Grammar School scored, they would take good care to keep the lead.

But the best-laid schemes of mice and men oft gang agley, as Burns said. The Grammar School could not have made a worse choice for a penalty kick.

Carpenter was a burly fellow, and he had heard of Fatty Wynn's achievements between the uprights. A prudent player would have banged it into the corner; but Carpenter had long nourished the idea of firing straight at Fatty and knocking him over.

Fatty read the expression on his face. He knew instinctively when a fellow was going to drive right at him.

"Oh!" cried the crowd, as Carpenter sogged at it with all his strength.

Fatty made no mistake. The shot brought him to his knees, but he had it safe against his chest. In an instant he was on his legs again.

Carpenter rushed in to charge him down, but he reckoned without his host. Fatty was much the heavier, and the crowd roared as he bowled Carpenter over, and a mighty cheer went up as the leather soared far into the field, with the St. Jim's attack racing under it.

Tom Merry & Co. felt like giants retreshed with wine at the release. They must win now. And they looked like it, too, as they swept down on the enemy's goal.

The Grammar School were so satisfied that Carpenter would make the penalty kick good, that his failure perfectly dazed them.

"Now, Saints, in with it!" yelled the crowd.

Gordon Gay and his side strove manfully to retrieve the position, but they were too late. Their men had been about the field in no particular order while the penalty was taken. Tom Merry and his men had beaten them completely by their prompt action.

The Grammar School goalie saw doom impending. Everyone was beaten, including the backs. There was only himself for it.

"Now, then, Tom Merry!" roared all St. Jim's.

Tom Merry would have preferred a better position, but the Grammar School men were almost on him.

"Take it!" yelled the crowd. "Take it! Kick!"

And Tom Merry kicked.

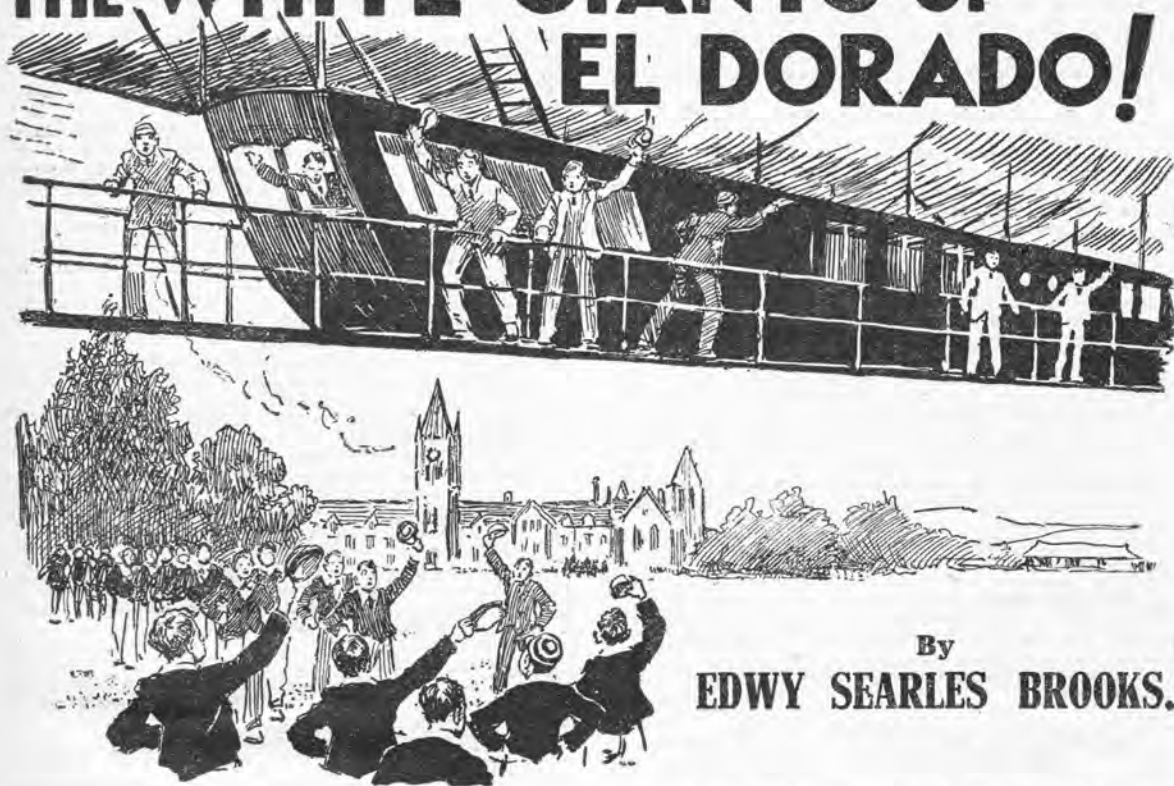
"Goal! Goal! Goal!"

Tom Merry found his favourite top corner with the

(Continued on page 23.)

THE ST. FRANK'S ADVENTURERS MAKE A THRILLING DASH TO ESCAPE FROM—

THE WHITE GIANTS OF EL DORADO!



By
EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

In a super airship, the *Sky Wanderer*, a big party of St. Frank's fellows, under Nelson Lee and three other masters, set off on an educational tour of the world. With the party also is Lord Dorrimore and his black friend, Umlozi. The airship is following a course over the wilds of Brazil when suddenly a burning ray strikes upwards from El Dorado, the fabulous city of gold, in Arzacland! Damaged by the ray, the *Sky Wanderer* is forced to descend for repairs, but before these can be effected everyone aboard is made prisoner by the Arzaes, a race of White Giants! They are taken before King Yoga, who is Professor Cyrus Zingrave, a dangerous criminal, and then imprisoned underground on an island in the centre of a pool of molten gold!

The Way of Escape!

LORD DORRIMORE, accompanied by Sir Hobart Manners and Squadron-Leader Truscott—the first navigation officer of the *Sky Wanderer*—joined Nelson Lee in the low stone opening of the cavern prison. The molten gold was just surging up after a two-minute interval.

'By Heaven! If that molten flood should overflow!'

muttered Sir Hobart, wiping his streaming face. 'We should be caught in the fiery flood—'

'It's not likely to overflow,' interrupted Lee, glancing round. 'You can see the even mark on the rock wall; the liquid fire surges up to that point and no farther.'

With a gurgling and roaring and bubbling, the golden mass subsided.

'Few living men have been surrounded by such wealth as this,' remarked Dorrie, with a touch of bitterness. 'An' what good is it? Millions! Countless, fabulous millions! An' we're bottled up here, helpless, weaponless. No wonder there are no White Giants on guard.'

'What need?' asked Truscott, with a shrug. 'They know we'll be here when they come back. Why should they suffer the scorching tortures of this inferno?'

'What a chance for us—if we could only bridge this death-gulf!' said Dorrie.

'It's a big 'if,' old man,' remarked Nelson Lee grimly. 'Yet it's our only chance. Presently, when Zingrave has considered, he will separate us; he will distribute us into different parts of Arzacland. And once we are broken up

there will be very little chance of ever getting together again.'

'I'm thinking of the airship,' said Sir Hobart tragically. 'Zingrave said that he had given orders for her to be broken up. The hound! To think of that magnificent craft—'

'Yet Zingrave may have misled us,' put in Lee. 'I doubt if the destruction will begin until to-morrow.'

'Does it make any real difference?' growled Dorrie. 'We can't do a thing.'

Some of the boys, growing accustomed to their strange surroundings, rendered silent by their thoughts, had gathered round the doorway, listening to the talk of the men. Handforth, as ever, was irrepresible.

'Couldn't one of us jump across, sir?' he asked eagerly. 'The roof of this building is flat, and a jumper could get a good run before he took off. I'll have a shot at it if you like.'

'I admire your courage, Handforth,' said Nelson Lee dryly, 'but I deplore your judgment. Such a leap is more than any human being could accomplish. Failure would mean death—swift and horrible.'

'Let me make the great attempt, Umtagati,' said Umlozi. 'I have leapt many great chasms—'

'No, old friend, I shall not let you sacrifice your life,' put in Nelson Lee firmly. 'What if you succeeded, by some miracle? Could you help us? I doubt it. There is the gangway, the bridge, but it required the efforts of a dozen Arzaes to shift it. Alone you could do nothing.'

'Perhaps we could make a kind of human bridge, sir?'

suggested Handforth.

'No, no; quite impracticable!' said Nelson Lee impatiently. 'Better stand back, Dorrie. The flood's coming up again.'

They retreated into the doorway, and the lurid glow from the molten flood illuminated them weirdly. Suddenly Nelson Lee went rigid. He was staring at something which Mr. Hunt, the chief engineer, was idly tossing from hand to hand.

'What's that?' rapped out Lee, in a strained voice. Everybody stared.

The chief engineer looked up in wonder, and found Lee's gaze upon him.

'This?' he said, holding up the object. 'It's only a

Ball of string, Mr. Lee. I scarcely knew I had it in my hand—"

He broke off, for, to his surprise, Nelson Lee had snatched it. After a brief examination of the string, Lee's eyes gleamed with a new light.

"There's a chance!" he said deliberately. "With this ball of string we might be able to get across the chasm."

"Alas! Brother Lee's brain has come unshipped from its hinges!" came a murmur from William Napoleon Browne. "Is it not always the way? The bigger the brain—"

"My brain's all right, Browne," interrupted Nelson Lee. "I'm not mad."

"Then what do you mean, guv'nor?" burst out Nipper. "How can that ball of string help us?"

"I think I might make it help us," replied Nelson Lee. "There's a remote chance. This is not ordinary string; it is asbestos string."

"That's right," agreed Mr. Hunt. "But even now I don't see how we can use it."

"Asbestos possesses one definite characteristic," said the detective. "It is indestructible by fire. If this asbestos string is lowered into the flood it will— But wait. Perhaps I had better not speak too soon. We must make an experiment."

With the ball of string in his hand, Lee walked away from the doorway. The walls of the stone building were not flush with the chasm; there was a rock ledge, several yards in depth, all the way round. Thus it was possible to walk completely round the prison, and yet be in no danger of falling into the fiery abyss. But when the golden flood surged up it was necessary to crouch back against the wall, so that the blast of fiery heat would sweep upwards and clear.

The detective took a keen look over the awful edge, and an exclamation of satisfaction escaped him. Then he turned his gaze across to the tunnel exit. No White Giant was to be seen. For some moments after that Lee stood in silent thought. His strong face was set and calm. He gave no outward signs of the thoughts which were passing rapidly through his keen brain.

"I want everybody's help," he said suddenly, and in a decisive voice.

They all crowded along the ledge, the men just as eager as the boys. There was something fantastic in the mere thought that a ball of asbestos string could assist their escape; but Nelson Lee was not the kind of man to raise false hopes.

"We're here," said Dorrie cheerfully. "Whatever you say goes, old man. What do you want us to do?"

"If you look over this rock edge you will see, eighteen inches down, a rough, uneven ledge," replied Lee. "Every time the flood comes up it covers that ledge, and it is scorching hot all the time."

He gave instructions. Men and boys took the asbestos string as it was uncoiled. They stretched themselves out in a long line until the string was completely unwound.

"Sixty feet at least," said Lee, with a nod. "Splendid! Now—altogether! When I give the word I want you to hold your breath, go forward, and lower the string until it rests upon the ledge."

"But what on earth—" began Sir Hobart.

"Please be patient," interrupted Lee. "This idea of mine may work out satisfactorily, or it may not. We can only put it to the test."

He retained hold of one end of the string, and Fenton of the Sixth was at the farther end. At the word, all moved forward, and the string was successfully laid upon the ledge. Less than a minute later the molten metal surged up, gurgled for a moment, and then subsided again.

Lee did not wait long. He pulled gently on his end of the string, easing it up on to the level rock once more. Fenton, at the other end, did the same. Thus, within a very few moments, the entire length was lying on the rock in full view.

But it was no longer asbestos string; it was a thin line of gleaming gold. The molten metal had coated the asbestos, as Lee had anticipated, and now the gold had rapidly hardened.

"It's weak and flimsy," said Nelson Lee calmly, "but what will it be like after it has been submerged a dozen times—fifty times? After every immersion it will have added another coat of gold—"

"You mean that it will become thicker and thicker until it is a great metal rod?" asked Dorrie, in amazement. "By the Lord Harry, you're a genius, Lee! The thing can't help workin'!"

"Can't it?" retorted Lee, with a touch of grimness. "It's going to be a long job, and there's always a chance of the string breaking under the accumulative weight of the gold. But the gold itself, once hard, will be strong. We must wait until this is quite cool before we lower it again—for this time we must take hold of the gold-coated string."

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They waited anxiously, and then, when the golden string was just cool enough to hold they all went forward, and, holding it gingerly, they once again bent over the inferno and the string was lowered.

Again rose the flood, again the string was lifted. And this time it was perceptibly thicker and stronger.

"By George, it's marvellous!" shouted Handforth. "There's only one snag, you chaps—it'll take hours and hours before the rod is any thickness. How do we know that we shall be left to ourselves all that time?"

"It's one of the chances we must take, Handy," replied Nipper. "Yet it's not a big chance, for even if the White Giants do come they're not likely to see the golden rod."

But Nelson Lee was counting upon the enemy's absence. It was not likely that Professor Zingrave would make his decision quickly; indeed, judging by the water and the crude bread, it seemed clear that the prisoners were destined to remain undisturbed until the next day. It would be characteristic of Zingrave to leave them for hour after hour in that sweltering, blistering heat, wondering what their ultimate fate was to be.

Gradually, the long metal rod took shape, as the hours crept by, and as the process was repeated again and again the rod became so heavy that all the men were obliged to haul at the ends in order to drag it clear of the ledge. Then, when it was sufficiently cool, men and boys alike had to lower it for the next immersion.

"Amazin'!" said Dorrie, with a deep breath.

The critical minute had arrived. Everybody had lost count of the hours—everybody, that is, except Lee, who calculated that the time must be somewhere between midnight and one a.m. Having been left alone so long, it now seemed certain that none of the Arzacs would come until morning. To-night, then, belonged to the prisoners.

At last the great rod was ready for the vital test. Much earlier in the process Lee had bent one end of it into a hook, and an additional length of gold-coated asbestos string had been used as a kind of crowbar to lift it for cooling. The other end did not matter.

Now it lay on the rock, snakelike in places, uneven in thickness and smothered with knobs and protuberances where drops of the molten gold had set. But the appearance of the thing did not matter—its utility was everything.

"It is a marvellous achievement, Mr. Lee," declared Sir Hobart Manners. "When I think that this rod was originally a thin piece of asbestos string, I am staggered. But what now?"

"Yes, Mr. Lee," said Squadron-Leader Truscott eagerly. "What is the next move?"

"Surely my plan is obvious?" asked Lee. "There, across the chasm, rests the flimsy bridge. We saw it moved forward by the White Giants. Well, if we can get this rod across in such a way that the hook engaged with a part of the bridge, we can then pull the bridge right over, and thus our way of escape will be open."

"Waul! 'Tis a simple plan, and its greatness lies in its simplicity," said Umlosi. "Thou art truly a wizard, my master."

Everybody was vastly excited. At Lee's orders they ranged themselves along the crude metal rod. Then it was raised inch by inch, foot by foot, until it was standing almost perpendicular.

"We are trusting to one throw of the dice," said Lee quietly. "If it fails, we lose. For if the hook does not engage with the bridge the rod will fall into the molten flood below. Are you ready?"

"Yes, yes!" went up a breathless, strained chorus.

It was Lee himself who gave the final word of guidance. Then the perpendicular rod was allowed to get off its balance. It fell slantwise across the cavern, and its further end touched the bridge.

"It holds!" roared Dorrie, in wild excitement.

"Hurrah!"

"Look—look! It's sagging in the middle!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"We've failed!"

"Not yet!" exclaimed Lee. "It was bound to sag! Pull all of you! Gently—gently! Yes, right through the open doorway, for there is room there!"

None of them ever knew how they managed it. The golden rod, horizontal, felt ten times the weight it actually was. In that stifling heat, with the perspiration running from them in streams, the men and boys pulled and pulled, and those in the rear were madly exultant to see the strange gangway creeping farther and farther across the death chasm. Even if there was a mishap now, with the gangway half across the chasm, it could be remedied. For there was no danger of the rod falling into the flood now.

But all went well, and so, finally, the gangway rested upon the rock ledge of the island.

Nelson Lee's brainwave had been crowned with success. The way of escape was open!

The Dash for Liberty!

NELSON LEE had some difficulty in restraining the boys, particularly the juniors, from making a head-long dash across the gangway.

"There must be complete order," said the detective crisply. "Any precipitate action may result in tragedy. We have succeeded so far, but our greatest ordeal lies ahead. Every one of you must take a long drink before we start."

They were all parched from the heat, but it is doubtful if they would have thought of a drink but for Lee. They gulped copious draughts of the water, and then, heeding Nelson Lee's calm, resolute commands, they formed into a single line. As they had originally crossed the bridge they now recrossed it—one man, one boy. And so they went across the molten horror until all were standing safely on the other side. At Lee's orders a number of the men had freed the golden rod before crossing, and had flung it into the chasm. The Arzacs and Professor Zingrave should never discover how the prisoners had made their escape. The gangway was once again drawn back, leaving it just as before.

"It might be of service to us," said Lee shrewdly. "Zingrave, of course, will know that we escaped by some rational

"Wau! Hearest thou not the sounds, Umtagati?" he asked in a low voice. "The enemy comes!"

Lee's lips tightened into a thin line.

"Silence, everybody!" he said tensely.

They stood there like statues, their hearts thudding, their high spirits suddenly dampened. And in the silence they all heard the ominous "thud, thud, thud!" of many feet. Umlosi's acute ears had caught the sound before any of the others.

"There is no escape this way," said Lee grimly. "The White Giants are returning, and if we advance we shall clash."

"Why not make a fight of it, sir?" came a breathless inquiry from Handforth.

"Because they will probably outnumber us, young 'un," replied Lee. "They are armed, and we are unarmed. No; we must retreat."

"But where to?" asked one of the airship officers. "The cavern is a trap—"

"Follow me," interrupted Lee. "I think we have one chance."

They retreated into the vast, super-heated body of the



Hidden in the shallow cave, Nelson Lee and the St. Frank's boys watched the tunnel opposite anxiously as the sound of many marching feet came to their ears. "Here they come!" whispered Nipper suddenly. A column of Arzac soldiers emerged into the cavern! What would happen when they found their prisoners gone?

method, although I doubt if he will guess the truth. But with the Arzacs themselves it may be different."

"You mean—" Dorrie paused, inquiry in his voice.

"I mean that the Arzacs might well credit us with magical powers," replied Lee. "For they know how impossible, or apparently impossible, it was for us to get across the abyss. No matter how carefully they examine the prison they will find no trace of the methods we used. They will be amazed, and, let us hope, awed. If we can make them believe that we are possessed of magic we shall have a big advantage. But come—we must waste no time here in talking!"

"But we must have some definite objective," said Sir Hobart.

"Our main objective is the Sky Wanderer," replied Lee promptly. "How we can get there, if at all, is in the lap of the gods. We know that this tunnel leads up to the open air. We know, moreover, that it is past midnight, and we can assume that El Dorado is a city of sleep. We are making a daring move, and we must take big chances. The first thing is to get up into the open, under the night sky."

They formed into a column, obeying Lee's orders eagerly, quickly. Nelson Lee himself led the way, with Umlosi on one side and Lord Dorrimer on the other. But no sooner had they entered the tunnel than Umlosi flung up a great hand.

cavern, and Nelson Lee now led the way across the wide, scorching-hot rock. He ran hard, keeping close to the rock wall. Very little escaped the great detective's keen eyes; and, from the very first, he had observed a low, tunnel-like opening in the rock on the opposite side of the cavern. Lee had ignored it hitherto because he had no knowledge as to where the tunnel led. But now it was a matter of necessity.

"Faster—faster!" he urged. "Run as you have never run before."

A fear had gripped him that they would still be in sight when the White Giants entered the cavern. If that happened they would lose their great advantage—for the pursuit would begin instantly.

The St. Frank's fellows rose nobly to the occasion; they easily beat most of the men, for they were in splendid condition, and they were less affected by the heat.

At last they reached the low opening in the rocks on the other side of the cavern. Plunging in, they found themselves in utter darkness. The roof was low—so low that they were obliged to bend almost double, and within forty yards it dropped abruptly to the rock floor. Umlosi, in advance, gave a warning cry.

"'Tis but a cave, N'Kose!" he rumbled. "There is no exit this way!"

"Just our luck!" grunted Dorrie.

"It was as I half-feared," said Lee. "However, we are

hidden—and unless there is a careful search, we shall remain undiscovered. Keep quiet, everybody, please. Do not make a sound. Back—back!”

Gasping for breath, they pressed into the deeper recesses of the shallow cave. It was stifling in there, and the congestion made things worse. But it had to be endured. Lee and Dorrie, crouching near the opening, could see across the cavern; they had a full sight of the tunnel in the distance. Nipper, Browne, Fenton, and one or two of the other St. Frank's boys were in a similar advantageous position.

“Here they come!” whispered Nipper suddenly. “Look! Scores of the beggars! You were right, guv'nor.”

“Hush!” warned Nelson Lee.

The Arzac officer who was in command of the force was the indefatigable Captain Oss. He marched his men into the cavern, and they came to a halt. At the word of command a number of them pushed the crude gangway across the chasm. Captain Oss was looking intently at the island prison; but, as yet, he had no suspicion of the truth. Lee saw him turn to another man who stood close at hand.

“They sleep,” he said briefly. “You go across and wake them, Lieutenant Laddmi.”

Nelson Lee heard the murmurs of astonishment from those about him. The two Arzac officers, so far away, and talking in normal voices, could be heard as distinctly as though they had been speaking from only four yards distance.

“It's uncanny, guv'nor,” whispered Nipper.

“Hush!” warned Lee. “It is due to some peculiar acoustic quality of the cavern—perhaps of this cave. And as we can hear them, perhaps they can hear us.”

He thought nothing of the fact that the Arzac officers were talking in English; no doubt Professor Zingrave had passed a stern law that the Arzacs were to speak English at all times.

“By glory! This is goin' to be interestin’,” whispered Dorrie, with eager anticipation.

Lieutenant Laddmi, not without reluctance, was crossing the gangway bridge. The watchers lost sight of him almost at once, for the squat bulk of the prison intervened. For some moments there was complete silence, tense, dramatic! Then a voice—agitated, alarmed.

It came echoing strangely, but the words were incomprehensible to the hidden fugitives. On the instant, however, a tumult went up from the Arzac soldiers.

“Silence!” came a command from Captain Oss. “Have you forgotten orders? You speak English—by the king's command!”

The muttered grumble which followed was like music to Nelson Lee's ears, for it told him that the White Giants resented Zingrave's dictatorship. He maintained his power only because he was using his old, ruthless methods of the League of the Green Triangle.

“You are mad, Lieutenant Laddmi!” said Captain Oss, as the other Arzac officer joined him. “The prisoners must be there. No escape.”

“Prison empty,” said the other jerkily. “They go mad; they crazy with heat; they fling themselves into hot gold!”

Captain Oss uttered an Arzac ejaculation.

“Perhaps it is so,” he agreed. “They guess that his majesty will treat them cruel. They prefer quick death. We go. We tell King Yoga.”

Nelson Lee's eyes were glittering with satisfaction. Listening to those words, he knew that the White Giants took it for granted that the prisoners had committed suicide. It seemed the obvious conclusion. Captain Oss did not even consider the possibility that the captives had escaped, for he believed that there was no escape. The party's absence could mean only one thing; one and all, they had flung themselves to death rather than await the tortures which King Yoga had hinted at.

There was a difference in the behaviour of the Arzac soldiers now. They were no longer orderly in their movements. Captain Oss himself was wildly agitated by the dramatic discovery; he gave his orders in a harsh voice. And, almost in confusion, the White Giants sped out of the cavern. They went out at the double.

“The chariots are ready,” came the voice of Lieutenant Laddmi. “They wait under the stars; but now they have no passengers.”

“It is perhaps as well,” replied Captain Oss. “Do we not know where the chariots' journey would have ended? Better that the unhappy people should be dead.”

They went into the tunnel, and soon the captives once again had the cavern to themselves. Nelson Lee was grateful for that last item of information—for it made a great difference.

“Did you hear, guv'nor—about the chariots?” whispered Nipper.

“Yes.”

“What did they mean?”

“There can be only one meaning,” replied Lee. “Zingrave meant to transfer us to various destinations in the quietness of the night. He meant to separate us, as he threatened. The chariots are waiting in the city square, and I think they will come in very useful!”

“Let's go!” said Lord Dorrimore exultantly. “I'd like to drive one of those weird chariots.”

Fate was playing into the hands of the fugitives, and Nelson Lee was the man to take full advantage of the slimmest opportunity. He led the way, now, out of the cave. Openly, he ran back towards the tunnel.

As the party mounted the steep gradient of the temperature dropped quickly, and soon they were breathing freely. The inferno was left behind.

When at length they were nearing the exit, Lee warned them to hang back. Alone he went forward.

So far things had gone amazingly smoothly. If they could escape from the city and reach the Sky Wanderer, they might yet defeat the vengeful Zingrave. By night he could not use the sunray.

Lee emerged into the open, and the night air, fanning his brow, felt like a fairy touch. Overhead the stars were gleaming in myriads, and the moon was rising over the golden buildings on the farther side of the square. It shed its soft, silvery light upon El Dorado; and there were no other lights. The only sound to be heard was the commotion of the Arzac soldiers, who were hurrying across to the king's palace.

Lee took in the whole scene at one glance. Quite near at hand stood the three great chariots which had brought the captives to El Dorado; the weird-looking triceratop steeds were harnessed to them, and the monstrous animals were standing docile. The Arzac drivers were muttering excitedly, and even as Lee watched they descended to the ground, and moved off in a body across the great square. They had heard the news; they knew that they now had no passengers.

“Luck's with us,” exclaimed Lee, as he rejoined the party, “The Arzacs have deserted the chariots.”

“By Heaven!” said Sir Hobart. “Are you suggesting that we should seize them?”

“What else? It is our only chance,” replied Nelson Lee. “I doubt if there are any other vehicles ready; and we can obtain a long start. Now listen carefully—all of you. We must act at once, and there must be no confusion.”

They crowded round, eager, trembling with excitement.

“I will make straight for the foremost chariot,” continued Lee. “All the junior boys will come with me. Do you understand, youngsters? Make a dash for the chariot, and climb straight in.”

“What about you, guv'nor?” asked Nipper.

“It will be my business to drive the triceratop,” replied Lee. “Dorrie, you will take command of the second chariot, and all the senior boys will accompany you. Is that clear?”

A chorus of assent went up.

“And you, Manners, will take the third chariot, and your passengers will be the officers and men of the airship,” concluded Lee. “Thus we shall be divided into three parties; but I am trusting that we will keep all together. Where I go, you must follow. As for the rest—” He shrugged. “So far, our luck has held. Let us pray that it will keep with us.”

The party was divided into three then and there. Lee led the way with all the juniors. They emerged into the open in a flood, and, obedient to their orders, the boys dashed for the leading chariot, and swarmed into its spacious interior, for the great flap in the rear was in the “down” position, in readiness for the captives who had not come.

Nelson Lee himself leapt like an acrobat up the crude ladder which led to the driving structure on the neck of the triceratop, and he was followed by Umlosi.

As Lee and the juniors were doing this, Dorrie and the seniors did exactly the same with the second chariot. And Sir Hobart Manners and the men of the Sky Wanderer took possession of the third.

As Nelson Lee tumbled headlong into the wooden structure on the triceratop's neck, a large, startled face appeared before him; a tall figure rose toweringly. A White Giant was there. Unlike his companions, he had remained at his post.

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Crash!

With all his strength Lee drove his fist hard into the Arzac's face. Then, following up his advantage, he flung himself bodily upon the man, taking him utterly by surprise. The White Giant staggered back, struck the side of the driver's platform, and only just recovered his balance. But it was for a second only. Lee leapt at the great man like a tiger, and he toppled. Over he went, giving a great bellow of alarm. Lee spun round, grasping the reins. He knew that the reins led to the monstrous animal's nose, and he gave them a sharp tug.

"Arr-yetti!" bellowed Lee, at the top of his voice. "Arr-yetti! Arr-yetti!"

He had memorised that Arzac word—the word which the drivers had used in urging the triceratops forward. On the instant the great creature sprang into life, and leapt forward. Lord Dorrimore and Sir Hobart, catching that shout of Lee's, echoed it.

And the three chariots went lumbering headlong across the main square of El Dorado.

The Stampede!

ARR-YETTI! Arr-yetti!" thundered Nelson Lee. The trained triceratops responded nobly; they broke into a shambling run, very different from the motion in which the journey to the city had been accomplished. The boys and men in the chariots were jolted and jerked, and they were obliged to cling to the sides and to one another as the speed increased.

But now, from the direction of the king's palace came wild shouts. In the moonlight Lee had a clear sight of Captain Oss; and the officer's face was blanched with awe. Confusion was left behind; Zingrave, mad with fury, was shouting orders to his officers; while, in the square, the White Giants were at a loss. They had no vehicles ready in which they could give immediate chase. Furthermore—and this was a point in favour of the fugitives—the guards at the city gate had been warned that the chariots would be coming. Yet there had been no time to inform those guards that there had been a hitch.

Thus, as the chariots thundered to the gates, these were standing wide open. With a clatter and a roar, the mighty vehicles swept out.

"Hurrah! We're clear of the city!" yelled Nipper. "We've done it, you chaps!"

"Hurrah!"
"Thou hast done wondrous things, O Umtagati," said Umlosi, his eyes agleam in the moonlight. "Wau! Thou art indeed a man—a warrior!"

"How are the others faring, old friend?" asked Lee, never taking his gaze from the wide road ahead.

"They follow, my master—they follow closely."

"Good! But we're not out of the wood yet, Umlosi," said Lee. "Thank Heaven they have no telegraph or telephone in this country!"

"Why art thou so thankful on that score, Umtagati?"

"Have you forgotten the mighty wall which divides the cultivated land from the wild country?" retorted Lee.

"There are gates there—gates which may yet, perchance, prove our undoing."

"Wau! Thy brain thinks of all things."

"At the moment I'm wondering whether the Arzacs have any native method of signalling messages by night," retorted Lee. "If the men at the gates are not warned we may get through—What's that lurid flare back there, Umlosi? Do you see it?"

Umlosi stared across the moonlit, sleeping countryside. In the general direction of the palace there was a spot where a fire burned, sending up a flickering glow to the heavens.

"'Tis a bonfire, perchance," said the black giant.

"A signal—a warning," muttered Lee, giving the reins a tug. "Arr-yetti! Arr-yetti!"

The road was wide and very distinct in the moonlight. On and on thundered the great chariots, swaying, lurching. As yet there was no sign of pursuit. The escape from El Dorado had been dramatic. It had taken the Arzacs completely by surprise.

"See! The great wall, my master!" exclaimed Umlosi, pointing.

It was plainly visible in the distance, ahead—a great wall which extended across the country. Lee set his teeth and again urged on the triceratop. He glanced round, and saw that a second fire was burning, far away now, near the city. There could be no doubt that those fires had been lit for the purpose of signalling.

On swept the chariots. There was a slight bend in the great road with heavy woods on either side. The leading chariot swung round, and directly ahead, not more than half a mile distant, the mighty wall towered up like a great cliff.

"By heavens!" muttered Lee, and it seemed as though a cold hand had clutched at his heart.

For in the moonlight he could see great numbers of the White Giants straining at the gates. The latter stood wide open—and this fact seemed to indicate that the guards had had earlier orders.

The gates were being closed! Lee could see them moving perceptibly. Owing to their tremendous size, however, the movement was slow.

During those tense seconds Lee made some rapid calculations. He had to make a grim, desperate decision. He made it almost on the instant.

"On—on!" he shouted. "Arr-yetti!"
His own chariot, he knew, could get through in time—perhaps the second one—

The gates were half closed now, but there was sufficient space left. Many White Giants were standing back, shouting, gesticulating. Others were straining madly at the gates.

With a rush and a rattling roar, the leading chariot swept through—and out into the wild country! Nelson Lee was now looking in his rear; he saw Dorrie's chariot win through, too; he saw the last great vehicle swerve horribly. Its offside wheels caught against the door edge, and there was a grinding, splintering crash. The chariot seemed as though it must inevitably overturn; but, as though by a miracle, it righted itself—and was through. On—on to

FOR NEXT WEDNESDAY

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freedom—on to that lonely valley which sheltered the Sky Wanderer!

The greater dangers were over now. Out here there were few White Giants, and pursuit would not come yet.

For the first time that wild night Nelson Lee breathed freely. The worst was over. He even began to hope—

"Umtagati," came Umlosi's voice, "didst thou hear?"

"Hear what?" asked Lee sharply.

"'Twas a thin, whistling sound, unlike any I have hitherto heard," replied Umlosi. "Wau! 'Twas the cry of some creature of the forest—"

He broke off, for the triceratop, too, apparently heard that sound. The monstrous creature swerved wildly from the road, and Lee's shouts were useless. It had stampeded! Lee, looking back, was horrified to see that the other triceratops had obeyed the leader. In mad terror the three "prehistoric monsters" were tearing across uneven turf-land, with the chariots lurching hideously. It was a stampede—and the puny human drivers were utterly helpless.

There was something in the great woods beyond—some horror which had yet to be faced, and which had driven blind, frantic frenzy into the three enormous steeds.

(What new peril are the St. Frank's adventurers up against? Don't miss next week's nerve-tingling chapters, whatever you do, chums.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,346.

RALLYING ROUND TOM MERRY!

(Continued from page 22.)

loveliest of long-dropping shots. The Saints, players and crowd alike, yelled and roared. Blake thumped Tom Merry on the back. Figgins was nearly wringing his hand off. The crowd was shouting themselves hoarse. They were still yelling when the game restarted.

"Attack like anything!" whispered Tom Merry, as they got into position again.

The whistle went. It was work indeed then. But Tom Merry & Co. had the lead, and they meant to keep it.

Gordon Gay knew as well as anyone that attack is the surest defence, and the Grammar School came with as much dash as ever, but all to no purpose. Tom Merry was on the watch, and the merest slip on the other side was taken advantage of to its fullest extent.

The Grammar School could not get in, and at last the whistle went for "Time!" And Tom Merry led his men off the field victors.

One goal to nil!

It wasn't a big score, but a low score often shows a grueling game, and this game had been a grueling one, and no mistake.

The Grammarians had been beaten, and St. Jim's were rearing with delight. Tom Merry had played in his last match for the old school, and he had led his men to victory.

As he came off the field, a cheering crowd surged round him. It was one of the brightest days of Tom Merry's young life—all the brighter by contrast with the shadows that were to follow. But for the present all was joy and satisfaction.

Sunday passed quietly enough for Tom Merry. It was the last day with his friends at St. Jim's; on the morrow he was leaving.

The chums made the most of it; and never had Tom Merry felt more keenly than he did then the depth and faith of the friendships he had formed at the old school.

It was bitter to leave it all, to go out into the world

among strangers, perhaps among enemies, to face want and work alone.

But Tom Merry did not falter.

He had to face the world, to choose between hard work and sponging, and the choice for a lad like Tom Merry could not be doubtful for a moment. Having put his hand to the plough, he would not look back.

On Monday morning he was very quiet, very grave, but cheerful.

His special friends had obtained leave of absence from classes that morning to see him off as far as Wayland Junction, where he was to take the London express.

Dr. Holmes shook hands with him very kindly as he bade him good-bye, and Mr. Railton came to the door of the School House to see him off. The juniors walked to the station where they took the train.

Off at last. Tom had taken his last look at the old school. The local train bore him off to Wayland, with the juniors crowded in the carriage to keep him company. They alighted at Wayland, with grim faces. Five minutes to wait for the London express. Five minutes more, and Tom Merry would be gone—for ever?

Manners was quiet and glum; Lowther, the humorist of the Shell, could see nothing humorous in this situation; the others were all very gloomy.

The train came puffing in; it stopped. Porters shouted and doors clanged. Figgins saw Tom Merry's box bestowed in the guard's van; D'Arcy selected him a comfortable corner seat. Fatty Wynn put a packet of sandwiches on the rack for him. Lowther arranged his travelling rug. Tom Merry entered the carriage, with a lump in his throat.

"Stand clear, there!"

The last handshake had been exchanged, the train was moving.

"Good-bye, Tom Merry!"

"Good-bye! Good-bye!" cried Tom Merry huskily.

The juniors stood watching the departing train. It was curving in the distance; the faces at the carriage window vanished.

Tom Merry was gone!

THE END.

(Read all about the dramatic adventures of Tom in London, in next Wednesday's powerful yarn, "DOWN ON HIS LUCK!" It will grip your interest from first line to last.)

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