

GRAND NEW YEAR FREE GIFTS FOR READERS—INSIDE!



The GEM

2d

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EVERY WEDNESDAY.

Week Ending January 6th, 1934.

**ELEVEN RIPPING
PICTURES IN
FULL COLOUR**

GIVEN **FREE**

WITH THIS
NUMBER



**TOM
MERRY
HITS OUT!**

Read "THE BOY FROM THE UNDERWORLD!"—A Powerful St. Jim's Yarn—Within.

HERE'S A GREAT YARN OF REAL HUMAN INTEREST, STARRING—

The BOY FROM THE



From the underworld to St. Jim's is a big change for a poor little waif whose only education has been in the art of picking people's pockets! But at heart Joe Frayne is true blue, as he proves in this ripping yarn of the Chums of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 1.

A Great Occasion!

A BLAZING fire glowed and danced in Tom Merry's study in the School House. It gleamed upon a spotless tablecloth, and an imposing array of crockery.

The gas was lighted, and the curtains drawn. Outside, in the quadrangle, the winter evening was dark and snowy, but in the study all was cosy and brightness.

The room was pretty well filled.

Manners, with a face as ruddy as the fire, was making toast. Monty Lowther was warming the teapot, preparatory to making tea. Blake of the Fourth Form opened a tin of sardines with his usual skill. Fatty Wynn was cutting cake, and slipping a chunk into his mouth every few seconds.

The sight of a feed always made Fatty Wynn hungry, and he had a substantial hunger that was not easily demolished. He could have finished that cake and another, and still have been ready for tea.

Digby was cutting bread-and-butter on a corner of the table. Herries was turning biscuits out of a tin into a dish. Figgins of the New House was there, making himself useful, and hesitating between a soap-dish and a china mug as a receptacle for jam.

Kerr had just come in with a paper full of ham, which he was piling on a plate.

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There were evidently great things in progress in that particular study in the Shell passage.

Something had apparently happened at St. Jim's which the juniors felt they were bound to celebrate in fitting style. New House fellows and School House fellows were mingling in perfect amity, as if the time had come when the lion and the lamb were to repose together in peace.

And indeed something had happened.

Tom Merry was back at St. Jim's.

He had not been away so very long, but it had seemed a long time to him and his chums. He had had to fight a grim battle with poverty. There had been dark days in London—darker days than he had ever known before. But that was all over now. The arrival of his uncle from America had changed it all. Tom Merry had come into his own again, as it were, and the chums of St. Jim's meant to celebrate his return to his old place in the Shell Form.

Such things, as Monty Lowther remarked, didn't happen every day. It was a reason for standing a ripping feed—a feed that should mark an epoch in the history of the School House.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had nobly "blued" a fiver he had received from his governor, and the other fellows had contributed liberally. Tom Merry had not been allowed to pay a shilling towards it, but all the others shelled out splendidly.

And the feed seemed likely to be a record.

Good things were piled on the table, on the shelf, and

UNDERWORLD!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

on the bookcase, and the study cupboard was overflowing with them.

Fellows came along the passage, and looked into the study enviously.

"No room for more," said Monty Lowther to every fellow who looked in. "Beastly squeeze as it is."

"That is hardly complimentary to your guests, Lowthah, deah boy," Arthur Augustus remarked.

"Rats!" said Lowther cheerfully.

"Weally, you know—"

"I mean it's a most happy and gratifying squeeze, then," said Lowther gracefully. "All the same, we've no room for more."

"Yaas, wathah! I quite agree with you there. Pway pass along, Mellish, deah boy! There is no room for you."

"Oh, I wasn't coming in!" said Mellish.

"Then you will have no objection to passin' on, I'm sure."

"Oh, rats!"

"Weally, Mellish—"

But Mellish had passed on.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked at his big gold watch.

"Bai Jove, it's half-past five!" he exclaimed. "Tom Mewwy will be here with his uncle in a minute, deah boys. Buck up with the pweeps!"

"The what?" demanded Manners, turning a perfectly crimson face from the fire, as he jerked another round of toast off the fork.

"The pweeps—the pweepawations, deah boy!"

"Oh!"

"Bettah have all weady for the honahed guest, you know."

"Why don't you lend a hand, then?" asked Figgins.

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Well, you've been doing nothing."

"Weally, Figgins, I have been exahcisin' a genewal supewintendence."

"Rats!"

"If you say wats to me, Figgins—"

"Now, don't begin to argue at a time like this, Gussy," said Jack Blake persuasively. "We shall want some more knives and spoons. Go and steal some."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Beg, borrow, or steal; it doesn't matter—only get some!"

"Undah the cires, I considah that it would be justifiable to bowwow a few things without asking permish—"

"Exactly! Buzz off!"

"Of course, if they are westered undamaged to the ownahs aftahwards—"

"Are you going?"

"Yaas, deah boy!"

And Arthur Augustus went.

"All right now," said Monty Lowther. "My haf, this will be a ripping feed. Tom and his American uncle will enjoy it."

"By Jove, yes!"

"Hallo! Here they are!"

"Come in, sir!"

"Come in, Tom Merry!"

Tom Merry of the Shell appeared in the doorway of his study, his handsome face flushed, and his eyes sparkling. His uncle was beside him—a kind-looking, bronze-complexioned man, who seemed to carry with him the airy breeziness of the Western prairies.

"Come in, sir!"

"All ready, sir!"

"Well, I guess this looks comfy," said Mr. Poinsett.

The rancher was an Englishman to his finger-tips, but he had lived long enough in America to "guess."

He stepped into the study. Tom Merry followed him in. There was a happier expression upon Tom Merry's face than had been there for many a day. This was something like olden times. The crowded study, the merry faces and voices made him feel that he was really and truly back at St. Jim's, and in his old place again.

"Here's your chair, sir!" said Monty Lowther. "And here's yours, Tommy, my son! Hallo! What on earth's that?"

"That" was a sound of hurried footsteps in the passage, mingled with a wild clatter as of metallic objects crashing upon the floor.

"My hat!"

"Gussy!"

"What the—"

Arthur Augustus burst wildly into the study, red and panting, and shedding spoons and forks and knives on all sides.

"Wescue, deah boys!" he gasped. "Bai Jove! Oh, wescue!"

And he rushed round the table.

The next moment the doorway was blocked with infuriated juniors.

CHAPTER 2.

Gussy, the Waiter!

MR. POINSETT sat in his chair, gazing at the scene in astonishment.

He was not accustomed to the manners and customs of the juniors of St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood gasping for breath and turning out of his pockets upon the table such of the cutlery as he had not dropped in his hurried flight.

Kangaroo and Clifton Dane, Bernard Glyn and Reilly, Hancock and Gore and Macdonald, and a crowd more juniors, crammed themselves into the doorway.

"Where's that blessed burglar?"

"Where's that brigand?"

"Where's D'Arcy?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What's the matter?"

"Matter!" roared Kangaroo. "He's raided our studies! Collared all our knives and spoons and things just as we're going to have tea!"

"Yah!"

"Burglar!"

"We'll scalp him!"

And the indignant juniors made a rush.

But Tom Merry & Co. lined up inside the study, and the rush was stopped. There wasn't much room for it, as a matter of fact.

"Cheese it!" exclaimed Figgins.

"Stand back!"

"Yah! We're going to bump him!"

"Order!"

"Yaas, ordah, deah boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, adjusting his eyeglass and looking severely at the juniors from behind his defenders. "I am vewy much surprised at you for wushin' into the study like this when there's a distinguished guest here."

"Oh, I guess you needn't mind me!" said Mr. Poinsett.

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Another TWELVE Presented Next Week!

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Kangaroo drew back, a little abashed. In his excitement he had not noticed the rancher sitting at the table.

"Oh!" he exclaimed. "I'm sorry!"

"Sorry!" said Clifton Dane.

"Faith, and we're all sorry entirely!" said Reilly.

And the juniors backed out of the study.

"Not at all," said the rancher genially. "All correct!"

But Kangaroo & Co. departed. Lowther closed the door.

"It's all wight, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus cheerfully. "I think I've got enough forks and things, you know!"

"You made enough row about it, anyway!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, sit down!"

"Gussy will have to sit on the coal-locker," said Manners. "No room at the table. Figgins and Herries in the window."

"I am afwaid I could not sit on the coal-lockah, Mannahs. I should be in dangah of soilin' my t'vousahs."

"Better stand on it, then," suggested Kerr.

"Weally, Kerr! Howevah, it's all wight—I will stand. Pewwaps I had bettah stand, as a mattah of fact, to keep a supewintendin' eye on the p'ceedings."

"Pass the toast to Mr. Poinsett."

"And the ham!"

"And the eggs!"

"Now, sir, pile in!"

"Don't think of the Head's dinner, sir. You owe us first innings."

Mr. Poinsett smiled.

At the risk, or, rather, the certainty, of spoiling his dinner with the Head, he "piled into" the good things in the junior study.

Life on the boundless plains in the Far West had given the rancher a constitution of iron, and so he was well-fitted to stand a junior feed. Any ordinary digestion would have sunk under the strain. But the rancher stood it without turning a hair. He would certainly have required the stowage capacity of a large steamer if he had eaten half of what the juniors had pressed upon him. But he did very well, nevertheless.

Tom Merry's face was very bright as he sat at the table. The study rang with voices and the clatter of plates and knives and forks.

It was a merry meal.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy hovered round the feasters, at times casting a dubious glance upon the coal-locker.

He was getting tired of standing, and his superintendence of the feast did not seem to be really necessary, as nobody listened to him when he said anything.

And as he was standing up, the fellows who were not close to the table seemed to take it for granted that he was there to pass things to them.

Only half the party had room at the table, and the rest were wherever they could find space, and so the services of a waiter came in very useful.

Arthur Augustus had not exactly intended that, but he was very obliging, and he was kept very busy.

"Pass the toast, Gussy!"

"Ham this way!"

"Another egg, please!"

"Fill my cup again, will you?"

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "I weally think I'll wisk the coal-lockah!"

"More jam, Gussy!"

"Cake this way!"

"I'll thank you for the salt!"

"Sorry to bother you, Gussy, but you're standing up, you know. Do cut some more bread-and-butter."

"Bai Jove!"

"You might pass the pie, will you?"

"Have you cut that bread-and-butter?"

"Jam over here, D'Arcy!"

Arthur Augustus flew to and fro breathlessly. And the more he obeyed the calls upon him the faster the calls came, till the swell of St. Jim's began to lose his head a little.

But when he put the salt into Figgins' tea and poured tea into Lowther's helping of pie there was a yell of protest.

"Look there!"

"You ass!"

"Oh, go and sit down!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"Fathead!"

"Do be careful, Gussy!" urged Figgins. "Bring me the tea, will you, and fill my cup, and don't be so jolly clumsy."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Buck up, old son!"

D'Arcy brought the teapot over to Figgins. Blake called to him for some sugar, and D'Arcy turned his head as he began to pour out the tea.

"Wait a moment, Blake, deah boy!"

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"Yaroo!"

It was a fiendish yell from Figgins.

It is difficult to pour out tea safely with one's head turned in another direction, but Arthur Augustus had not thought of that for a moment. The steaming hot stream from the spout of the teapot was missing Figgins' teacup and pouring over his legs.

Crash!

Teacup and saucer fell to the floor and were shattered into fifty pieces as Figgins leaped to his feet, with a wild yell.

"Ow! Yaroo!"

"Bai Jove!"

Crash went the teapot to the floor.

"You ass!" shouted Lowther.

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Yaroo!" roared Figgins. "Oh! Ow!"

"Gweat Scott! I'm sowwy, Figgay!"

"Yow-ow! Ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins gave D'Arcy a terrific glare, and rushed out of the study to seek a change of trousers. The juniors simply yelled. From that moment forward, however, no one sought to utilise D'Arcy's services as a waiter.

Figgins returned in five minutes with new trousers and a new smile, and the feed went on cheerily. But D'Arcy was sitting in Figgins' place now, and he did not move again. Figgins sat on the coal-locker.

CHAPTER 3.

The Promise!

TOM MERRY'S uncle took his leave of the chums of St. Jim's, the juniors accompanying him to the end of the staircase.

Mr. Poinsett was in high good humour, and so were all the juniors. They agreed that the study had seldom seen a merrier meeting, and Lowther was loud in his praises of D'Arcy as a waiter—a compliment that the swell of St. Jim's took in a rather dubious spirit.

The Fourth Formers departed, well satisfied with their entertainment in the Shell study, and the Terrible Three were left on their own.

They proceeded to put the study in order again. The remains of the feast cumbered the room in every direction, and the piles of used crockery were appalling.

"Fortunately, it doesn't all belong to us," Monty Lowther remarked, "and the chaps who lent it can wash it. They shouldn't have lent it to us."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it was a jolly feed!"

"Ripping!"

"What's the matter with you, Tommy?"

Tom Merry came out of a reverie with a start.

"Eh?" he exclaimed.

"What are you scowling about?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"I wasn't aware that I was scowling," he replied. "I was thinking, that's all."

"Well, don't!"

"But, I say—"

"Ain't you glad to be back at St. Jim's?" demanded Lowther.

"What-ho!" said Tom Merry heartily. "It seems almost too good to be true. My uncle is a brick! He's going to keep me at St. Jim's, and he's going to provide for Miss Fawcett. Isn't he ripping?"

"Yes, rather! What are you thinking about, and wrinkling your chivvy over?"

Tom Merry coloured.

His two chums stared at him. There were no secrets between the Terrible Three, and Manners and Lowther could both see that the hero of the Shell had something on his mind. They waited to be told what it was.

"Look here," said Tom Merry, "you remember Blucher's Buildings—that awful place in London you went to when you were looking for me at Christmas-time?"

"Yes, rather!"

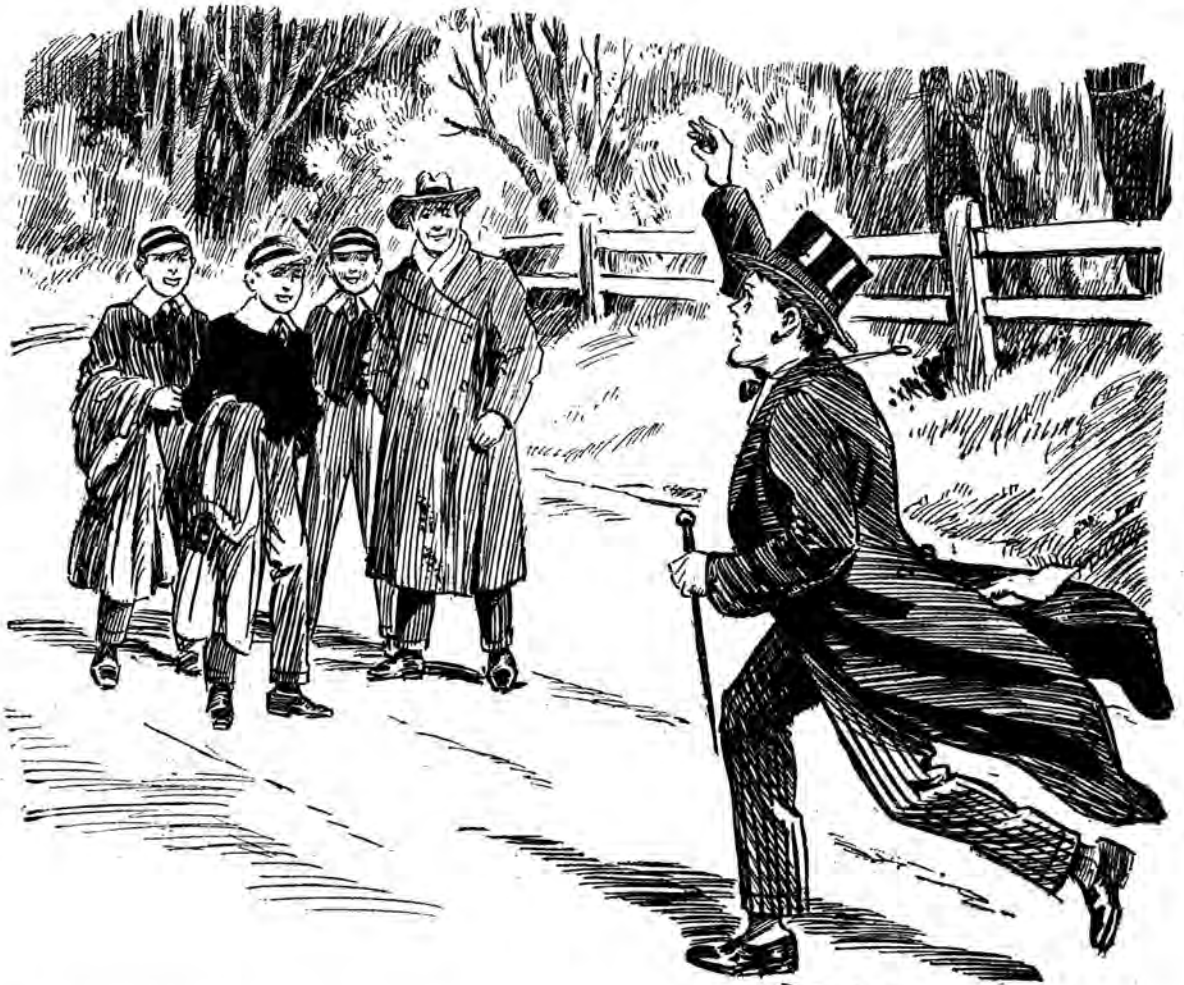
"You remember that kid—Joe?"

"The little ragamuffin who wanted you to become a pick-pocket?"

"Well, he didn't exactly want that—he's been brought up among pickpockets, and he really didn't know how rotten it was," said Tom Merry. "I had a lot of good turns done me by that kid when I was in London. I didn't know much about living on next to nothing a year, you know. That kid saved me a lot of things. He took a liking to me, and stood by me in many ways."

"Good for him!"

"And I told him," went on Tom Merry—"I told him that if my luck ever changed and I came out of the trouble I was in I'd look after him."



At the sound of hurried footsteps behind in the lane, the Terrible Three and Tom Merry's uncle turned round. It was to see Gussy, dressed in an old frock coat that nearly touched the ground, running towards them. "Why—what!" gasped Tom Merry. Then the Terrible Three burst into a yell of laughter. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ah!"
"Oh!"
Manners and Lowther uttered those ejaculations together.

"Well," continued Tom Merry, "I'm out of the trouble now, and my luck has changed. I've got to keep my promise."

"H'm!"
"Exactly how I'm to do it I don't know; but—but I can't leave that kid to grow up in horrible poverty among drunken brutes and criminals!" said Tom Merry quietly.

Monty Lowther nodded.
"There are thousands of kids who grow up like that in London every year, Tom," he remarked. "We can't help it."

"You're right, Monty. But in this particular case I've given my word—and if I hadn't, it would be just the same. After the way that poor kid stuck to me, I shall have to stick to him."

"Well, that's right, I suppose."
"I'm going to do it. But the question is—how?"

"Your uncle would do something for him. He seems to be an awfully good sort."

Tom Merry nodded.
"That's what I was thinking. I told Joe I'd look after him, and he should come with me if my luck changed."

"Phew! Come with you?"

"Yes. Why shouldn't he come to St. Jim's and have a decent education and grow into a decent chap?" said Tom Merry.

"That little ragamuffin at St. Jim's?"

"Why not?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Well, I suppose there are about a thousand reasons

why not," said Lowther. "He's not what you'd call a suitable chap to come here, and I fancy the Head wouldn't have it."

"I should have to get my uncle to work it with the Head, of course. And I don't see why the kid shouldn't improve in a very short time. He was very quick and intelligent."

"H'm!"
"Anyway, he would pass among the other young rascals in the Third—he would make an addition to Wally & Co."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"What do you chaps think?"

"Blessed if I know," said Manners uneasily. "You ought to get your uncle to do something for the kid, of course. But—"

"Let him come here," said Lowther. "It will be fun. If the fags don't like him, we'll lick 'em!"

"Well, that's so," said Manners. "We could do that."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Then I shall jolly well put it to my uncle!" he said. And he did. He had a talk with the rancher that evening, and told him the whole story.

Mr. Poinsett listened, with a curious gleam in his clear, keen eyes.

When Tom Merry had finished the rancher laid his brown hand upon the lad's shoulder.

"I'm glad to hear this, Tom," he said quietly. "I'm glad to see that you've not forgotten a fellow who stood by you when you needed it, however humble he may be. It's like you, Tom, to think of him—it's just like you. If you think he could come to the school, and you would look after him and lick him into shape a bit—"

"I would, gladly, uncle!"

too bad, and he could imagine the shriek of merriment that would greet his return to St. Jim's.

"But to travel in that coat! He whipped it off; but the cold wind blew clean through the Etons, and his teeth chattered."

"It's wotten!"

There was no help for it. He put on the coat again, and started after the party.

As D'Arcy entered the old High Street of Rylcombe, and walked on to the station with a crimson face, yells of laughter from all sides testified that the ancient and extraordinary coat had not escaped the attention of the youth of Rylcombe.

CHAPTER 5.

Funny!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY walked on to the station with a face the hue of a beetroot.

The old porter of Rylcombe almost had a fit as he saw Arthur Augustus.

"Haw, haw, haw!" he roared. "Skuse me, gentlemen; bad cold this mornin'. Huh! Ugh! Haw, haw, haw! Oh!"

"Weally, portah—"

"Haw, haw, haw! Cold mornin', sir! Need a big, thick coat this mornin', sir! Haw, haw, haw!"

"Weally—"

"Come on!" shouted Manners. "The train's in!"

"Pway stop a minute while I wush into a place and buy a coat!"

"Late already!"

"But weally—"

"Not a second to spare."

"We must hurry!" said Mr. Poinsett. "We must not lose the train."

"Oh, bai Jove!"

They rushed upon the platform.

The train was there, and they had just time to tumble into a carriage before it started.

The guard waved his flag, and the train moved out of the station.

"We're off!" said Tom Merry.

"I guess so."

The party had to change at Wayland Junction, and there D'Arcy hoped to be able to rush out of the station and buy a ready-made coat. Under such circumstances the swell of St. Jim's would have been willing to wear a "reach-me-down."

But there was no time.

They had three minutes to catch the London train, and another platform to reach, and there was no time to cut to waste.

They walked through the station, to the accompaniment of titters and chuckles wherever D'Arcy's coat appeared.

The London train was in, and they entered it, and the swell of St. Jim's was relieved to see that there were no other passengers in the carriage.

But as the train rolled Londonwards, passengers entered at several of the stations, and everyone who entered seemed to be in danger of apoplexy as soon as he caught sight of D'Arcy's coat.

The swell of St. Jim's sat with crimson cheeks.

It was a long journey to London, and the cold was bitter, and D'Arcy could not think of taking the coat off.

It was all the worse because his companions did not seem to understand how really awful it was, and persisted in taking the matter as a joke.

"Bai Jove! I wondah if we shall evah weach London?" the elegant junior muttered more than once.

Near London the carriage was quite full.

The passengers stared at D'Arcy, and grinned and winked at one another on the subject of the coat, and the swell of St. Jim's endured it as patiently as he could.

He would have given a whole term's pocket-money to be in London, within reach of any sort of a shop where a coat could be procured.

But the journey was long.

D'Arcy looked as if all the blood in his body had been pumped into his face by the time the train rattled into the London terminus.

He gave a gasp of relief when the train stopped.

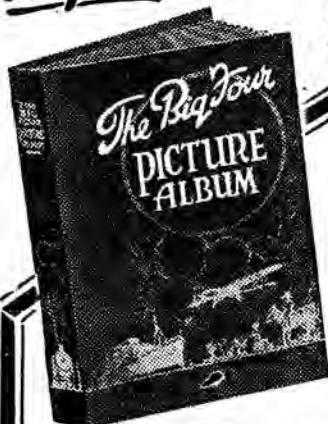
The St. Jim's party alighted. A chuckle went along the platform as the swell of St. Jim's stepped out of the carriage, his coat-tails sweeping the ground.

"Well, I guess we part here," said Mr. Poinsett. "I wish I could come with you to look out your young friend, Tom, but it can't be done."

"We'll manage all right, uncle."

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"Yes, I guess you will. You'd better take D'Arcy somewhere and get him a coat first."

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, uncle!"

"Good-bye, sir!"

And Mr. Poinsett jumped into a taxi and was gone.

People were staring at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's coat, and youthful persons were passing rude remarks about it.

"Bai Jove, pway show me to a place where I can get a coat!" said D'Arcy plaintively. "I feel weally awfully widdleous, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you wottahs—"

"Come this way, Gussy, if you want a ready-made tailor's," said Monty Lowther.

And Arthur Augustus was marched into a ready-made clothes shop, and there, to his great relief, he was able to discard the ancient morning-coat, and don one more suitable to his size and his years.

The new coat was certainly not all that the elegant junior would have desired in cut or in cloth, but he was too glad to get any sort of a change to be inclined to grumble.

"I say, you're not going to leave that old coat behind, are you?" asked Manners.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Couldn't you carry it on your arm?"

"I uttably wufuse to cawwy it on my beastlay arm!"

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"It belongs to the Junior Dramatic Society, you know."
 "Then the Juniah Dwamatic Society can come and fetch it," said the swell of St. Jim's.
 And the offending garment was left in the shop when Arthur Augustus walked out.

CHAPTER 6.

Tom Merry Hits Out!

"WE can get a motor-bus most of the way," said Tom Merry.

"What pwice a taxi?" asked D'Arcy.
 "Ninepence."

"Ass! I mean how much would a taxi be?"

"No need to waste cash, Gussy. Haven't you blued enough over that blessed new coat?" demanded Lowther.

"Gussy is always extravagant," said Manners, with a shake of the head. "Buying new coats, and throwing morning-coats away, while they've still got a lot of wear in them, and—"

"Weally, Mannahs, you ass—"

"Here's our bus!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

The juniors boarded the bus, and Tom Merry sat and looked round him upon the teeming crowds.

The last time he had been in London was in that bitter December, when he had tramped the streets without a coin in his pockets, and without a crust of bread to stay the cravings of hunger.

His chums had found him, and taken him from that; but had it not been for the kindness of his uncle, he must have returned to it sooner or later.

The battle of life was hard—bitterly hard—for a boy unaided. Tom Merry had learnt that lesson. It made him more than ever determined that little Joe, of Blucher's Buildings, should have a helping hand, while it was still time to save him from a life of want and crime.

Blucher's Buildings had been an episode to Tom Merry—an episode that seemed, as it were, seared into his memory with a hot iron.

Little Joe had never known anything else. Blucher's Buildings was the world to him. Joe's universe had been bounded by Charing Cross Road and the Euston Road, and the narrow old streets of the City.

He knew that there was a place where flowers and vegetables were grown, for he had seen them arrive at Covent Garden Market. But that was about all he knew of his Mother England—a hard mother to him.

Tom Merry thought of all those things; and thought, too, that his life might have been even as poor Joe's.

"We get down here," said Tom suddenly.
 They had to walk the rest of the way. It lay through dingy streets, and then through a reeking alley, and so they reached Blucher's Buildings.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.
 It was all he could say.

Rough, ragged figures were gathering round the juniors, staring at them rudely, and some begging for coppers.

Tom Merry led the way into the house.

A slatternly old woman stopped on the stairs to stare at him. Tom Merry remembered her as an occupant of the house when he had lived in a miserable room under the roof.

"You know me, Sal?" he said, with a smile.

The woman nodded. Early in the day as it was, she was partly intoxicated.

"You've 'ad some luck," she said. "Where did you get that there clobber?"

Tom Merry pressed a half-crown into her hand.

"Do you know where Joe is?"

"Joe?" she repeated vaguely, her thin fingers closing like talons on the coin.

"Yes—young Joe."

A shrill scream of pain rang from a room above the stairs. "That's Joe!" said Sal.

Tom Merry waited to hear no more.

He dashed up the stairs at top speed, his chums at his heels. With a kick he sent the door of the room flying open.

A short, thick-set bulldog of a man, with a convict's face and eyes bleared with drink, held a belt in his hand, and a cowering bundle of rags quivered and moaned on the floor at his feet.

The man glared round furiously as the door was burst open.

"Oh, you hound!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Outside!" said the man, his brutal face black with passion. "Outside! This 'ere is my room! I'm master 'ere!"

"Put that belt down!"

The ruffian stared at him, apparently hardly able to believe his ears. His savage face worked with rage.

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The bundle of rags sat up.

"Master Tom!" cried a quivering voice. "Master Tom come back agin!"

"Yes, I'm back, Joe; and that cowardly brute shan't touch you again!" shouted Tom Merry, almost beside himself with rage and indignation.

The man made a step towards him.

"Shan't touch 'im agin!" he muttered thickly. "Ain't 'e my son—eh? You are goin' to give orders to Bill Frayne, are you? I'll cut your hide off! Take that!"

The belt sang in the air.

But Tom Merry was ready. He leaped forward, dodged the descending blow, and his clenched fist, hard as iron, shot up and caught the ruffian upon the point of the chin.

It was a terrible upper-cut, and it sent Bill Frayne, powerful as he was, staggering backwards till he fell with a crash to the floor.

Crash!

The ruffian lay half-dazed; and then, as he strove to rise, the juniors were upon him, and he was grasped and pinned down to the floor by sheer weight.

"Put the belt round him!" said Tom Merry.

The ruffian struggled furiously; and so strong was he that the juniors had all their work cut out to hold him.

But held he was, and the belt was passed round his body and buckled over his arms, pinning them down to his sides. Then he was easy to deal with.

Struggling and kicking and uttering curses, he was held fast while his braces were torn off and tied round his ankles. Monty Lowther stuffed a handkerchief into his mouth to stop the torrent of foul abuse that was streaming forth, and Bill Frayne relaxed into maddened silence.

CHAPTER 7.

Joe's Joy!

TOM MERRY closed the door.

Rows were of too common occurrence in Blucher's Buildings for this tussle to have attracted any attention from the other inhabitants.

Bill Frayne lay quivering and gasping on the floor, helpless now to move hand or foot, able only to glare his rage.

But Joe was trembling in every limb.
 Tom Merry patted him on the shoulder.

"It's all right now, Joe."

"Ye-es," mumbled Joe.

"Has he hurt you much?"

"Not more'n usual," said Joe, shivering. "Only it's bad because me legs is so cold, Master Tom. It 'urts more when you're cold."

"The howwid wascall!" exclaimed D'Arcy indignantly. "Bai Jove! I've a great mind to give him a fearful thwashin'!"

"It's wery kind of you young gents," said Joe; "but 'e'll only take it outer me arter."

Tom Merry shuddered.

"The brute won't be able to hurt you again, Joe," he said.

"He will when you're gone, Master Tom."

"I'm going to take you with me, Joe."

Joe started.

"Take me with you?"

"Yes."

"Away from 'ere—away from 'im."

"Away from London altogether, Joe."

The lad gasped.

"Oh, Master Tom!"

"You'll come, Joe?"

"Won't I?" grinned Joe. "Not 'arf! Then you've come into your money agin, Master Tom. I knew you wouldn't always stay with the likes o' us. Won't I come with you? Not 'arf!"

The man on the floor writhed. Tom Merry turned to him with a stern expression upon his young face.

"I'm going to take Joe away where he will be cared for," he said. "You have no rights over him, you cruel brute. You'll never see him again. I only wish I could send you to prison before I go!"

The man glared.

"Come on, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "This place is suffocatin' me."

"Crikey!" said Joe. "I'm ready!"

They passed out upon the landing and closed the door after them.

"Somebody will come and let that brute loose presently," said Tom Merry. "I'll leave word as we go. Do you think he's likely to make any attempt to follow you, Joe?"

Joe shook his head.

"E don't want me," he said. "E'll find somebody else to belt."

"Bai Jove!"

"Come on then, Joe!"



"Look 'ere, Master Tom," said Joe. "That's for you." The waif drew a gold watch from his pocket and held it out. But Tom Merry could only stare at the watch in blank astonishment—for it was Gussy's famous gold timekeeper that had been stolen from him!

"Hold on, deah boys! Joe hasn't packed up his things yet!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We'd better all give him a hand in packin' his twunk."

Tom Merry grinned. Joe seemed on the point of going into convulsions.

"It's all right, guy'nor. I ain't got no trunk, and there won't be no grand planner to move!" he exclaimed. "I've got all my property on."

"Bai Jove!"

"Come on!" said Tom Merry.

And in a few minutes more they were clear of Blucher's Buildings.

The four of them bundled into a passing taxi, and the vehicle dashed away at a great speed through the crowded streets.

If Bill Frayne, when he was released, attempted to follow them there would not be much chance of his success.

In the taxi the juniors looked curiously enough at Joe. The little ragamuffin was a bundle of rags and dirt, and on his skin in several places were the marks of old bruises and cuts.

Joe had evidently had a hard life. But the delight of the present moment seemed to compensate him for it all. He was grinning from ear to ear in sheer enjoyment.

His dirty face was a picture of pleasure. But it was very dirty. It had probably been washed some time or other—but not lately! The marks of recent tears could be seen furrowing the dirt. But there were no more tears for Joe. Life was all smiles to him now.

Only he seemed scarcely to believe in his good luck.

"You mean it, Master Tom?" he said more than once.

"I ain't to go back to Blucher's Buildings any more?"

"No," said Tom Merry.

"You're going to take me away for good?"

"For good, Joe."

"You must 'ave piles of money now, Master Tom."

Tom Merry laughed.

"My dear kid, I haven't piles of money, but I have a very kind and generous uncle who is looking after me."

"Crikey!"

"Bai Jove! What an expression!"

"Crikey! It's a bit of orl right!" said Joe. "You're going to take me into the country, Master Tom?"

"Yes."

"Where the vegetables come from?"

"Yes," said Tom, laughing.

The thought seemed almost too much for Joe, and he remained silent for several minutes, chewing the cud of meditation.

"My word!" murmured Lowther aside. "I wonder what sort of a sensation our young friend will make at St. Jim's?"

"He will want washing," said Manners.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But he seems a good little chap!"

"Wippin', deah boy!"

"There's one thing I'll bet on," said Manners, "and that is that the Head never knew what Tom's protegee was exactly like when he agreed with Mr. Poinsett to take him in at St. Jim's."

"Vewy pwob."

"But he's agreed now," grinned Lowther. "And the Head isn't a man to back out of his word."

"Wathah not!"

Tom Merry stopped the cab.

"We get down here," he said. "Here's the station."

"Good!"

The chums of St. Jim's alighted. Tom Merry paid the taximan, who looked curiously at Joe. So did a good many other people. Joe certainly looked a strange enough companion for the well-dressed juniors.

D'Arcy nudged Tom Merry.

"You can't take the kid to St. Jim's in that state, Tom Mewwy," he remarked in an undertone. "My ideah is that we should wash him and have his hair cut, you know, and then get him a new wig-out!"

"Adopted," said Tom Merry. "We'll take him to a barber's first, and then have the wash and hair cut."

"Crikey!" said Joe.

"You don't mind being washed, do you, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus courteously.

Joe looked doubtful.

"All over?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, orl right!" said Joe. "I'll do anythin' that Master Tom thinks is all right."

"Then you shall have a steaming hot bath," said Tom Merry.

"Orl right, guv'nor!"

And Joe was forthwith marched into a large hairdressing establishment, to the great surprise of a most aristocratic and highly scented hairdresser.

CHAPTER 8.

Well Washed!

THE hairdresser—he would have felt extremely indignant if he had been called a barber—looked at Joe, and then at the chums.

Joe was not a pleasing object to behold. True, there was intelligence in the dark eyes that looked out from the reddened rims, and sensitiveness in the mouth, dirty as it was. But the hairdressing gentleman could not be expected to notice those trifles. He was far too snobby, far too high-scented to tolerate willingly a person of Joe's class. He stared.

cleaning of Joe, and then retired to his tonsorial department.

He evidently did not intend to take a hand in the cleaning process himself.

Tom Merry looked at Joe rather helplessly.

The little ragamuffin was such a mass of dirt and rags, that it seemed difficult to know where to begin.

Joe was grinning cheerfully. He had never been in such a room before, and the sight of the marble basins, the clean towels, and the soap and hot water amazed him as if he had entered into a fairy palace.

"Crikey!" was all he could say.

"You'd better take those things off, Joe, and wash all over," said Tom Merry. "I'll see if the barber chap's got a footbath."

A small bath was forthcoming, and it was filled with hot water. Joe's rags were peeled off.

He looked doubtfully at the hot bath, and stepped in.

"Bai Jove! He will want some scwubbin', you know!" said D'Arcy.

"He'll want some new clothes, too," said Tom Merry. "One of us ought to go and get him some clothes, while the others take turns at scrubbing him."

"Good egg!"

"Pewwaps I had bettah do the shoppin'," said D'Arcy. "But how am I to get the size without the kid bein' measured?"

"Chance it!"

"It would be wathah wotten to get a bad fit."

"My dear ass—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"You must get some ready-made clothes to take him down to St. Jim's," said Tom Merry. "He can have a new rig there."

"Yaas, that's vewy twue."

"Buzz off, and get the best things you can, Gussy! So long as he can wear them, that's near enough, and don't pay too much."

"Wight-ho!"

Arthur Augustus departed on his errand.

The Terrible Three superintended the bath of Joe Frayne.

HOW'S YOUR ALBUM LOOKING?

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It was a most aristocratic stare.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, adjusting his eyeglass and looking at the hairdresser in great surprise. "What is the mattah with the person?"

"Shocked!"

"What about?"

"Joe!"

"Bai Jove! Surely if we can stand Joe this person can stand him?"

"My dear chap, don't you know that that chap is really a duke in disguise, running a hairdressing business for the fun of the thing?" demanded Lowther aside.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"That's where he gets his haughty manners from. Listen, and you'll hear him pretending to drop his 'h's' soon!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Sir!" said the tonsorial artist.

"I want to have this kid washed and combed—and—hair cut," said Tom Merry a little dubiously.

"My establishment is not for persons of that sort, sir!" said the hairdresser, with dignity. "Send 'im hout, please!"

"There, I told you so!" whispered Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

Tom Merry coloured a little. "We're taking the kid away with us," he said, "and we want him cleaned up. We're willing to pay ten shillings."

The tonsorial artist's manner changed at once.

He had to shave a great many customers, even at four-pence each, to pile up the sum of ten shillings. His aristocratic reserve melted away at once.

"Yes, sir; quite so, sir," he said. "Always willing to oblige a gentleman, sir!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Ducal manners, don't you think, Gussy?" murmured Lowther.

"You uttah ass!"

The hairdresser led Tom Merry & Co. into another room with a range of marble washing-basins in it.

He provided the juniors with all that was required for the

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Joe scrubbed and scrubbed, under their directions, till the whiteness of the skin began to show.

Then each of the chums rolled up his sleeves, and took a hand in the scrubbing.

It was hard work.

But it was rewarded. At the end of a quarter of an hour Joe was quite white and rosy. He gazed at his own limbs in admiration and surprise. He had never suspected them of being susceptible of such a change.

"Crikey!" said Joe.

"Here's a towel," said Tom Merry.

Joe was towelled down.

He certainly presented a very different appearance now, and when his unkempt mop was taken off, he would be further improved, Tom Merry thought.

The hairdresser was called in, and Joe was seated in a chair with a coat round him, while the tonsorial artist's assistant cut his hair.

The hair was cut very close.

"By George!" said Monty Lowther, when the operation was finished. "I must say he looks ripping."

"Splendid!"

"Crikey!" said Joe.

"Time Gussy was back!"

"Bring me a toothbrush," said Tom to the hairdresser's assistant. "How often do you clean your teeth, Joe?"

Joe grinned.

"You're joking, Master Tom," he said.

"Don't you ever wash your teeth?" asked Manners.

Joe chuckled at the idea.

He had evidently never heard of people washing their teeth. But the toothbrush was brought in, and Tom Merry instructed him in its use, and made him promise solemnly to use it regularly every morning and evening.

By that time Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had returned.

The swell of St. Jim's brought in a big leather bag. The chums of the Shell stared at it.

"What's that for?" asked Tom Merry.

"Clothes in it, deah boy."

"But what did you want the bag for?"

"To cawwy the clothes in, of course!"
 "Ass! How much did you give for it?"
 "I wufuse to be called an ass—"
 "How much did you give for it?" roared Tom Merry.
 "I picked it up cheap, deah boy, for thirty shillings."
 "Well, it's worth fifteen, so you haven't been done as much as I expected," said Tom Merry.
 "Weally, deah boy—"
 "Tumble out the togs!"
 Arthur Augustus opened the bag.
 "It's a weally wippin' bag," he said. "The man in the shop told me he had sold one exactly like it to the Prime Ministah."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I see no cause whatevah for wibald laughtah, Monty Lowthah!"
 "Ha, ha, ha! But what did you want a bag at all for?"
 "I have already weplied that it was to cawwy the clothes in."
 "And you couldn't carry them without a bag?"
 "I suppose I couldn't walk through the streets with a bwown paper parcel?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Weally, you ass—"
 "Hand over the duds!" said Tom Merry.
 Arthur Augustus handed over the clothes. He had purchased a ready-made suit of clothes suitable for a lad of fourteen, and about three sizes too large for Joe.
 "Get into them, Joe," said Tom Merry.
 The clothes might be ill-fitting, but they were princely raiment to the little ragamuffin of Blucher's Buildings.
 "Them togs is for me, sir?" asked Joe.
 "Yes."
 "Crikey, guv'nor!"
 That was all Joe could say; emotion overcame him. He plunged into the new clothes in eloquent silence.

CHAPTER 9.

A Topper For Joe!

JOE did not take long to dress. It was the first time in his life that he had ever worn underclothing of any sort, and that D'Arcy had purchased for him was of the same quality as the swell of St. Jim's wore himself. It seemed like rolling in unheard-of luxury to Joe, of Blucher's Buildings.

The boots D'Arcy had bought him were a little too small, in contrast to those which Joe had discarded, which were a great deal too large.

But Joe crammed his feet into them, manfully repressing any sign of pain. That was a thing he had learned to do.

He would not appear to dislike anything that his kind friends had bought him, and the chums did not even see that it hurt him to put on the boots.

The trousers were six inches too long for him, but they were turned up at the bottoms rather liberally, so that it was possible to walk in them.

The jacket fitted him somewhat like a sack, and the sleeves came down over the ends of his fingers, and the waistcoat had to be pinned in at the back to make it fit at all.

But with all these drawbacks Joe's appearance presented a wonderful improvement.

He fell into a way of jerking his head, like a restive horse, as the linen collar rubbed against his neck. Joe had never worn a white collar before.

The chums surveyed him in great admiration.

"Wippin'!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Splendid!"

"Gorgeous!"

"Topnotch!"

"Look at yourself, Joe," said Tom Merry, leading the ragamuffin before a standing glass.

Joe looked at his reflection.

He almost fell down at the sight of the clean, tidy, respectable lad who was standing before him, reflected in the glass.

"Crikey!" he gasped. "Is—is that me?"

"That's you, Joe!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, crikey!"

Tom Merry looked at his watch.

"Time to get some lunch, and then to catch the afternoon train to St. Jim's," he remarked. "Where's Joe's cap?"

"His what?"

"Didn't you bring him a cap?"

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, we can take him out and get him one," he said. And he settled with the hairdresser, and the chums of St. Jim's and their proteges quitted the tontorial establishment.

"Here's a hattah's, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus.

(Continued on next page.)



MAKE THE
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PRIZE!

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.

AIR-MINDED.

Son: "I feel I should make a good airman, dad."

Father: "You might. You're no earthly good!"

A football has been awarded to L. Hudson, 12, Wykebeck View, Selby Road, Leeds, 9.

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON!

"Oh dear!" said John, who was struggling with his homework. "I can't find this Least Common Multiple."

"Is that thing still lost?" asked his father. "I hunted for it for months when I was your age!"

A football has been awarded to K. Salisbury, 1, Hawthorn Grove, Leonard Road, Handsworth, Birmingham, 19.

THE ALTERNATIVE.

When prunes were served for breakfast for the third morning in succession, the new boarder felt entitled to say something.

"I'm not very fond of prunes," he said. "Is there no alternative?"

"Yes," replied the lady of the house. "You may take them or leave them!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Blewitt, 160, Amyand Park Road, St. Margarets, Middlesex.

SELF-JUDGMENT.

Lawyer (to rival): "Sir, you are the biggest ass I've ever seen!"

Judge: "Order, order! You seem to forget I am here!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to D. Buchanan, 9, Valley Drive, Durban North, Natal, S. Africa.

QUITE SO!

Jim: "Is it easy to learn to skate?"

Bob: "Oh, you soon tumble to it!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Potts, 6, Hamilton Buildings, Upper Northgate Street, Chester.

A PROBLEM.

Mistress: "There are two things that I must have—honesty and obedience."

Maid: "But if you tell me to say you're out when you're in which shall come first—honesty or obedience?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Williams, 22, Craven Terrace, Lancaster Gate, London, W.2.

APPLE SAUCE!

Elder Brother (reprovingly): "If I had been offered a dish with two apples on it, I would have taken the smaller."

Younger Brother: "Well, you've got it—so why worry?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to I. Blake, 97, Bradford Road, Wakefield.

LOWTHER, THE LEG-PULLER.

Lowther: "Hi, Gussy! You've put your foot in it!"

D'Arcy: "Bai Jove! What, deah boy?"

Lowther: "Your shoe, old bean!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Woolbert, 27a, The Burroughs, Hendon, London, N.W.4.

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"Come in, Joe."

Joe showed a little trepidation in entering the shop. It was a large and fashionable-looking establishment, such a place as Joe had never entered in his life before, and he inwardly marvelled at the coolness and self-possession with which the chums entered it.

However, he walked in.

A spruce assistant came swimming up to the juniors; it could not be called walking.

"Yes, gentlemen. What can I do for you, gentlemen?"

"I want a cap for this kid," Tom Merry explained.

"Pewwaps he had bettah have a toppah, Tom Mewwy."

"Oh, rats!"

"Weally, deah boy—"

"I should recommend a silk hat, sir," said the assistant. Tom Merry grinned.

He had no doubt that the assistant would have recommended a Panama, or an opera hat, if he had seen any chance of selling it.

"Bettah have a silk toppah, Tom Mewwy," said D'Arcy firmly. "You see, Joe will be bound to have one at St. Jim's."

"My dear Gus—"

"I will stand tweek for the toppah."

Tom Merry hesitated.

All the juniors at St. Jim's wore toppers for Sundays and state occasions, even down to the fags in the Third Form.

"Oh, very well!" he said.

Joe gave a gasp.

To have a silk hat was the symbol of undreamt-of wealth and luxury.

"Topper!" he gasped. "For me? Crikey!"

"Shall I try a silk hat on the young gentleman, sir?" asked the assistant graciously.

Joe jumped.

"Young gentleman!" he murmured. "I'm a young gentleman! Oh, my 'at! Crikey!"

"Yes, please," said Tom Merry.

Silk hats were brought and tried on the hero of Blucher's Buildings.

Joe seemed like a youth in a dream as he looked at his reflection in a glass.

He looked very good-looking in a silk hat. As Arthur Augustus remarked, looking at his own reflection the while, there were fellows there suited and fellows they didn't.

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "How much?"

"Twenty-five-and-six, sir," said the assistant.

"Wippin'!" said D'Arcy.

"Hatbox, sir?" said the assistant. "Nice leather hatbox, sir, only forty-five-and-six."

"Bai Jove!"

"One in a cheaper leather at thirty shillings."

"Thanks—"

"Or in cheap leather, very good and serviceable, at fifteen shillings."

"No thanks!"

"Our special line in hatboxes at ten shillings, sir. These are what we really recommend to our customers."

"I suppose you haven't an extra-special line at half-a-crown?" suggested Monty Lowther innocently.

The hatter smiled in a sickly way.

"N-n-no!" he stammered. "But we have one at seven-and-six!"

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "This is vewy intewestin', you know. I always take an intewest in these mattahs of business, you know. I think evewybody ought to have some knowledge of the twade of the countwy. Now—"

Tom Merry grinned and paid for the hat.

"Now," went on D'Arcy, "you have hatboxes fwom seven-and-six—"

"Yes, sir, that's the lowest."

"And what's the next pwice?"

"Ten-and-six, sir."

"And aftah that?"

"Twelve-and-six."

"Bai Jove! You have a vewy gweat vawwety. What is the next deawah?"

"Fifteen-and-six, sir."

"And then—"

"One guinea."

"This is awfully intewestin', deah boys."

"Oh, come on, Gussy!"

"Wats! Pway let me finish the subject, Tom Mewwy. What is the next to a guinea, my deah sir?"

"Twenty-five shillings, sir," said the hatter. "But I should strongly recommend the thirty-shilling one."

"But you have a bettah one?"

"Oh, yes, sir; quite so, sir, at two guineas—a really splendid one, sir, such as we supply to the King of Afghanistan and the Crown Prince of Siam, sir."

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"Bai Jove!"

"But the really best one, sir, is the forty-five shillings. If you care to take that—"

"Oh, not at all!"

"We have a striking line at three guineas."

"Bai Jove!"

"And a most luxurious one at four guineas."

"How good! Is that all?"

"Ye-es, that's all, sir. Which one will you have?"

"Oh, I don't want any, thank you! I was only askin', you know. Come on, deah boys!"

And Arthur Augustus walked out of the shop with his chums, leaving the assistant speechless.

CHAPTER 10.

Gussy's Pocket is Picked!

"OFF again!" said Monty Lowther, as the train buzzed out of the station.

The chums of St. Jim's had a first-class carriage to themselves.

Joe was seated in a corner, with a travelling-rug over his knees and an expression of never-ending astonishment on his face.

A few hours before he had been a hungry, dirty, ragged little wastrel, trembling under the belt in the filthy room at Blucher's Buildings.

Now he was clean, tidy, cleanly-clad, filled with a good lunch, and leaning on the cushions of a first-class carriage of an express train.

It was enough to bewilder him.

At intervals he put up a furtive hand to his silk hat, as if to assure himself that it was a real one.

When the train passed through a tunnel, and the window beside him was transformed into a looking-glass, the little ragamuffin stared at his reflection there with intense enjoyment.

For a long time, as the express rushed on westward, the chums of St. Jim's chatted, and Joe remained silent, lost in wondering thought.

"Well, Joe, what are you thinking of?" Tom Merry asked at last.

Joe came out of a brown study.

"I was wondering what your school is like, sir," he said.

"Oh, St. Jim's?" said Tom Merry, with a smile.

"Why do you call it St. Jim's, sir?"

"It's named after St. James, you see—full title, St. James' Collegiate School—St. Jim's for short," said Tom Merry.

"Crikey!"

"You'll find it a ripping place, Joe. We'll teach you to play footer."

"Oh, Master Tom! And—and—" Joe paused.

"Yes, Joe?" said Tom Merry encouragingly.

"Shall I have to wash every day?" asked Joe hesitatingly.

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes, twice."

"Twice a day!" ejaculated Joe, in alarm.

"Yes, rather!"

"Crikey!"

"You'll get used to it, Joe."

"I'll do whatever you tell me, Master Tom," said Joe submissively, though it was easy to see that he regarded washing twice a day as something extraordinary.

"I s'pose I shall 'ave my 'air cut every day, too?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha! No."

"Twice a day?"

"No; once in three weeks will do for that."

"Oh, orlright!" said Joe. "I s'pose I clean my teeth once every three weeks, too?"

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry held up his hand.

"Haven't you already made me a promise, Joe?"

"Ave I?" said Joe.

"Yes; to clean your teeth twice a day, morning and evening."

"Crikey!"

"They can't be kept decent without, Joe."

"Oh!"

"You promised!"

"Yes, so I did," said Joe.

Tom Merry looked at him. He wondered whether Joe really understood what a promise was. Certainly his word did not seem to weigh very much on his mind.

"You must always keep a promise, Joe," he said.

"Yes, Master Tom."

"Never break your word under any condition, whatever it costs to keep it. A chap who would break his word would do anything rotten."

"Yes, sir."

"Always play the game, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus.

"What game, sir?"

(Continued on page 14.)

GATHER ROUND FOR YOUR EDITOR'S CHIN-WAG!



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! The first week of the New Year! What has 1934 in store for all of us? No one can say, but if we cannot foresee the future—which is probably just as well for our own peace of minds—we can at least profit by the past. Hence this is the time of the year when we are most given to self-analysis; when our mistakes of 1933 are borne in upon us and we aim to rectify or improve them. New resolutions are made, but circumstances can break them as easily as they are formed. So without good fortune and, of course, will-power, our resolutions are, like the New Year, in the lap of the gods.

One resolution I always strive to keep to, and that is that the GEM progresses along the right lines. I have many new things in the way of stories, serials, and features up my sleeve, and you will learn more about them later. But should I not keep to my resolution I want readers to write in and "let me have it"! On the other hand, if I do I want readers to do their little bit by introducing the GEM to their pals. Shall we call it a bargain? Yes? Good!

"NOT WANTED AT ST. JIM'S!"

Such is the title of the next grand yarn of the chums of St. Jim's, and no doubt you are wondering who the unfortunate fellow is. To be an outcast among one's Form-fellows, even if deserved, must be an unpleasant experience, but when it is not merited, well—read what happens to little Joe Frayne, the waif from the underworld, who has joined the Third Form at St. Jim's. Environment has had an unfortunate effect on Joe's character, but there is no denying the fact that he has plenty of pluck and that he is true blue; and when, in next week's stirring story, the waif has to put up with no little ragging from the Third Formers who don't want him, he proves it to his persecutors in no uncertain way.

"THE WHITE GIANTS OF EL DORADO!"

Following the further thrilling adventures of the chums of St. Frank's, told by E. S. Brooks in this number, our school-boy pals meet with even more amazing and exciting experiences in the next powerful instalment. Once again the one and only Handforth puts his foot in it, with the result that he finds himself at the mercy of the most repulsive and huge crocodile the boys of St. Frank's have ever seen. What happens then? Read all about it next week and be thrilled!

To round off next Wednesday's tip-top programme there will be another sheet of free gift coloured pictures—twelve of them—in addition to our other popular features.

A FEATHERED FREAK.

A naturalist has recently discovered a sparrow which must be the envy of all birdland—it's got two heads! And each head has its own beak, too, so the sparrow can eat twice as fast as a normal one. People who have fed it say it finds no difficulty at all in tackling two worms at once. What is more, it can feed with one beak while warding off greedy companions from its dinner with the other.

Freak animals and birds like this two-headed sparrow are fairly common, but they rarely live long, for mothers in the wild usually "bump off" any oddities among their children!

SAFETY FIRST!

Someone poking about in the foundations of a new London building has brought to light a safety pin which museum experts say was made about two thousand years ago. Probably some

**A Happy and
Prosperous New Year
to You All, Chums.**

The Editor.

Roman legionary used it to hitch up his toga when he lost a button, and it's been lying in the ground ever since waiting to be found.

But who'd have thought they knew about safety-pins all that time ago? Especially as the design of the pin is almost identical with that of modern ones, except that it was made in bronze and by hand instead of being a steel one produced at the rate of thousands an hour by a super-efficient machine.

The only improvement over the Roman pin that you will find in a modern version is in that sheet metal flange now used to conceal the point of the pin. The fellow who invented that flange, by the way, made himself a fortune and died worth

To Irish Free State Readers.

Readers in the Irish Free State are requested to note that when free gifts are offered with the GEM, they can only be supplied when the article is of a non-dutiable character.

about £50,000. A similarly lucky invention was the metal Blakey for fitting to the soles of boots, which netted several thousands for its originator.

Another money-making idea was putting a wire into the rims of pneumatic tyres—it brought its inventor £100 a day in royalties. Any of you fellows who get hold of golden wheezes like that can count yourselves on "Easy Street" for life!

TRICKY TORPEDOES.

It was a nice fine day, and the sea was calm, so the captain of a Swedish naval destroyer decided to give his men a little practice in torpedo-firing. Into its firing tube slid the torpedo, careful aim was taken at the target, and then came the command "Fire!"

Out into the sea sped the missile, heading straight for its objective. But suddenly the watching sailors saw it turn in the water and come speeding back to the ship at 30 m.p.h. It hit the vessel full amidships, smashing a great hole in her side. Of course, the torpedo was a dummy one and contained no high explosive charge, or the damage would have been far worse.

What had happened was that something went amiss with the gyroscopic directional gear used to keep the torpedo on a straight course. This directional gear is an amazing gadget, but it is rarely absolutely accurate, and all torpedoes on British ships are tested to see what allowances must be made for errors in the mechanism. Then, should the torpedoes be required in actual warfare, the directional gear can be set to compensate for the errors. Drift due to currents in the water is allowed for in the same way.

"KISSING THE LADY"!

Walking round the docks of the Port of London the other day, I saw an ancient ceremony being carried out aboard a big Finnish sailing ship, the Lawhill, lying against a quay. Like most old sailing ships, the Lawhill has a figurehead, and a sailor was cleaning this down ready for repainting. Sailors call this business of washing the figurehead "kissing the lady," and have a superstition that if the job is not done properly the vessel will meet with bad luck on her next voyage.

Old-time figureheads were not always just ornaments. The "wooden walls" to which they were fitted counted ramming as one of the best ways of fighting, and the heavy wooden figureheads helped to put a little extra "beef" into the business. This applied to merchant ships as well as men-o'-war, for there was always the danger of attack by pirates.

THE LAKE MONSTER.

What is the secret of Loch Ness, a big lake in the North of Scotland, where dozens of people say they have seen an enormous creature quite unlike any bird, beast, or reptile known to man? According to the reports of local fishermen and others who claim to have seen this monster, it is about thirty feet long and has an eel-like head on the end of a lengthy scaly neck. When the first reports of the creature were made nobody would believe in its existence, but so many people now claim to have seen the beast that there is talk of trawling the lake to see if the monster can be made to show itself.

One man tried to take a photograph of what he thought to be the monster, but his photograph, when developed, only showed a big patch of disturbed water. If the trawl is made, photographers will be on the spot to get pictures of the alleged creature.

THE EDITOR.

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THE BOY FROM THE UNDERWORLD!

(Continued from page 12.)

"Gussy means always stick to the truth, and keep your word, and wash yourself, and clean your teeth, and be decent generally," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Oh, I see, sir."

"We shall be in in half an hour," Arthur Augustus remarked, taking out his famous gold ticker and glancing at it. Joe's eyes glinted on the gold watch.

He fell into silence for some time, and presently asked Tom Merry the hour. Tom Merry took out his watch to tell him. It was a silver, serviceable watch.

"Thanky, sir!" said Joe.

The juniors changed at Wayland Junction for Rylcombe. They found a carriage to themselves on the local train and rushed off through the snowy countryside towards the school.

Joe looked out of the windows in great interest and wonder.

The wide sweep of country, the leafless trees standing white in the forest, the long hedges, and masses of dark wood amazed him.

It was a change from the smoke and grime of a great city such as he had never experienced before.

"Crikey!" he exclaimed in an undertone many times as the train swept on.

"We shall be in before the chaps are out from aftahnoon classes," said Arthur Augustus, putting his hand to his pocket for his watch.

Then he uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"Gweat Scott!"

The juniors all looked round at him. The swell of St. Jim's was upon his feet, the greatest dismay written in his face.

"What's the matter, Gussy?"

"What's the biting you, dear boy?"

"My watch!"

"Rats! Watches can't bite!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"What's the matter with your watch?" asked Tom Merry.

"It's gone!"

"Gone!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, rot!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"It's not half an hour since you told us the time by it."

"Yaas, but—"

"You put it back in the wrong pocket."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Well, look!"

"I have looked!"

"Look again!"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Look!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Oh, vewy well!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy searched through all his pockets. Then he held up his empty hands.

"It's gone, deah boys!"

"Let us look!" said Monty Lowther.

"Weally, you know—"

"Pile in!" said Lowther.

The swell of St. Jim's was searched. The juniors turned out all his pockets, and Monty Lowther even poked a fountain-pen down his back to see if the watch was there. It wasn't!

The watch—the famous twenty-five guinea gold ticker—was gone!

It was evident that Arthur Augustus had had his pocket picked.

Joe did not take part in the search. He sat looking on at the scene with keen, twinkling eyes.

But his assistance was not needed. The Terrible Three reduced Arthur Augustus

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MICK O'THE M

Our Thrilling Picture-Story of the Wild

Mick Ray is taking Plug Kelly, a crook, down to headquarters when the prisoner escapes. boy's father is gold prospecting. Later, Jim falls into Kelly's hands, and Mick and Forster father, who is snow-blind. Mick carries on alone; but in the night, Forster d



"Stop, you hound! Drop that poker or I'll shoot!" With gun in hand, Forster rushed forward into the glow of the campfire, even as Plug Kelly was about to torture the helpless Jim Bates.

Kelly swung round with a startled cry, and in the same movement he hurled the red-hot poker at the Mountie. Forster fired, but in ducking to avoid the missile, his shot missed Kelly by inches.

What ha them to ta bolted, dres through th



"Got to stop them somehow!" panted Mick, and snapped into action at once. Racing over the snow towards the dogs, he managed to grab their harness just as they were on the lip of the deep crevasse!

"That was a narrow squeak! How you feeling, Jim?" Mick asked as he released the boy. "I'm O.K.," answered Jim, "and thanks for saving my life. Now we must get back—Forster has found Kelly!"

The dogs and Jim we they found snow, but t follow his t



The trail led back to where the Mountie, had left Jim's father, who was snow-blind. Kelly was threatening Angus Bates with a revolver when Mick approached. "Tell me where you struck gold?" he was saying.

"Hands up, Kelly!" shouted Mick. "I've got you—" Crack! Desperate. Kelly turned and fired. Mick reeled, wounded in the arm, but his own weapon spat lead and Kelly fell to the ground.

Mick soon no more wounded. the scene. forward in

THE MOUNTED!

story of the Wild West!

the prisoner escapes. With Mick is Jim Bates, of whom Kelly was guardian while the and Mick did Forster, a fellow Mountie, follow the crook's trail. They meet Jim's the night, Forster discovers Kelly menacing Jim with a red-hot bar of iron!



What happened next was unexpected. The hot poker fell near the dogs, causing them to take fright. Next moment they bolted, dragging Jim, tied to the sled, through the snow after them.

Snarling and howling, the terrified dogs raced onwards—and were sighted by a solitary figure in uniform. "Gosh, that's Jim—and those dogs are heading for this crevasse!" gasped Mick Ray.



The dogs were now recovered, so Mick and Jim went back to Kelly's camp. There they found Forster lying unconscious in the snow, but there was no sign of Kelly. "I'll follow his trail," said Mick.

Footprints in the snow clearly indicated which way Kelly had gone, and while Jim attended to Forster, Mick set out after his quarry. "He's escaped me once, but I'll get him this time!" he vowed.



Mick soon saw that Plug Kelly would give no more trouble; the scoundrel was wounded. Then Forster and Jim came on the scene. "Dad!" cried Jim, and ran forward into the arms of his father.

Kelly went to prison—and Mick is now Corporal Ray! Some weeks later he received a visit from two old friends—Jim Bates and his father, who had now recovered from his snow-blindness.

to several sorts of a wreck in their search.

D'Arcy plumped down on a seat breathlessly.

"You see, it's gone, deah boys!"

"Looks like it," said Tom Merry perplexedly. "But how on earth did you manage to lose it since you looked at it last, Gussy?"

"It's been taken, you ass."

"Taken by whom?"

"Some beastly pickpocket."

"But you had it in the train?"

"That was before we changed at Wayland," said Monty Lowther. "There was rather a crowd at the junction."

"Yaas, wathah! I wemembah someone pushed against me vewy wudely while I was helpin' Joe into the cawwiage!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, I suppose your pocket was picked at Wayland, Gussy, when we come to think of it. It's rather rotten!"

"It's vewy wotten, deah boy. You see, that watch was a pwesent fwom my gov'nah, and I simply must get it back somehow."

"H'm!"

"I've lost it before, you know, and got it back," said D'Arcy, in distress. "I trust I shall get it back this time. It's vewy wotten!"

"Better go straight to the police as soon as we get into Rylcombe," said Tom Merry. "They will telegraph a description of the watch to Wayland, and so to London."

"Yaas, I suppose so."

The train stopped in Rylcombe Station.

CHAPTER 11.

A Gift for Tom.

TOM MERRY & CO. left the station, Tom linking his arm in Joe's.

The little ragamuffin of the city looked round in wonder.

The quiet of the old streets, the old-fashioned cottages within a stone's throw of the station, the big trees growing outside the building astonished the street arab.

"Crikey!" was all he could say.

"We'll cut off to the police station at once, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "It won't make us much later at St. Jim's."

"Vewy well, deah boy!"

Joe pulled at Tom Merry's arm. The junior looked down at him. There was a very alarmed expression upon Joe's face.

"Where are you going, Master Tom?" he asked.

"To the police station."

"You ain't taking me there?"

"Yes. Why not?"

Joe's face was visibly troubled.

"I—I'd rather not go," he said. "The police—they don't like me! They chivy a chap so, a-moving of him on!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"You won't get moved on here, Joe."

"May I stay outside, sir?" asked Joe.

"My dear lad, they won't hurt you."

Joe hung back.

"I suppose he's had some wathah unpleasant expwience of the police, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, in a low tone. "Better take him on to the coll, while I go to the station, you know."

"Oh, all right!" said Tom Merry.

"Come on with me, Joe. You fellows go with Gussy, and see that he explains it properly to the police."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"So-long!"

Tom Merry strode off towards Rylcombe Lane with Joe, leaving D'Arcy and Manners and Lowther to go to the police station.

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Joe trotted along beside Tom Merry in contented silence for a time.

True, his feet were beginning to ache considerably, but Joe's experience had always been that he had a pain or an ache somewhere, and it was no worse in the feet than anywhere else.

Joe's training had made him a philosopher. The poet assures us that there was never a philosopher that could endure the toothache; but the poor of a great city have worse things than toothache to endure with what patience they can.

Joe trotted along beside the hero of the Shell, unheeding his tight boots, and the expression upon his face showed that he was happy and content.

Tom Merry glanced down at him with an amused look more than once.

"How do you like the country, Joe?" he asked.

Joe grinned.

"Oh, it's spiffing!" he said.

"There's St. Jim's!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

He pointed to the grey tower rising over the leafless trees. Joe gazed at it with the keenest interest. A curious shade of thoughtfulness came over his brow.

"That's where you used to live, Master Tom?" he asked.

"Yes, Joe."

"Afore you lost your money and came to London?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry, with a smile.

"I'll like to see it, Master Tom."

"It's my school again now, thanks to my uncle," said Tom Merry—"and it's going to be your school, too, Joe."

"Thanks to you, Master Tom."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Thanks to your good-heartedness when I was hard up in Blucher's Buildings, Joe," he replied. "You're only yourself to thank."

Joe shook his head.

BILLY

BUNTER'S

CONVICT!



FIFTY pounds reward for information leading to the capture of Convict 191 And Billy Bunter, of Greyfriars, runs up against him—and gets the fright of his fat life! But Bunter can't forget that fifty pounds, and when a new master, exactly like the escaped convict, arrives at Greyfriars, Bunter gets busy! Read what happens in the best book-length school story of the month. Ask for No. 211 of

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"I know 'ow much I owe you, Master Tom," he said. "I ain't forgettin' it. I shan't never forget it, and I'd die for you any day, I would straight. Look 'ere, Master Tom, you ain't got so much money as that other cove, 'ave you?"

"What cove?" asked Tom Merry, with a laugh.

"Im with the glass eye."

"Ha, ha, ha! Gussy? No; Gussy is much richer."

"'E 'as a gold watch, 'e 'as?"

"Well, he had."

"And you 'ave a silver one, Master Tom?"

"Yes, Joe. Most of the fellows have silver watches. It's considered rather swanky for a junior to have a gold watch, but D'Arcy is a bit out of the ordinary, you know. We make allowances for Gussy."

"But you'd like a gold watch, Master Tom?" persisted Joe.

Tom Merry looked a little puzzled. He did not quite see what Joe was driving at.

"Yes, I suppose so," he said. "I suppose every chap would like to have a gold watch."

"You can have one, Master Tom."

"How do you mean, Joe?"

"I can get you one."

Tom Merry stared at him.

"You, Joe?"

"That's it, Master Tom—me!"

"Blessed if I understand you, Joe."

"Come 'ere, Master Tom," said Joe very mysteriously. And he drew Tom Merry into the cover of a high hedge.

"Look 'ere, that's for you."

Tom Merry gazed at him speechlessly as he drew a gold watch from a pocket and held it to him.

The sun glistened upon the gold case.

Tom Merry glanced at it, deprived of speech for the moment. He could only stare at the gold timekeeper in blank astonishment. For it was D'Arcy's famous watch.

Tom Merry stared at the gold watch in Joe's hand, and Joe looked anxiously at Tom Merry.

The blank amazement in Tom's face seemed to disconcert him.

"It's the real thing, Master Tom," he said.

"Joe!"

"And it's yours, Master Tom."

"That's D'Arcy's watch!"

"It was 'is; it's yours now."

Tom Merry looked at him.

The thing was so surprising, so utterly unexpected, that the junior was taken hopelessly aback.

"Do—do you mean to say that you stole D'Arcy's watch, Joe?" he gasped out at last.

"Pinched it!"

Joe grinned.

"Good heavens!"

"Yes; when we were changing carriages."

"Joe!"

"Put it in your pocket, Master Tom, afore anybody sees it."

Tom Merry took the watch mechanically.

He was beginning to realise now what it meant to take charge of a lad who had had the training poor Joe had had.

Brought up in a den of poverty and thievery, taught to steal before he was taught to write, poor Joe had very vague ideas of the rights of property.

The wickedness of stealing had never been brought home to his consciousness. To steal came as easily to him as to lie, and to lie came more easily than to tell the truth.

The growing horror in Tom Merry's face struck the boy from the underworld. His face took on a more anxious expression.

"You—you ain't wild with me, Master Tom," he said falteringly.

"Yes, Joe, I am very angry with you," said Tom Merry quietly.

Joe's eyes dilated.

"Wot 'ave I done?" he muttered, his voice showing signs of a coming whimper. "I wanted you to 'ave the watch, Master Tom."

"It is D'Arcy's watch."

"Not now I've pinched it."

"Don't you understand, Joe, that what you call pinching is stealing, and that stealing is one of the meanest, basest, most cowardly of all things?" exclaimed Tom Merry sternly.

"Oh, Master Tom!"

Joe began to cry.

Tom Merry's anger melted away at once at the sight of the tears in the eyes of the little wastrel of the London slums.

After all, what had Joe done more than he was trained to do? The poor little wretch knew no better.

"There! Don't blub, Joe!" Tom Merry exclaimed hastily.

"I suppose you didn't mean any harm. But if this should be known at St. Jim's—if it should ever happen again—you'd be kicked out of the school!"

"Oh, Master Tom!"
 "Promise me, Joe—mind, a sacred promise—that you'll never take any more things that don't belong to you."
 "Yes, Master Tom."
 "Promise, Joe!"
 "I—I swear it, Master Tom."
 "Don't swear it—promise!"
 "I promise," said Joe.
 "And mind, Joe, a promise has to be kept. Breaking a promise is only one degree less rotten than stealing."
 "Yes, Master Tom," said Joe submissively.
 "Remember, Joe—never lie, never steal, and never break your word," said Tom Merry. "Stick to that, and you'll get through all right."
 "Yes, Master Tom."
 "Now, we must let Gussy know his watch is all right—"
 "You're going to give it back to 'im?"
 "Of course!"
 "Crikey!"
 "And you will have to confess to him and beg his pardon, Joe."

"I'll do anything you tell me, Master Tom."
 "That's right, kid!"
 Tom Merry turned back towards Rylcombe. He walked quickly, and the two of them arrived at the police station just as D'Arcy and Lowther and Manners were leaving it.
 D'Arcy stared at them through his eyeglass.
 "Bai Jove! I undahstood that you were goin' on to the coll, deah boy."

"We've found the watch," said Tom Merry abruptly.
 "What!"
 "Here it is!"
 "Gweat Scott!"
 "You'd better cut into the station and tell them it's found," said Tom Merry.
 D'Arcy looked at the watch in amazement.
 "But where did you find it?"
 "I'll tell you afterwards."
 "But I shall have to explain—"
 "Oh, simply say it's found! That will do."
 "But—"
 "My dear Gussy, there's nothing more to say!"
 "But what will they think?"
 "Whatever they like."
 "Oh, vevy well!"

D'Arcy re-entered the police station. The chums remained waiting for him in the street. Lowther and Manners were looking very curious, but they did not say a word. They waited for the explanation to come.
 Arthur Augustus appeared in a few minutes, looking very red and indignant.

"All right?" asked Tom Merry.
 "The inspectah was vevy wude," said D'Arcy. "He said that if I came here with any more of my larks he would box my yahs! I wplied that I should uttally wefuse to have my yahs boxed undah any circes whatevah, and a gweat wuff policeman pushed me quite wudely!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "It's no laughin' mattah, Tom Mewwy! A fellow has to considah his dig."

"Come on, Gussy!"
 "Undah the circes—"

"Yes. We shall be late at coll, you know."
 D'Arcy was still looking considerably exasperated as they walked down the lane together.

He evidently considered that his dignity had not been fully acknowledged by the persons at the police station.

"I should be vevy glad of an explanation now," he remarked frigidly. "Did you take my watch for a wotten joke, Tom Mewwy?"

"No."
 "Then how did you get it?"

"Joe had it."
 "Joe!"

"Yes, Joe!"
 Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass severely upon Joe. Joe hung his head. The full enormity of his action was far from being revealed to him. But he understood that he had done something that was universally condemned in the new world he was now entering.

"Joe! You have played that wotten jape on me!"
 "Oh, sir—"

"Joe stole your watch, Gussy," said Tom Merry quietly.
 "He gave it to me because I have only a silver one."

"Gweat Scott!"
 "My hat!" said Monty Lowther.

Manners grinned.
 He could not help it. The matter was serious enough, and yet there was something funny in the poor ragamuffin stealing a watch and giving it to Tom Merry, thinking that Tom would keep it.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "You awful young wascal!"
 "Tell him you're sorry, Joe!"

"I'm sorry, sir," said Joe.
 "But—but you can't take that sort of person to St. Jim's, Tom Mewwy! It's howwible!" exclaimed D'Arcy.
 "Oh, sir—"
 "I want you to look over it, Gussy. Joe didn't know any better; it's owing to his rotten training," said Tom Merry. "He's promised never to do anything of the sort again."
 "Oh, yes, sir!" said Joe eagerly. "I'll never, never—"
 "Bai Jove!"
 "You'll keep it dark, you fellows?"
 "Certainly!" said Manners. "But—"
 "Yes, rather!" replied Lowther. "But—"
 "Joe won't do it again."
 "Never, sir! Wish I may die if I do!" exclaimed Joe.
 "What a howwid expression."
 "Say honour bright, Joe," said Tom Merry. "Wish I may die" would hardly do for St. Jim's!"
 "Honour bright, Master Tom!" said Joe obediently.
 "Do you know what that means, Joe?" asked Monty Lowther suspiciously.
 "No, sir," said Joe candidly.
 The chums could not help laughing.
 "Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "I wathah think that Joe will want some twainin'. Howeveh, I am quite

MISUNDERSTOOD.



Artist: "I'd like to paint you. I'll pay you if you'll sit for me."

Yokel: "Yes, but how do I get the paint off after?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to H. Gorman, 11, Peter Street, Brick Lane, London, E.2.

willin' to take him in hand. I flattah myself that I have a vevy good influence on youngstahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Weally, you wottahs—"
 "Come on, Gussy!"
 And the chums walked on to St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 12.

Joe and the Head!

THERE was no one in the quadrangle when the juniors arrived at the school.

Afternoon lessons were still in progress, and from some of the lower class-rooms came a hum of voices.

Taggles, the school porter, came out of his lodge and looked at the juniors, and bestowed a second look upon little Joe.

Joe, in his new and respectable clothes, looked decent enough; but there was something about him that betrayed him to Taggles' eye as not an ordinary new boy for the school.

"Which this is the new boy, Master Merry?" Taggles asked.

"Yes, Taggy."

"Box to be carried in, sir?" said Taggles.

"No," said Tom. "There will be a box later."

"I ain't got no box," said Joe.

"One will be sent for you later, Joe," said Tom Merry.

"Thankee, sir!"

Taggles stared blankly at Joe.

Such language, and such an accent he had certainly never heard before within the precincts of St. Jim's.

"Is this one of your little jokes, Master Merry?" he asked, staring. "That ain't a new boy for the school, I know that!"

"Yes, it is, Taggy!"

"What's his name, sir?"

"Joe!"

"Joe what, sir?"

"What's your other name, Joe?"

"Ain't got no other name, sir!" said Joe cheerfully.

"My word!" gasped Taggles.

And he stared after the juniors as they walked on across the quadrangle.

Taggles rubbed his nose and rubbed his chin. He was very dubious as to whether he ought to have allowed Joe to enter at all.

"I suppose it's true, as Master Merry says so," murmured Taggles. "But it's a disgrace, that's wot it is! Nice goings hon, I must say!"

And the school porter retreated into his lodge in disgust. Tom Merry and his comrades marched Joe on to the School House. Taggles' surprise and disgust that a person of his own class should come to St. Jim's was rather amusing than otherwise. But Tom Merry was really feeling a little uneasy as to what the Head might think about the matter.

True, he had told Mr. Poinsett that Joe should come to St. Jim's. But the rancher had not known exactly what Joe was like. And probably he had not thought of telling the Head all he knew. Neither, probably, had he given the matter much thought. Poor boys had come to St. Jim's before, and the Head probably thought that Joe would be like one or two good, hardworking lads who had come to the school at different times with scholarships.

He would have a surprise when he saw Joe.

"Mind, don't talk more than you can help," said Tom Merry. "I'm going to take you to see the Head. Be as silent as you can."

"Yes, Master Tom."

"And treat the Head with great respect."

"Yes, Master Tom."

Joe hesitated a moment.

"I suppose 'e'll ask me questions?" he said.

"I suppose so."

"And I tell 'im the truth, sir?"

"Yes, certainly!"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"

"Orlright," said Joe.

"Don't say all right, Joe, old chap—say very well!"

"I suppose I'd better come to the Head's study with you, Tom Mewwy," Arthur Augustus remarked. "You will probably make some fearful howlah othahwise!"

"Rats!" said Tom Merry.

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Buzz off, Gussy—and you chaps, too! I'll take Joe in alone!"

"I'm afwaid you will make some awful bloomah, Tom Mewwy."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I'll risk it, Gussy."

"But undah the circs—"

"More rats!"

"You uttah ass!"

"I'm off. See you chaps later."

And Tom Merry linked arms with Joe and walked him off to the Head's study. The School House page brought him a message from the Head. Dr. Holmes was engaged in the Sixth Form class-room, and Tom Merry was to wait for him in his study.

Joe gazed round the Head's study in amazement, and when Tom Merry made him sit down he sat down on the extreme edge of a chair.

The cosy, comfortably-furnished room, the walls lined with bookcases, with the titles on the books in many languages, struck Joe with an oppressive sense of his future headmaster's greatness and learning.

"I—I say, Master Tom," murmured Joe nervously, as if afraid that the sound of his voice would awake scaring echoes.

"Yes, Joe?"

"Wot is the 'Ead like?"

"A kind gentleman," said Tom Merry. "One of the best and kindest men in England, Joe. You will like him."

"Thank you, Merry," said a voice at the door.

Tom Merry swung round with scarlet cheeks as Dr. Holmes came in.

"Oh, sir!" he said.

The Head smiled.

"Never mind, Merry. I know you did not mean me to hear," he said. "Is this the new boy—the lad your uncle has so kindly taken charge of?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry, still very much confused.

"Stand up, my boy!" said the Head, frowning a little. Joe evidently did not know that he was expected to rise when his headmaster entered the room.

"Yes, sir," said Joe.

"What is your name, my boy?"

"Joe, sir."

"Your surname?"

"Joe, sir."

The Head smiled.

"But you have another name besides Joe," he said.

"I ain't, sir."

"Oh!"

Dr. Holmes gave Tom Merry a quick glance, and Tom coloured more deeply. He stood silent and uneasy while the peculiar interview proceeded.

"But you have a surname?" said the Head.

"What's that, sir?"

"Another name you are called by as well as Joe," said the Head.

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A light of comprehension gleamed in Joe's eyes.

"Oh, I catch on, sir!" he exclaimed. "Yes, sir, I 'ad another name in Blucher's Buildings, sir, cert."

"What did they call you?"

"Bones, sir."

"What?" ejaculated the Head.

"Bones, sir," said Joe innocently.

"But—but that is not your name?"

"Oh, no, sir! They called me Bones because I was skinny," said Joe. "Come through not 'avin' enough to eat, sir. Bones and Rags are werry common names in Blucher's Buildings, sir; 'cause why—we was most bones and rags, sir."

The Head stepped back a pace.

"Bless my soul!" he murmured.

Tom Merry was mute.

"Then you have no other name, my lad?" asked the Head, in a very gentle voice.

"Ain't got one, sir, that I knows on."

"But what was your father called?"

"Whisky Face, sir."

"Wh-what?"

"Leastways, that's wot they called 'im be'ind 'is back, sir," said Joe. "When they was talkin' to 'im they'd call 'im Bill."

"Dear me!"

"'Cause why?" exclaimed Joe. "'E would 'ave knocked any of 'em in Blucher's Buildings dead hout with one tap on the smeller."

"Oh!"

"Even the captain never rubbed up father the wrong way, sir," said Joe. "'E was a terror, 'e was. 'E broke out worse'n ever when 'e came back from quad, sir."

Tom Merry trembled for his protegee.

The expression on the Head's face was too awful to look upon. The old gentleman was in a state that the juniors would have described—correctly—as knocked into a cocked hat. He seemed to be unable to catch his breath. He could only gaze at Joe, of Blucher's Buildings, with wide-open eyes.

"Dear me!" gasped the Head at last.

Joe stood waiting to be questioned further. Tom Merry had warned him to tell the truth, and he was doing it with a vengeance.

"But was your father called by no name?" asked Dr. Holmes, determined to get at the bottom of the surname mystery, at all events.

"Oh, yes, sir. Before 'e went to quod 'e was called John Smith, sir, and sometimes Fred Brown, sir. When 'e came hout he was William Davis, and last of all 'e was Bill Frayne."

"Oh!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the Head. "It is possible that the boy does not know what his own father's real name was?"

"Never thort about it, sir," said Joe.

"Dear me! Please wait outside, my lad, while I speak to Merry."

"Suttin'g, sir!"

And Joe left the study and closed the door. Dr. Holmes turned to Tom Merry with an expression upon his face that made the junior's heart sink.

CHAPTER 13.

A Chance for the Waif!

"MERRY!" Dr. Holmes spoke firmly.

"Yes, sir!" said Tom Merry as bravely as he could.

"Is—is that the boy you asked your uncle to send to this school?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"Do you think St. Jim's is a suitable place for him?"

Tom Merry was silent.

"Do you think he is suitable for this place?"

Still no reply.

But the dismay and discomfort in Tom Merry's face touched the Head and his look and his tone became softer as he proceeded.

"I suppose you felt yourself bound by some ties to this lad, Merry?"

"He was kind to me when I needed it, sir," said Tom Merry. "I couldn't forget that. And I had promised him that I'd stand by him if I ever came into good luck again."

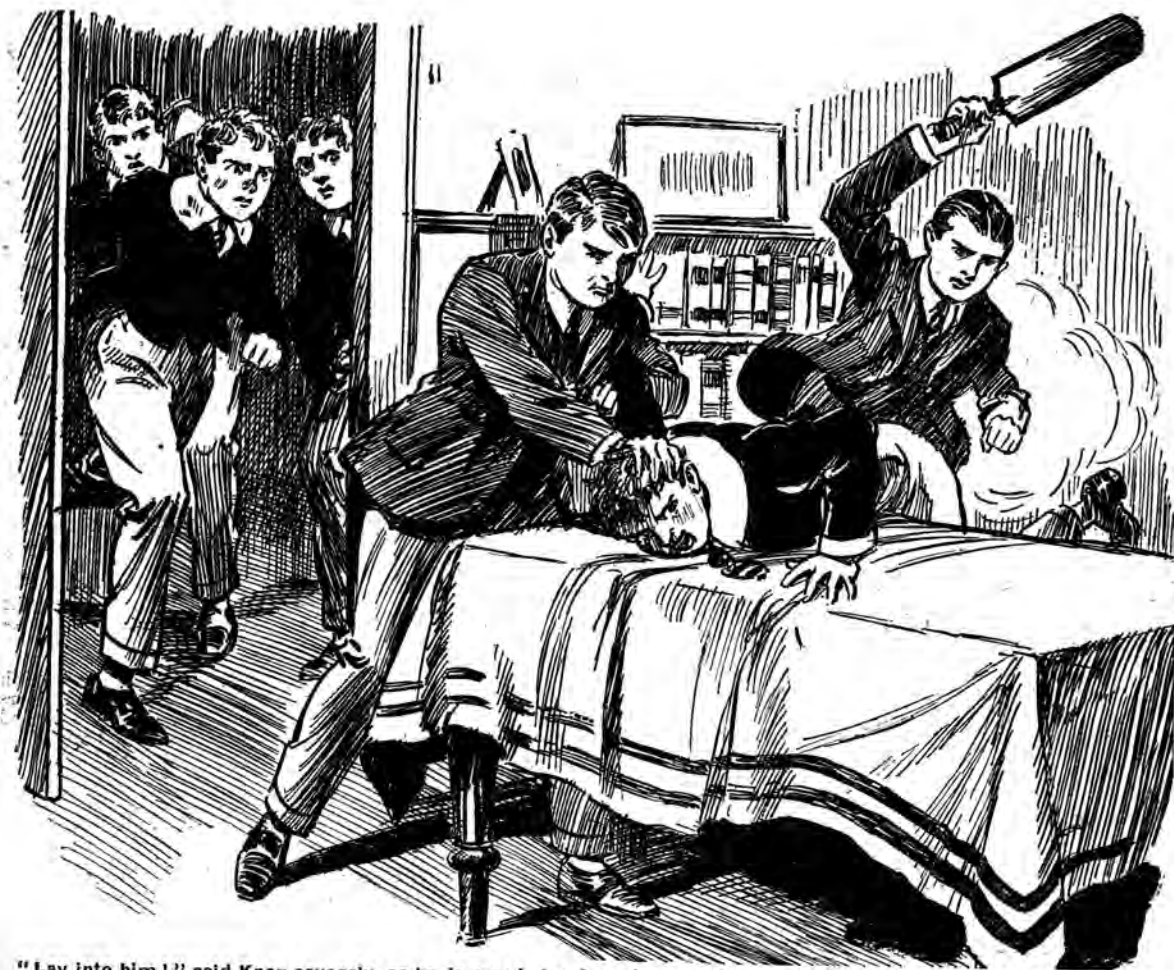
Dr. Holmes nodded.

"Quite right, Merry! I cannot but approve of that—quite right! But a totally uneducated slum-dweller, the son of a convict at St. Jim's!"

Tom Merry was silent.

"You see how incongruous it is, Merry?"

"I suppose so, sir."



"Lay into him!" said Knox savagely, as he jammed Joe face downwards on the table. "What-ho!" said Mellish, Lash, lash! The cricket bat rose and fell. Then suddenly the study door burst open and Tom Merry & Co. appeared, looking damaged and dishevelled. But without hesitation Tom rushed fiercely at Knox.

"The worst of the matter is that I have promised Mr. Poinsett to take him, and have accepted a cheque for three terms' fees in advance," said the Head musingly.

Tom Merry's eyes lighted a little. Under these circumstances it would be exceedingly difficult for the Head to send Joe away—he realised that.

"But it is really most unpleasant," said the Head—"most disagreeable. How can I allow such a lad to associate with the boys here?"

"I think the best fellows would help him on, sir," said Tom Merry. "I know I and my best friends would stick to him and help him."

"Quite right, Merry. But you remember the case of Binks. It was arranged that he should be a pupil here, but on reflection he saw himself that it would be better for him to put in a few terms at another school first—a school—ahem!—not exactly of the same standing as St. Jim's!"

"Yes, sir."

"As for this boy—"

"He's got a heart of gold, sir," said Tom Merry. "His manners and—speech—and other things can be improved. We'll all look after him, sir. I do hope you'll give him a chance. We found him in London being beaten with a buckled strap by his father, who was half-intoxicated, sir."

"Bless my soul!"

"He's covered with weals and bruises, sir, from head to foot," said Tom Merry. "We saw it when we bathed him. He's had an awful time, sir. If you'd give him a chance here I know he'd improve. And—and, after all, sir; we're supposed to take some trouble, and even to run some risk, to help others who've been less fortunate than ourselves, sir. I remember you saying so in your sermon last Sunday, sir."

Dr. Holmes was silent.

Tom Merry was speaking with earnest sincerity, and all unconsciously he had placed the Head in a difficult position.

Dr. Holmes would have been very sorry to give the impression to a junior that he had one set of principles in the pulpit and another set out of it.

"Under the circumstances, Merry, I do not see how I can refuse to give the boy a trial," he said. "But it must be understood that he is under your care to a large extent, and in case of any outrageous conduct on his part I shall hold you responsible."

"I'm quite willing, sir."

"Is he honest?"

"I believe he is now, sir."

"That means that he has stolen?"

"You haven't seen Blucher's Buildings, sir. It's a place where they breed thieves like—like maggots in rotten fruit," said Tom Merry. "The poor kid was brought up to steal just as he learned to breathe."

The Head shuddered.

"But if he were to steal here, Merry—"

"He has promised me not to, sir."

"You think he will keep that promise?"

"I'm sure of it, sir."

"Does he use decent language?"

Tom Merry coloured.

"I am afraid he used to swear, like all the people he knew, sir; but when I was in Blucher's Buildings, I spoke to him about it. I only spoke once, sir, but he never swore again after that."

"Ah, that shows that there is something in the lad!" said the Head slowly. "We shall see. Very well, Merry, I can only say that he shall have a chance."

"Thank you so much, sir!"

And Tom Merry quitted the Head's study, feeling very much relieved.

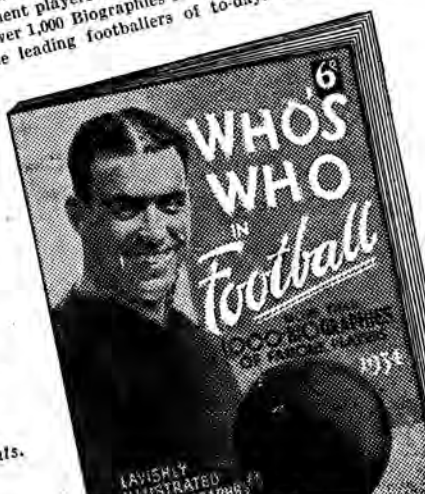
He found Joe waiting for him in the passage.

Joe's face wore a peculiar twist, and Tom Merry looked at him quickly and inquiringly.

"What is the matter, Joe?"
 "Nothing, sir!"
 "Have you got the toothache?"
 "No, sir."
 "You've got a pain of some sort."
 Joe was silent.
 "What is it, Joe? The truth, now!" said Tom Merry.
 "Well, it's the boots, sir," said Joe reluctantly.
 "The boots! Are they tight?" asked Tom Merry, glancing down at Joe's well-clad feet.
 "Ye-es, Master Tom."
 "Have they been hurting you long, Joe?"
 "Ye-es, sir."
 "Since when?"
 "Since I put them on, sir."
 Tom Merry frowned with annoyance.
 "Why didn't you tell me before, Joe?" he exclaimed.
 "Not arter the young gentleman was so kind as to buy 'em for me, sir," said Joe. "I wouldn't be so thankless, sir!"
 "You young ass! Another time just say so. Come up to my study and take them off."
 "Yes, Master Tom."
 Tom Merry took Joe up to his study. Manners and Lowther were there, boiling the kettle and making toast for tea. A great many Shell fellows were in the passage, evidently having heard about Joe, and were anxious to see him. There was a shout as Tom Merry was seen piloting his protegee along the Shell passage.
 "Here he is!" shouted Gore.
 "Hallo! Here's the new kid!"
 "What's your name, kiddie?"
 "Who's your father?"
 "Where are you from?"
 "Oh, let him alone!" said Tom Merry. "He's tired after a journey, and he wants a rest. Come into the study, Joe."
 "Orlright, sir," said Joe.
 "Orlright!" gasped Mellish of the Fourth. "My only hat, what a voice! What a giddy accent! Where did you dig him up, Tom Merry?"
 "Mind your own business, Mellish!"
 "Is that chap really coming to St. Jim's?" asked Mellish.
 "Yes, he is!"
 "Great Scott!"
 "My hat!"

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Tom Merry, with a very red face, pushed Joe into the study, and closed the door. It was opened again almost immediately, and Mellish, the cad of the Fourth, looked in.
 "Let's have another look at your workhouse kid," he said, in his amiable tone.

"You cad!" shouted Tom Merry. "Get out!"
 Mellish held the handle of the door, ready to slam it and run if Tom Merry made a movement towards him. He did not see that Monty Lowther had quietly picked up a pat of butter from the table, and was unostentatiously drawing back his hand to throw it.

"Oh rats!" said Mellish. "We haven't had such a nice kid here, you know, since that ragamuffin you brought from Liverpool—what was his name—Erbert! Oh, yes, there was Binks, too! But this chap takes the cake! What I admire most is his accent! I—Ow! Ooooooh!"
 The pat of butter whizzed through the air, and squashed fairly in Mellish's eye.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Monty Lowther. "Bullseye first shot!"

"Groooooch!"
 "Give him some jam with the butter!" exclaimed Manners.

But Mellish did not wait for the jam.
 He slammed the door and ran, gouging the butter frantically out of his eye. He did not look in at Tom Merry's study again.

CHAPTER 14.

Joe Has Tea!

MONTY LOWTHER had a queer expression upon his face as he placed the big dish of toast on the table. Manners was looking a little curious, too, as he brought the teapot on the scene.

Tom Merry understood very well what those expressions meant, and he was feeling uncomfortable enough.

His taking up of Joe was likely to prove a bigger order than he had ever dreamt of. The reception Joe had met with so far had been very mixed; but it could not be doubted that at least half the fellows he had seen had been hostile.

It was probable that the greater part of the lower school would be injured and insulted by the introduction of a street arab into their ranks.

It would be, to some extent, a natural feeling. Joe would require great care before he could mix with the other fellows on equal terms.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry believed that the waif of the London slums had plenty of good in him.

But he could hardly expect the other fellows to take that on trust.

There was trouble ahead!
 Tom Merry knew it, but he did not shrink from it. He had said that he would stand by Joe, and stand by him he would, through thick and thin.

Joe stood looking at the table. He had seldom seen a table so clean and neat before, which was saying a great deal, for there were many stains of coffee and tea on the cloth, and the crockery had hardly two articles of a similar pattern.

"Sit down, Joe," said Lowther.
 "Thank you, sir!"
 "And take your boots off," said Tom Merry.
 Lowther stared.
 "Hang it all," he exclaimed, "this isn't a Turkish mosque, where you have to take your boots off before entering!"
 Tom Merry laughed.

"Joe's boots are too tight, and they're hurting him," he exclaimed. "Gussy got them a size too small."

"Just like Gussy!"
 "Weally, Lowthah—" said a voice at the door.
 "Hallo!" said Tom Merry. "You'd better fetch Joe a pair of slippers—his boots are too tight!"

"Certainly, deah boy!"
 Joe changed into them with great comfort.
 "Thankee kindly, sir!" he said.
 "I've looked in to see how you're getting on with the kid," said D'Arcy. "If I can be of any use, I twust you will not neglect to call upon me."

"What-ho!" said Lowther. "You ought to make yourself useful, Gussy. People who can't be ornamental should always try to be useful."

"Weally, Lowthah—" "Sit down to tea, Gussy. We're getting on all right so far with Joe, and he's going to play up like anything."

"Crikey!" said Joe, as his teeth closed on the hot, buttered toast, so that the words came out in a rather smothered way. "This is spiffing!"

"Bai Jove!"
 "Crikey! Yes, rather!"
 "Pway don't say 'spiffin,' deah boy," said Arthur

Augustus D'Arey. "It's a vulgah expression. Pway say 'wippin'!"

"Wipping!" said Joe.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Terrible Three.

"Weally, deah boys," remonstrated Arthur Augustus, turning his eyes upon them reprovingly, "I twust you will not discedit my instructions in this wude mannah by unseemly laughtah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you feahful duffahs—"

"Let him make it ripping!" implored Monty Lowther.

"I wegard you as an ass, Lowthah!"

"Blessed if I know what I've done to inspire you with such brotherly regard, Gussy!"

"Bai Jove, I—I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you—"

"That's right. We know you give us your regards," said Lowther. "Pass the toast!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Pass the toast!"

"I wefuse—"

"These are what Gussy calls his table manners," said Lowther. "He says that he refuses to pass the toast."

"I did not mean I wefuse to pass the toast. I meant—"

"Never mind what you mean, so long as you pass the toast," said Lowther cheerfully. "You are really neglecting young Joe in a shocking way."

Arthur Augustus, at a loss for words, but with an eye burning with indignation, passed the toast.

Joe liked toast.

He did not say so, but his actions left no room for doubt upon the subject.

He bolted round after round. Fortunately, there was a large supply. But the butter which was intended to be eaten with the toast was largely applied by Joe to making shiny his fingers and his face.

The juniors watched Joe's behaviour curiously.

It was Tom Merry's self-imposed duty to give Joe instructions, especially in manners, but he had a natural dislike to correcting a fellow at his own table. It seemed to Tom Merry priggish to correct anybody. It was his duty in this case, but it was a most uncongenial one.

He was rather at a loss how to do it, too. Joe evidently thought that he was giving complete satisfaction.

Joe's method of drinking tea, too, was not exactly gratifying to his entertainers.

He would take the cup in both hands, and guzzle into it with a noise like that of water gurgling out of a pipe.

The chums gazed at him in dismay. Arthur Augustus D'Arey drew back unconsciously from Joe.

He was afraid that his immaculate trousers and his faultless jacket might suffer from contact with the hero of Blucher's Buildings.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured. "Bai Jove!"

Gore opened the door and looked in.

Joe was still bolting toast at top speed, and his hands and his face were shining brightly in the gaslight.

Gore stared at him.

"My only hat!" he exclaimed. "What a specimen!"

"What do you want?" asked Tom Merry irritably.

"Nothing!"

"Then buzz off!"

"But—"

"Oh, clear out!"

Monty Lowther picked up a chunk of bread, and Gore closed the door rather quickly.

"You'd better come!" he bawled through the keyhole.

"It's a House row. Blake and Digby have been collared by the New House cads, and Kangaroo told me to call you! I'm off!"

The Terrible Three and Arthur Augustus jumped up at once. A House row was a call they could not neglect. If their chums were fighting with Figgins & Co., it was their bounden duty to rush at once to the rescue.

"Come on!" exclaimed Manners breathlessly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Stay here, Joe," said Tom Merry. "Finish your tea; we'll be back by then. Don't go out of the study whatever you do."

"Orlright, Master Tom!"

"Mind you don't go out, Joe," said Tom uneasily.

He was afraid that the lad might be led to go out and look round, for sheer curiosity in his new quarters, and he knew that the juniors would be certain to capture him if he did, and probably rag him without mercy.

"I'll stay here, Master Tom."

"Honour?" said Tom.

"Honour bright, Master Tom!"

Joe had learned the meaning of that expression by this time. He evidently meant what he said, and Tom Merry was satisfied.

"Right you are, Joe!" he said.

"Come on!" roared Monty Lowther from the passage.

"I'm coming!"

And Tom Merry slammed the door and rushed after his comrades and out into the dusky quadrangle, and in less than a minute they were in the thick of the row.

CHAPTER 15.

Real Grit!

JOE sat in the study at the tea-table. A smile of beaming and happy contentment was upon Joe's face.

Joe was, in fact, happy—happier than he had ever been before in his life. Only that morning he had been writhing under the belt of the drunken convict; and here he was in the early evening, sitting at Tom Merry's table, enjoying a hitherto undreamt-of luxury—hot, buttered toast.

Joe was enjoying himself immensely.

Joe had no principles to speak of; his training had not given him any. He had learned one thing—to worship Tom Merry, and do whatever Tom Merry told him. And as Tom Merry was as fine a specimen of British boyhood as could be found in the British Isles, Joe could not have had a better guide. To do exactly as Tom Merry wished, and to anticipate his wishes, if possible—that had become Joe's purpose in life.

Tom Merry had told him to finish his tea; and Joe went on with it, and finished it at last. He revelled in toast, in jam, and marmalade, and cake. He had to leave off at last for sheer want of stowage room, and then he moved to the armchair, and sat down in it, with his feet on the fender, and gazed at the blazing fire blissfully.

"Crikey!" he murmured. "This is spiffing! Wipping—ripping!"

Joe had got it right at last.

He gazed at the flames, seeing in them pictures of his old life, and fanciful sketches of his new, till the sound of the door opening made him look round. He thought it was Tom Merry returning, but it was not.

Gore came in with Mellish and Crooke. They grinned at the sight of the shiny face of Joe.

"Here he is!" said Mellish.

"Good!" said Crooke. "And those cads are away, so we can ask him a few questions."

"If he won't answer—"

"Oh, we'll make him answer!"

Joe gazed at his visitors in some alarm. He could see by their looks that they had no friendly intention. There was another step at the door, and a Sixth Former looked in. It was Knox, the prefect, the most unpopular senior in the House.

He glanced at the juniors and stared at Joe.

"I hear Tom Merry's protegee is here," he said. "Is that it?"

"That's it, Knox."

"Pretty looking specimen, I must say. Isn't Merry here?"

"Oh, he's rowing in the quad with the New House chaps!"

Knox grinned, and came into the study and closed the door. Prefect as he was, Knox was always careful how he treated the Terrible Three. He knew that though it was in his power to take advantage of his position in dealing with them, the chums of the Shell would always contrive to give him as good—and as bad—as they received.

It seemed to Knox an excellent opportunity to score over the juniors whom he disliked by bullying the new boy they had taken under their care. And he was really very curious about Joe, too.

"So you're the new boy?" he said.

"Yes, sir," said Joe.

The "sir" pleased Knox somewhat, and his tone was a little less bullying as he proceeded. Gore, Mellish, and Crooke drew round. They had intended to rag Joe themselves. But they could see that that was Knox's intention, and they preferred to back up the prefect. For his rank as a prefect would be a shield over them afterwards if the Terrible Three cut up rusty.

"Oh, where did you come from?" asked Knox.



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"London, sir!"

"I know that!" snapped Knox. "But what part of London?"

"Blucher's Buildings, sir."

"What's your name?"

"Joe, sir."

"Joe what?"

"Nothing but Joe, sir."

"Oh, I suppose you never had a father?" said the prefect.

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"Is he alive?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is his name?"

"Bill, sir."

"Bill what?"

Joe did not reply.

After the most unfortunate interview with the Head, Tom Merry had cautioned Joe not to be too free in giving information about his origin.

He had explained to the little ragamuffin that, while if one gave information it should always be truthful, on the other hand it was always possible to refuse giving information of impertinent questions were asked.

Joe did not yet realise what it meant to him to keep secret the fact that his father had served a term of penal servitude.

In Blucher's Buildings it had been rather a distinction than otherwise. St. Jim's had ideals different from those of Blucher's Buildings. But Joe had not been long enough at the school to begin even to understand that.

But his faith in Tom Merry was his guide. Tom Merry had told him not to relate the details of his early life. He meant to do as Tom Merry had bidden him.

Knox was gazing at him in astonishment.

"Why don't you answer, you brat?" he demanded.

"I ain't got nothing to say, sir," said Joe.

"You impudent young whelp!"

Joe looked frightened. Knox was growing very angry, and he was big enough to eat Joe. And Gore and Crooke and Mellish were all ready to pounce upon him at a signal from the prefect; Joe could see that.

"My hat!" ejaculated Knox, in sheer amazement. "If the rotten little guttersnipe isn't disobeying me!"

"Cheek!" said Mellish.

"Give him a licking!" suggested Crooke.

"I'll break every bone in his body if he checks me!" said Knox. "Look here, young shaver, have you ever been thrashed?"

"Orfen, sir," said poor Joe.

"Oh, you know what it's like, then, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. My father used to give me the buckle-end of his strap," said Joe.

Knox stared at him. The words, so full of the unconscious pathos of the slum child's life, would have gone straight to most hearts. But Knox did not feel touched. He felt disgusted, and prided himself upon his disgust, which made him feel so aristocratic and superior to common people.

"My word!" he exclaimed. "What sort of a horrible toad has Tom Merry brought to St. Jim's! Where were you brought up, you snipe?"

Joe looked at him with wide, frightened eyes without replying. He cast a hunted glance at the door. He could have dodged out, but he remembered Tom Merry's injunction not to leave the study.

True, Tom Merry had been far from foreseeing anything of this sort. But an order from Tom Merry was an order to Joe, and had to be obeyed.

"Oh!" said Knox in a low, unpleasant voice. "So you've learned Tom Merry's cheek already, have you, and you're taking it upon yourself to disobey a prefect? I might have guessed you'd be taught insolence by those cads."

Joe's eyes gleamed.

"Master Tom is better'n you are any day in the week," he said. "Don't you say nothing against Master Tom. You're a liar, you are!"

Joe's language had the painful directness of Blucher's Buildings.

Knox glared at him for a moment, and then he grasped him by the collar, grinding his knuckles into the boy's neck.

"You confounded young cad!" he shouted. "I'll teach you to cheek me! Gore, hand me that cricket bat!"

"I'll lay it on for you, if you like, Knox," said Mellish viciously.

"Good!" said Knox. "I'll hold him while you lay it on!"

Mellish grinned as he grasped a cricket bat.

"I'll jolly well make you squirm," he said. "We'll show the filthy young rotter that beggars can't come to St. Jim's!"

"Ow! You leggo!" roared Joe.

"Quiet, you little greasy pig!"

"Leggo! Leggo! You're a coward! You're a beast!"

Knox smiled grimly, and twisted the new boy over on the tea-table. Joe yelled and struggled fiercely in the senior's heavy grasp, but he was helpless.

"Now!" Knox hissed to Mellish.

"What-ho!" said the cad of the Fourth cheerfully.

The cricket bat rose and fell. Joe gave a wild howl of pain. He tried to get at Knox with his teeth, but the prefect was too careful. He jammed Joe's face down upon the table to stifle his yells.

"Lay into him!" he said savagely.

Lash, lash!

There was a sudden rush of footsteps in the passage, and the door of the study was flung open.

"Well, Joe—Hallo! What—My hat!"

The Terrible Three had returned. Their appearance showed that they had been through a rough experience. Tom Merry had a swollen nose, and Lowther a discoloured eye, and Manners' collar was torn out and hung by a single stud. Their clothes were dusty and their hair dishevelled. There had been a wild scrimmage in the quadrangle, but the School House had beaten the New House, so the Terrible Three had returned to their study quite contented.

The sight that met their gaze almost petrified them for a moment.

Then Tom Merry rushed fiercely towards Knox.

He did not speak. He drove his clenched fist straight at the prefect, and Knox reeled back. Mellish dashed for the doorway, and Manners and Lowther kicked at him together as he passed, and he crashed down into the passage, with a yell of pain.

Joe rolled off the table, wriggling, jammy, buttery, and in tears. Knox was glaring furiously at the chums of the Shell.

"Tom Merry!" he gasped, choking with rage. "You—you dare to strike me—a prefect!"

"Yes, you hound!" shouted Tom Merry, facing him with clenched fists and blazing eyes. "And I'll do it again if you lay a finger on that kid! You bully! You cad!"

Knox sprang straight at him. Tom Merry faced the prefect without faltering, and Manners and Lowther rushed to his aid at once.

Then Knox hesitated. He knew that he had no chance against the Terrible Three together, and they had evidently no scruples, just now, about laying hands upon a prefect.

"You—you young hounds!" Knox spluttered. "I'll report this to the Head! I'll have you expelled from the school!"

Tom Merry laughed scornfully.

"And we'll report at the same time how you were treating this kid!" he exclaimed. "You cowardly hound!"

"I—I—" Knox fairly choked, and could not get the words out.

"Get out of my study!"

"What?"

"Get out of my study," said Tom Merry determinedly, "or I'll throw you out, prefect or no prefect!"

The Terrible Three advanced a step. Knox hesitated one moment, and then strode from the study.

Monty Lowther closed the door after him, while Tom Merry turned to Joe. The little waif was trying bravely to keep back his tears.

"Have they hurt you much, Joe?" asked Tom Merry.

"Not much," faltered Joe through his quivering lips.

"Why didn't you bolt?" asked Manners.

"Master Tom told me not to leave the study," said Joe simply.

Tom Merry felt a choking sensation in his throat. The simple faithfulness of the little waif went straight to his heart.

"Good for you, Joe!" he said. "Isn't he the real stuff, you fellows?"

"Right-ho!" exclaimed Monty Lowther heartily. "He's real grit!"

"He's been ragged," said Tom Merry slowly. "He may be ragged again. But we know he's the right stuff, and we're going to stick to him through thick and thin and see him through. That's agreed?"

"Agreed!" said Manners and Lowther. The Terrible Three were more than determined to stand by the boy from the underworld.

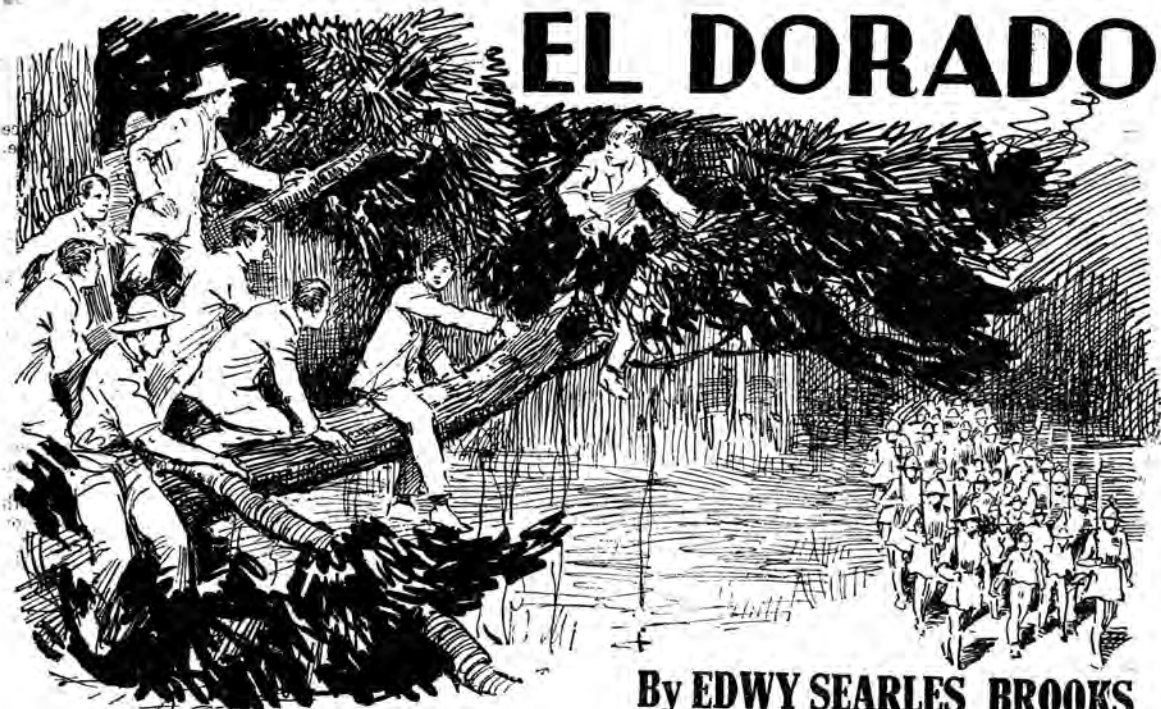
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MORE EXCITING CHAPTERS FROM OUR SUPER SERIAL STORY.

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 are Lord Dorrimore and his black friend, Umlozi. The airship is brought down in Arzacland by a powerful ray, and the whole party fall into the hands of Professor Cyrus Zingrace, ruler of a race of White Giants. The St. Frank's boys escape, however, and take refuge in Az, an Arzac city preparing for war against Zingrace. When a hurricane threatens, the St. Frank's party go to the *Sky Wanderer* to secure it to the ground more safely. No sooner do they get aboard than the giant airship is swept away by the terrific wind!

The Swamp of Terror!

EVERY man and boy aboard the *Sky Wanderer* believed that his last moment had come when the stricken airship was wrenched from her moorings and caught up in the grip of the mighty hurricane.

Not that anybody had time to think, or to even be frightened. It had happened in a flash. The St. Frank's fellows in the main lounge were sent hurtling like ninepins. The floor assumed an acute angle as the *Sky Wanderer* turned right over on her side, helpless in the blast. One wall of the lounge was now like a floor, but before the boys could pick themselves up, the airship heeled again, and over and above the shouts of the boys, and the crashing of furniture, came the raucous shriek of the gale.

Nelson Lee, who had attempted to reach the control-room, was trapped in the corridor. Plunged face downwards, he lay half-stunned for a moment, for his head had crashed with heavy force against the wall. Yet, as reason came flooding back to his mind, he knew that he could do nothing. With every second that passed, he expected to hear the horrid, grinding shriek of metal as it was torn asunder.

Miraculously, however, the airship remained intact. Seconds were like minutes. Every brain was hammered into numbness by the awful might of Nature's rage.

The airship escaped destruction merely because, in the first moment, she had been lifted high by the strong upward trend of the gale. Had she struck the forest she would have been torn into a million fragments, and scattered over miles of land.

Actually, the hurricane had the *Sky Wanderer* in its grip for only a few minutes; yet she was swept twenty miles in

that short time; she was carried like a feather into one of the darkest and most mysterious parts of the Arzacland forest.

The speed was such that her passengers remained half-stunned. Floors heaved, walls rocked, and above the incessant straining and groaning of metal came the devil's tumult from outside.

Inevitably, the nightmare journey was brief. Such a horror could not last long. It must either end in total destruction and death for every soul aboard, or—

Suddenly, abruptly, the voice of the hurricane came to an end. That instant cessation was almost as terrifying as its commencement. At one second there was the screaming howl of the wind; and the next second—almost silence. For an instant there was the thin whistle as the wind-madness died away in a whine. But that was all.

A shudder swept right through the *Sky Wanderer* from stem to stern; she swayed gently now, and she was dropping. Miraculously, she was on an even keel.

Nipper, as it chanced, was the first St. Frank's fellow to get to his feet. He was nearest to the door which led out upon the promenade deck. Staggering, he reached the chromium rail, and stared. The darkness was like something solid. The air was moist, hot, like the breath of some monstrous creature. It was impossible to tell whether they were a mile above the earth, or a mere foot.

"Great Scott!" gasped Nipper dazedly.

A figure materialised out of the darkness like a ghost.

"The point is, why are we alive?" came the voice of Lord Dorrimore. "It's you, Nipper, isn't it?"

"Where are we, Dorrie?" muttered Nipper unsteadily.

"What do you think I am—a magician?" retorted Dorrie.

"Phew! How long did that horror last? What's happenin' now?"

"We're dropping—we're descending quite slowly, on an even keel," said Nipper, staring so hard into the solid blackness that his eyes hurt him. "But I can't see a thing. Can you, Dorrie? Not a sign of the ground—not a tree—and the sky is just as black."

"Whoa! What was that?" broke in Dorrie, reeling.

Somewhere, far forward, there had been a shuddering jar, which ran all along the airship in a trembling vibration.

From the lounge came the tumult of voices and movement. The boys were recovering themselves, and amongst them Nelson Lee picked his way. He joined Nipper and Dorrie

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There came another jar, and the Sky Wanderer rocked. Something seemed to strike her a violent blow aft, and after that she suddenly became rigid. It seemed that the drop had ceased; she was motionless and still. Her girders made no sounds whatever.

"Good glory! Have we landed?" muttered Lord Dorrimore.

Lee flashed a powerful electric torch into the darkness below the rail. The light did not penetrate far; it seemed to be quickly absorbed by a strange thickness, like a black mist.

"Queer!" muttered the detective. "We seem to be perfectly still, and there can be no doubt that we have landed. But where? There was no crashing of trees."

He broke off abruptly, turned, and strode back into the great lounge, where the electric lights were still glowing brightly. Instantly, Lee was surrounded by crowds of half-dazed, excited boys.

"Are we safe, sir?" went up a shout. "Is the danger over?"

"Have we landed, sir?"

"Steady, you fellows," said Lee, holding up a hand. "We've all had a disturbing experience, and we must thank Heaven that we are still alive. Wait! The peril may not yet be over, and we must make sure."

He strode through them, and now Lord Dorrimore and Nipper were hard at his heels. They followed him into a small lift, and Nipper shut the door before any of the other fellows could crowd in. At a movement of the lever, the lift commenced shooting rapidly upwards.

"Everything works, anyhow!" said Dorrie. "By gad! Manners achieved a triumph when he designed this airship! She's as sturdy as solid English oak!"

The lift went right up through the vast body of the craft, and soon the passengers walked out into a small metal deck-house on the Sky Wanderer's "roof." Here there was an astonishingly wide deck, covering the airship's giant hull from stem to stern. On this deck, in normal times, the boys had been able to take their exercise—even to play games.

Now it was a place of bewildering darkness. Nipper and Dorrie were reluctant to step forward, for they were utterly blind. Then Nelson Lee's torchlight slashed the darkness like a knife, and he went hurrying towards the tower-like structure, amidships, which housed the Sky Wanderer's main searchlight.

"We must know the truth," said Lee grimly.

Nipper was about to mount the platform after the detective, but Dorrie checked him.

"Better stay here—he doesn't want any help," said Dorrie. "We can see better. Let's get to the rail."

There was only a short delay. Before Nipper and Dorrie could grope their way to the strong protecting rail, an immense beam of dazzling light blazed out from the tower, directed downwards.

"We have landed!" yelled Dorrie. "Look!"

Nipper looked, and in spite of the steamy, oppressive heat, he shivered. For there was something uncannily mysterious in what he saw. The ground, all round the airship, was level enough, and not a bush could be seen, not a blade of grass. Yet the ground was not bare, for it seemed to be covered by a black-looking, moss-like growth, from which steam was rising in eddying clouds. The grapnel claws of the airship had sunk deeply in, proving that the ground was soggy.

"It's the effect of that terrific rain," said Lord Dorrimore. "Don't forget that thousands of tons of rain fell in less than half an hour, and it flooded the ground instantly. But there's somethin' rummy about this patch; it seems to have soaked the rain in like a sponge. There's not even a pool to be seen."

The silence was almost unnerving. From far below, sounding distant and vague, came the voices of the St. Frank's fellows, on the promenade deck, amidships. But up here, on the Sky Wanderer's roof, Nipper and Dorrie seemed to be cut off completely from their companions. And in all that vast darkness there was no other sound—no whisper of wind, no voice of bird or beast.

Splash!

A raindrop, like a cupful of water, fell on the deck. Then, from some distance away, came another. But the rain did

not develop. Just these solitary, occasional drops, splashing down with queer plops.

Dorrie stared up. The sky was as inky as the ground. The storm had passed, leaving the atmosphere breathless with moist heat. It was so heavy that Nipper fancied that it was even difficult to breathe.

"It's—it's horrible!" he muttered unsteadily.

The searchlight beam had widened, moving slowly, and its range was now so much greater that the limits of the moss-like ground could be seen.

"The forest!" said Dorrie, pointing.

"Thank goodness!" said Nipper. "It's good to see something real again—something familiar."

Perhaps it was the light, perhaps it was the general strangeness of the whole situation; but it seemed to both Dorrie and Nipper that the trees, in the far distance, were fantastic-looking giants, rearing their huge trunks hundreds of feet into the air. The foliage seemed to be of a pale, sickly green.

Round swept the searchlight, and Nelson Lee, behind it, saw that the clearing, with its unhealthy looking moss, was of an irregular oblong shape, perhaps a mile from side to side. The airship had settled within a few-hundred yards of the forest.

"Look!" muttered Nipper hoarsely, as he pointed.

"I'm lookin'!" said Dorrie.

"The ground over there—it heaved and rolled as though some monstrous thing was trying to break through," said Nipper.

Dorrie gave him a sharp look, and then stared hard at the ground—until the searchlight shifted, leaving the spot in darkness.

"You're nervy, my son!" said his lordship gruffly. "Pull yourself together! You mustn't let your imagination run away with you like that. How could the ground heave? Don't be such a young ass!"

"Sorry!" muttered Nipper. "Perhaps I was wrong. But I could have sworn—"

"It's difficult to see anything distinctly," interrupted Dorrie. "There's this blackish mist risin' all the time. It makes everythin' vague and unreal. Glory be! Isn't it good enough to know that we've landed safely, that the old Sky Wanderer is whole, and that the storm has passed?"

He slapped Nipper on the back.

"You don't seem to realise how infernally lucky we are," he went on. "There's still a good deal of the night to go, and we'd better get some sleep. Hallo! What did I tell you? It's 'lights out.' Your worthy headmaster has switched off!"

In the black darkness which followed the shutting out of the searchlight, Nipper almost laughed. It seemed so incongruous to talk in school terms.

Nelson Lee, electric torch in hand, joined them.

"You saw, Dorrie?" he asked. "We have landed in a strange clearing, and the grapnel claws appear to have made a firm and secure anchorage. Yet I am not satisfied. The claws have sunk in too deeply."

"What do you mean?" asked his lordship.

"The ground appears to be solid—yet I have an idea that it is little better than a swamp, entirely covered by a mossy growth," said Nelson Lee. "To make sure, we shall have to go down to the entrance deck. There's another searchlight there, and we'll soon have it going. We must be thankful that the airship is still whole."

They crossed towards the deckhouse which held the lift. "I've been thinking of our friend, Captain Hurricane, back in Az," said Dorrie. "By Jove! I'll bet he's in a rare stew! Remember, Lee? You sent him back to the city to bring two hundred men—so that we could get moorin' ropes in position, then we were swept away—"

"Cane will certainly believe that we are all dead," said Lee. "No doubt he will organise rescue parties—although he can do nothing until daylight. This darkness is the blackest I have ever experienced. We do not even know how far we were carried by that appalling wind. We may be ten miles from Az—or we may be fifty. It is impossible to say. I only know that we have dropped into a particularly unhealthy pocket of the forest. Even the forest has a nasty, forbidding appearance."

"You might think we were on another planet, guv'nor," said Nipper.

The lift took them swiftly downwards. Lee did not stop at the lounge amidships; for he knew that all the boys, on the promenade decks, would come crowding round. He took the lift farther down to the very base of the great aircraft. He and Dorrie and Nipper walked out upon the entrance deck.

Electric lights were glowing here, but they only intensified the surrounding blackness. Lee strode forward, and halted against a little control panel. He switched on a number of floodlights which were fitted flush into the airship's hull. These were better than the searchlight. The effect, for a moment, was dazzling. As the floodlights blazed, Nipper blinked. Then he let out an absolute yell.

**St.
Franks
STAMP
WHO'S
WHO**



Mr. A. Wilkes. R. Christine. E. Biggleswade.
(Three more portraits next week.)

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"By George!" exclaimed Handforth. "Look at that!" As he spoke the door bulged inwards and there was a loud crack. Then something of a dirty greyish-yellow pressed its way through! What was the Unknown Thing that was attacking the airship?

"Great Scott!" he shouted. "We're right on the ground!"

It was a fact. The floor of the entrance deck was actually resting on the mossy growth! Normally, when the airship came to earth, her grapnel claws held her well clear, so that ladders were necessary to reach the ground. But the giant telescopic claws had sunk deeply into the swampy, mossy mass. Even the staircases had vanished.

"I was right, Dorrie," said Nipper excitedly. "I told you that I saw the ground heaving, didn't I? It's not solid at all!"

"At all events, we're firmly anchored," said Nelson Lee. "How we shall ever get the airship out is a mystery—but we need not worry about that now. She cannot sink deeper. Mercifully, she has settled evenly, all along her keel, and she is far too bulky to sink farther."

They peered into the black, shadowy depths beyond the radius of the floodlights. Even Dorrie, with his strong nerves, fancied that some monstrous creature might come wallowing over the swamp, to attack. Nelson Lee seemed to read his thoughts.

"Yes, Dorrie, we'll close all the shutters and lock the doors," he said. "We're too near the ground to be comfortable. But if we shut every opening, we shall be safe enough."

As he spoke, he operated some of the other controls, and, as though by magic, metal shutters shot up from the rail of the entrance deck, sealing it into an air-tight enclosure. The doors which led to the stairways were hermetically secured, too. Nipper found himself breathing a sigh of relief.

"That's better, guv'nor!" he said. "We're shut in, now. Nothing can get at us."

They returned to the lift, and a few moments later they were in the main lounge, and seniors and juniors were swarming round them. Briefly Lee explained the situation; he told the breathless boys that there was no danger, and that nothing could be done, in any event, before daylight.

"We do not know where we are, but I have no doubt that Captain Cane and the forces of Surnum Mentius will be out on a wide search at dawn," said Lee. "We must wait until our friends come to our aid. There is nothing whatever we can do to-night, so I am advising you all to go to your beds."

"Here, I say, sir, cheese it!" protested Handforth. "How do you think we can sleep?"

"There's no reason why you should not sleep," replied Lee.

"Your dormitories are ready for you, and you certainly ought to be ready for them. If all goes well, we have a hard, gruelling march before us. You need all the rest you can get. I want everybody to go straight to bed."

The juniors did not see eye to eye with Nelson Lee in this matter. But Lee had already nodded to Old Wilkey and Barry Stokes, and they, in their turn, gave instructions to Fenton, Morrow, and other seniors.

In a moment school routine was enforced. It seemed strangely incongruous after the wild excitements of the previous hour. It was, indeed, like coming back to earth with a jar.

But it was the best possible thing. The boys were martialled off in good order, and the prefects saw that they went into their dormitories and got into bed. Not until then did the boys realise that their clothing was soaked through. Even their night attire seemed damp, for the air was heavy and humid.

That Nelson Lee's advice was sound was proved by the fact that the majority of the fellows fell into a deep sleep almost as soon as their heads touched the pillows. They were far more exhausted—chiefly by excitement—than they had realised.

A few, however, remained wakeful. William Napoleon Browne, of the Fifth, having changed, insisted upon going out upon the deck, and Stevens, his bosom pal, accompanied him. He wanted Chambers and one or two others to go, too, but they declined.

Stevens looked uneasily into the stygian darkness as the two Fifth Formers walked on the deck.

"I'm a bit scared of this beastly place!" he muttered. "It's—it's unnatural!"

"Admittedly, it has the tendency to give one the creeps," agreed Browne, leaning over the rail. "Am I fanciful, Brother Horace, or do I hear a sound of movement?"

Stevens caught his breath in, for he, too, thought that he could hear something uncanny and mysterious in that all-enveloping darkness. The two seniors were alone on the great stretch of deck, and the airship, in general, was utterly silent.

And from that swampy, mossy basin came the sound of a slithering, whispering movement.

Out of the Darkness!

"WHAT is it?" asked Stevens huskily.

"I regret, Brother Horace, that I am no wizard," replied the long-legged Fifth Form skipper. "Something is moving below, but whether it is animal or human I cannot say. It might be that a few thousand Ciri-ok-Baks, knowing nothing of the events in Az, have decided to pay a call. If so, it is hardly likely to be friendly."

"Look here, hadn't we better go and tell Mr. Lee and

Dorrie?" asked Stevens hurriedly. "They ought to have the searchlights going. I don't like the look of this! Perhaps we're being surrounded by deadly enemies!" He broke off with a startled intake of breath. "Look!" he gasped. "There's a horrid, fiendish-looking savage coming up behind you, Browne!"

Browne leapt round from the rail with commendable agility, and he saw, looming up out of the gloom, faintly illuminated by the glow from a neighbouring doorway, an enormous human figure, with black body and limbs. There was only a short girdle round the middle, and in one hand the apparition carried a great spear.

"Your nerves, Brother Horace, are somewhat frayed," said Browne reproachfully. "Have you no better manners than to refer to Brother Umlosi in such insulting terms?"

"Umlosi!" gasped Stevens. "Oh, my hat! Sorry! I thought—"

"Wau! I expected not to meet the young white masters," said Umlosi. "For a time I revel in freedom," he added, indicating his unclothed condition.

"My mistake," said Browne politely. "I thought you might be going for a swim."

"'Tis a night of mystery, my young master," said Umlosi, staring straight into the darkness. "Wau! Methinks there will be strange happenings before the dawn comes. Hast thou not heard the whisperings in the air? My snake tells me that peril is abroad."

Before the Fifth-Formers could reply, the deck beneath their feet seemed to quiver. The Sky Wanderer trembled strangely.

"Something is happening," muttered Stevens. "We'd better wake the others, Browne! We'd better tell Mr. Lee! There's something down there on the ground—"

"Before raising any alarm, would it not be better, Brother Horace, for us to descend to the entrance-deck?" suggested William Napoleon. "It is on a level with the ground, and from the windows we can easily see if any enemy is attempting to force an entry."

With long strides, he crossed the deck and entered the big lounge, and Stevens and Umlosi followed him. Before

they could reach the staircase, however, a number of other figures, in pyjamas, appeared from the main corridor.

"I say! Did you chaps feel anything?" asked an eager, excited voice.

It was Handforth, of the Remove. Church and McClure were with him, and a moment later Nipper and Archie Glenthorne appeared.

"We are just going down to the entrance-deck to investigate, Brother Handy," said Browne. "Let me urge you to keep your voice softer. There may be no cause for alarm."

"I was buzzing off to find the guv'nor," said Nipper. "Ten-to-one he's in the control-room with Dorrie and the masters. They're probably having a chin-wag over the general situation; and if they've got lights on, and are all talking and smoking, they might not have noticed anything. But perhaps we'd better go down first."

They all went running down the wide, carpeted stairs—for the Sky Wanderer was equipped in very much the same way as a super-liner.

Nipper's guess with regard to Nelson Lee and the other men was correct. Lee, Dorrie, Old Wilkey, and Barry Stokes were having an earnest talk in the control-room: lights were gleaming, and all the men were smoking. It was a sort of council-of-war—discussing what would be done in the event of the non-arrival of an Arzac search-party.

Down on the entrance-deck the boys found themselves in complete darkness—until Browne switched some lights on. Everything seemed normal.

"We're all jumpy—that's the trouble," said Church. "Didn't we tell you, Handy, that there was nothing wrong? It's only one of your silly mare's nests—"

"Nay!" came an interruption from Umlosi. "There is a strange sound, my young masters. Be silent, I beg."

They held their breath, for something in Umlosi's tone caused their hearts to thud more heavily.

The sound was with them all the time. It seemed to fill the very air—and it was vague and unidentifiable. Browne and Nipper stepped forward at the same moment, and pressed their ears to the inner side of the sealed doors. Then they looked at one another with startled eyes.



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For they could hear, on the other side of the door, a slow, slithering movement. They felt, too, a pressure, as though something outside was striving to force a way in.

"Good heavens!" muttered Nipper. "What can it be?"

A feeling of dread, of horror, seized the boys. What was this unknown thing which was prowling about outside? In such a moment they could not prevent their thoughts darting back to the terrible monsters they had already encountered in Arzacland. They thought of the colossal brontosaurus which had wrecked the chariots, the triceratops, the pterodactyls—

"Oh, my goodness!" panted McClure.

At that moment the doors gave a protesting sound, as though terrific pressure was being applied on the outer side.

"It's some vile monster!" cried Church, almost hysterically. "Oh, let's get out of here! It'll be in on us before we can escape!"

"Steady!" growled Handforth. "We're safe enough. By George! Look at that!"

As he spoke, the doors bulged perceptibly inwards; there was a loud, splintering crack of metal and woodwork. Then something of a dirty, greyish-yellow pressed its way through the broken space, like a fold of fish-like skin.

"Run!" yelled Browne.

Nelson Lee, in the act of lighting his pipe, paused, flaring match in hand.

"Did you hear that?" he asked sharply.

"Somebody yelling, I think," said Mr. Wilkes.

The sound came to them very faintly—for the control-room was a considerable distance from the entrance deck. It was, in fact, right in the very nose of the Sky Wanderer.

"I'd better go and see what's wrong," said Lee.

He was in the act of turning towards the door when he halted, transfixed. He was staring at the black windows which formed three sides of the apartment. The lights were strong, and they served to intensify the outer darkness. But Lee was looking at something else—something of a yellowish grey, which was creeping upwards, fold upon fold, and gradually but surely obscuring the windows.

The Peril of the Giant Fungus!

"GLORY be!" ejaculated Lord Dorrmore, leaping forward. "What is it?"

"I don't know—but whatever it is, the boys have seen it, too!" said Lee grimly. "It's strange we didn't notice it before—but we have been under the strong light."

Mr. Wilkes was close to the window, staring at the mysterious mass.

"It looks like the skin of some kind of fish!" he exclaimed, in a startled voice. "Dear me! Can it be possible that some horrible and incredible monster has risen up?"

"It's a grotesque suggestion, Wilkes—but we must not dismiss it too lightly," said Nelson Lee. "I am beginning to think that anything can happen in this extraordinary country! But we'll soon make certain."

Without hesitation, he flung open one of the windows in the extreme front of the control-room. Just below him, the yellowish-grey mass was moving like some malignant body. Boldly, Lee thrust a hand out, grasped at the mass, and a portion of it broke away in his hand, pulpy, moist, slimy—

"Good heavens!" he ejaculated, aghast.

A foul, pungent odour came pouring in through the open window. The other men stood round, as still as statues.

"What is it?" asked Dorrie, with an effort.

"Fungus," replied Nelson Lee briefly.

"What?"

All the others yelled the word in chorus—and with untold relief in their voices.

"Fungus," repeated Nelson Lee, fingering the stuff in his hand. "That's all it is. Look! A kind of toadstool-like growth!"

The door burst open, and Nipper almost fell in, with Browne, Archie, Handforth, and the others at his heels.

"Guv'nor!" croaked Nipper. "Danger! There's some awful creature trying to break in!"

"Absolutely!" exclaimed Archie Glenthorne. "Hadn't we better dash about with machine-guns and things?"

"Hold your horses, boys," said Nelson Lee. "There's no monster. Look out here!"

"Great Scott! It's here, too!" said Church. "It's coming through the window—"

"But it's nothing but fungus," interrupted Nelson Lee. "There must be some peculiarity—"

He was interrupted by shouts from the boys—shouts which rapidly turned to yells of laughter. They were enormously relieved to learn the truth, for they had indeed allowed their imaginations to get the better of them.

"There must be something peculiar in this moss-like

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ground," said Nelson Lee, when he could make himself heard. "No doubt the terrific soaking it has had from the rain has brought about this remarkable growth of fungus. It may be only here, at the forepart of the ship. However, we had better make sure."

"Rather, sir!" said Nipper. "The horrible stuff has smashed the doors of the entrance deck, and it's likely to do a lot more damage. Whoever would have thought that fungus would have so much force behind it?"

They all went hurrying out of the control-room, and, reaching the deck, they stared out into the darkness. But still they could see nothing.

"We'll soon make sure!" said Lee crisply.

He ran in, leapt into the lift, and Lord Dorrmore accompanied him. On the upper deck, they fairly raced to the searchlight tower, and a minute later the great beam of light was sweeping downwards, slashing through the darkness.

"My goodness!" ejaculated Dorrie, in blank amazement.

What he had expected to see he hardly knew, but what he actually did see staggered him. The entire forest clearing was choked with dense masses of gigantic toadstools! They were growing so close together that they were fouling one another, their enormous yellowish-grey tops folding one across the other. Some of them were already thirty or forty feet high, and the entire field of fungi was in a state of continuous, quivering movement.

"By Heaven, Dorrie, this is more serious than I first thought," said Nelson Lee, his voice charged with anxiety. "Look at the foul stuff! Look at its phenomenal growth!"

"I've never seen anything like it in the whole of my life!" said Dorrie. "You can actually see the blightin' stuff growin'! It's getting higher, an' spreadin' at the rate of two or three feet every minute."

"It'll be a case of all hand to the pumps, Dorrie," said Lee. "We mustn't waste a second—"

"But, man alive, where's the danger?" asked his lordship, staring. "You're not sayin' that this confounded fungus can do us any harm?"

"It might possibly wreck the Sky Wanderer," retorted Nelson Lee.

He left the searchlight blazing, and, running to the lift, he and Dorrie went quickly down to the main part of the ship. They found the boys on the decks, talking excitedly, pointing out to the amazing field of toadstools. Everybody was awake now—for even the boys who had been slumbering the soundest had been aroused by the general hubbub.

"Mr. Wilkes! Mr. Stokes! Fenton—Biggleswade—Morrow!" shouted Nelson Lee. "Listen to me, please! I want all of you to organise the boys into working parties. We've got to do the best we can to fight the fungus. We cannot shift the airship—she is stuck hard and fast in this moss-like bog. We cannot leave her, for the fungus hems us in."

"But what can we do, Mr. Lee?" asked old Wilkey, bewildered.

"We can get improvised weapons and knock this stuff away from the vessel's side—we can keep it at bay as it creeps up," replied Nelson Lee. "I say 'creep,' but it appears to be fairly leaping at us. The airship is forming some attraction, for the fungus is much thicker here than elsewhere—and is growing solidly, without the toadstool-like form, which is so characteristic in other parts of the clearing."

"But how can it hurt us, sir?" asked Fenton, in wonder. "Fungus has remarkable power," replied Nelson Lee. "Even an ordinary meadow mushroom can lift a full-sized brick—and this giant abomination can well shatter the Sky Wanderer by its very pressure. Yet it is so soft, so pulpy, that we can easily smash it as it grows."

"My hat! You're right, guv'nor!" sang out Nipper, who had gone to one of the rails and was staring down. "It's coming up at an awful rate; it'll soon be level with the deck here."

The air by this time was reeking with the sickly stench of the stuff, and the oppressive heat, rather than diminishing, was becoming worse. It was like being in a Turkish bath; a strange, blackish-looking vapour was curling inwards, over the decks, in thin, billowing clouds.

Nelson Lee himself, with a party of helpers, went down to the entrance deck. But nothing could be done here. Curiously enough, the fungus had not made much inroad, but it was packed closely all round the lower part of the vessel.

And once or twice Lee thought he felt a movement of the deck as though the great airship was being shifted bodily. He could well believe that such was the case, for he knew that the fungus was capable of exerting extraordinary power.

"We must thank Heaven for one thing, Dorrie," said Lee fervently. "What's that?" "The pressure appears to be upwards rather than inwards," replied the detective. "In a word, the fungus is striving to lift the Sky Wanderer. I was afraid that the stuff would surround her and crush her sides in. It might happen even yet—unless we take precautions."

So rapid was the growth that by the time Nelson Lee and his party returned from the promenade deck they found the fungus already creeping up to within striking distance. The boys, on both sides of the vessel, and organised into parties, were armed with spare girder parts from the vessel's stores. These were sectional pieces of strong metal, six feet in length, and much lighter than wood. The boys were able to wield them with ease.

Leaning over the rail, they smashed at the fungus as it came growing upwards—growing so rapidly that, as its pulpy mass was broken away, it seemed to spread and creep onwards with renewed force.

At first Nelson Lee believed that the boys could cope with the danger, but he soon changed his mind. So appallingly rapid was the growth that the attack upon it was more or less futile. Indeed, Lee came to the conclusion that the attack increased the spread of the stuff. Soon it was creeping over the rails, invading the decks, and the boys were hacking at it, forcing it back, fighting gamely. But it was no good. They might as well have tried to hold back the sea with the tide coming in.

"It's no good, guv'nor, we'll never do it!" gasped Nipper, reeling as he spoke. "It's got us beaten! The more we smash it up, the faster it grows! Look how it's spreading over the decks! It'll be inside, soon—right in the ship! This horrible whiff is making us dizzy, too!"

It was true. Something like panic was rapidly spreading amongst the boys. They had started work enthusiastically, fully believing that they could win. But the fungus was growing and spreading with such appalling speed that they became frightened. Moreover, there was a gaseous vapour sent forth by the fungus. It sickened the fighters, it got into their heads, and, one and all, they were feeling drowsy, lethargic.

In the middle of all this excitement the Sky Wanderer moved perceptibly; she even rocked once or twice, swaying gently from side to side. Without question, she was being lifted; her grappling claws were being forced out of the boggy ground. She was fairly in the grip of the fungus, but it was growing all about her far more quickly than it was lifting her. It was a double process, and the outer growth was winning.

There was only one thing to be done. Lee gave sharp orders, and the boys retreated into the interior of the vessel. Every door was hermetically sealed. And the fungus, no longer checked, drew in upon the decks, spreading, and then continuing upwards over the greater bulk of the giant silver hull.

The next half-hour was fraught with intense anxiety; but the danger seemed to pass. The fungus was not forcing the doors—it was continuing to grow upwards, enveloping the Sky Wanderer in its soft, pulpy, slimy mass. A serious and dangerous development was the blocking of all the ventilation vents. For as the stuff grew it smothered windows, it clung tightly, pressing hard. And presently the air within the vessel became foul. More than one boy in the lounge or in the corridors fell prone!

"We must get them on the upper deck—it's our only chance!" said Lee grimly. "Good heavens, Dorrie, this stuff will grow to five or six hundred feet before daylight comes to check it."

"Do you think it will check then?" "I believe so—for this type of fungus grows rapidly only in the darkness," continued Lee. "Get the prefects together—have them collect every boy. They must all be got up to the upper deck."

It was done at last. Every soul aboard was got safely into the air on the top deck. The great splashing raindrops were still falling, and the darkness was inky, except for the blaze of the searchlight. This now revealed a solid yellowish-grey mass of fungus. The stuff was coming up in a solid field of pulpy mass.

And now, in all truth, there was a hideous peril. Escape from the Sky Wanderer was impossible; even her interior had become uninhabitable. The fungus was growing as rapidly as ever, and there were some hours of darkness left yet. Soon—perhaps within an hour—the fungus would come creeping over the upper slopes of the hull; then it would surge forward over the decks. What then? Nothing but death for them all—for the fungus would grow over them, enveloping them, smothering them in its vile, stench-filled embrace!

Silent, now, the men and the boys waited. There was nothing else they could do. All about them was the silence—except for the whispering, slithering murmur of the growing fungus. Nobody was conscious of the passage of time.

"Look!" screamed one of the juniors suddenly. The fungus was at the rail!

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