

"THE FAG'S SECRET!" Powerful Long Story of the Chums of St. Jim's—INSIDE!



The GEM

TOM MERRY'S WEEKLY.

2d





By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Under a shadow for a caddish trick—breaking school bounds at night—borrowing money! This unusual behaviour of Joe Frayne, the little waif of the Third Form, completely baffles his friends at St. Jim's; yet Joe refuses to give an explanation. What is the mystery of his sudden change of conduct?

CHAPTER 1.
Heated Argument!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY polished his eyeglass with great care, and jammed it into his right eye in an emphatic way. Having adjusted it there to his satisfaction, he glanced round Study No. 6 through it and coughed.

The cough passed unnoticed.

Perhaps it was because the fellows in the study were busy. Jack Blake, Digby, and Herries were talking all at once, as a matter of fact, and as Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were in the study, too, all talking, there was plenty of conversation going on. Under the circumstances, it was not surprising that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's little cough was not observed.

D'Arcy coughed again.

"Ahem!"

"You see," said Tom Merry of the Shell—"you see, it stands to reason that as I am footer captain for the junior club, I shall be cricket captain when cricket comes along."

"Of course!" said Manners and Lowther together. They had not thought out the matter, but Tom Merry was their chum, and that was quite enough for Manners and Lowther. The Terrible Three always backed one another up.

"Ahem!" said D'Arcy.

"Well, I think it's rot," said Jack Blake emphatically. "The fact that a Shell chap is footer captain is quite sufficient reason for a Fourth Form chap to be cricket captain. That stands to reason."

"Hear, hear!" said Herries and Digby heartily.

"Now, don't be an ass, Blake!" said Tom Merry.

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"Don't you be a fathead!"

"Look here, you Fourth Form bounder—"

"Look here, you Shell duffer—"

"I tell you—"

"I tell you—"

"Ahem!" coughed D'Arcy. "Hem! Ahem!"

Blake turned irritably upon his elegant chum.

"I wish you'd get something for that cough, Gussy!" he exclaimed. "You've been barking away for the last five minutes, while I have been trying to explain things to this Shell duffer."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Why can't you take some medicine if you've really got a cough?" demanded Blake.

"You uttah ass, I haven't a cough!"

"Then what are you barking for?"

"You ass! I wasn't barkin'—"

"Well, grunting, then."

"Weally, Blake—"

Jack Blake turned to Tom Merry again.

"We'd better get this question settled!" he exclaimed. "You Shell bounders never will listen to reason. Why, even Figgins of the New House, though he's an ass as a rule, agrees that a Fourth Form chap ought to be cricket captain for the coming season."

"That's because Figgins is in the Fourth—"

"Oh, rats! Figgy is a jolly sensible chap in some things. The only point where he goes wrong is that he thinks he ought to be captain, whereas—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"Ahem!"

—THAT WILL GRIP YOUR INTEREST FROM FIRST LINE TO LAST!

"Gussy, will you stop that barking, or take something for it?" shouted Blake, exasperated.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Why don't you try some cough mixture, or a bronchial lozenge, or something, if you've got something the matter with your silly gullet?"

"I haven't, you ass—"

"Then stop grunting. Look here, Tom Merry—"

"Ahem!"

"Will you dry up?" roared Blake.

"Certainly not, deah boy!" replied Arthur Augustus D'Arcy with dignity. "I have a wemark to make—"

"About the cricket?"

"Wathah not!"

"Then dry up! Look here, Tom Merry—"

"Ahem!"

"Gussy, you ass—"

"Ahem! Weally, you know—"

"We'll leave it to the junior cricket club, and have an election then," said Tom Merry, laughing. "That will settle the question."

"Ahem!"

"You chump, Gussy—"

"Ahem! I have a wemark to make. It is a wathah important mattah, dear boys, and I twust you will give me your attention."

Blake snorted.

"I suppose it's some more of your bosh!" he said disparagingly.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Is it anything about cricket or football?" Digby demanded.

"Certainly not!"

"Then ring off!"

"Anything about my dog, Towser?" asked Herries.

"Towsah? Certainly not!"

"Then we don't want it. Ring off!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"As for an election," said Blake, "I'm willing to leave it at that; but it would be more graceful on your part, Tom Merry, to propose me as cricket captain."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling asses!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ahem!"

"Gussy, you ass, if you don't leave off grunting—"

"I wefuse to have my wemarks chawactewised as gruntin', Blake. I have somethin' wathah important to mention."

Blake groaned.

"Oh, I suppose we shan't have any rest till it's over!" he said. "Get it off your chest, dummy. Quick!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Go ahead!"

"Undah the circs—"

"Look here, I'll give you a time limit," said Blake, pulling out his big silver watch. "You can have two minutes to talk, and if you haven't finished by then, it's understood that you shut up. That's fair, you fellows?"

"Hear, hear!" was the unanimous response.

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Twenty seconds gone!" said Blake, keeping a business-like eye on the dial of his watch. "You'd better go ahead, Gussy!"

"Undah the circs—"

"Forty seconds!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Nearly a minute!"

Arthur Augustus dropped his eyeglass from his eye, and polished it, and jammed it into his eye again. Then he took survey of Blake, beginning at his feet, and travelling up to his head. By the time he had finished that scornful survey, Blake rapped out:

"One minute gone!"

"You uttah ass!"

"Ten seconds!"

"You feahful chump—"

"Twenty seconds!"

"I wefuse to be tweated in this widiculous mannah. I have a vewy important observation to make concernin' the welfare of a youthful fwient. I uttally wefuse to have my wemarks set to a time limit in this way!"

"Minute and a half!"

"I wegard you, Blake, as a fwabjous chump, and you othah fellows as a set of gwinnin' asses!" said D'Arcy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Twenty seconds more, that's all. You'd better buck up, Gussy, or your interesting remarks will be lost to the human race for good."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Ten seconds more! Mind, if you talk after the time limit has expired, we shall sling you out. Five seconds more!"

"You silly ass—"

The juniors were roaring with laughter, and the swell of the School House was crimson with wrath. Only Blake kept grave, watching the dial with a serious eye. He closed the watch with a sudden snap.

"Time's up!" he exclaimed.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Ring off!"

"I wefuse to wing off! I—"

There was a sudden sound of racing footsteps in the passage, and the juniors turned towards the half-open door. "Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

The juniors heard the beating of footsteps and gasping of breath. From the distance came a sound of heavier footsteps, evidently in pursuit.

D'Arcy made a sudden step towards the door.

As he did so, a diminutive figure came rushing wildly into the study, panting and breathless.

Biff!

Right into D'Arcy he ran, knocking the swell of St. Jim's flying backwards, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave a tremendous yell and sat down on the floor. The newcomer, unable to stop himself, fell upon him, and clasped him round the neck for support.

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Joe, you young ass!"

Tom Merry was interrupted. A crowd of wrathful juniors crammed the doorway of the study, and there was a roar.

"Here he is!"

"We've got him!"

CHAPTER 2.

Joe in Trouble!

TOM MERRY stepped quickly towards the door. Monty Lowther and Manners stepped with him, and the Terrible Three stood in the way of the excited juniors.

What the trouble was about the juniors did not know. But they did not intend to let the study be rushed by the excited crowd from the passage.

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry quietly.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy struggled in the grasp of the fag who had fallen upon him.

It was Joe Frayne, Tom Merry's protegee—the new fellow in the Third Form at St. Jim's—the "slummer," as some of the fellows called him, who had been rescued from his slum by Tom Merry, and whose fees at St. Jim's were paid by Tom Merry's uncle.

Joe was panting for breath. He did not seem to know where he was, or what he was doing, so breathless and excited was he.

"Crikey!" he gasped. "Oh crikey!"

"Bai Jove! Gewwoff me, you young wascal!"

"Oh, Master D'Arcy—"

"You feahful young ass! You are wumplin' my waistcoat, and cwumplin' my collah feahfully! Gewwoff!"

"Sorry, Master D'Arcy—"

"Gewwoff!"

Joe scrambled breathlessly off the swell of St. Jim's.

He stood up, gasping for breath, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rose slowly to his feet. The swell of the Fourth was very dusty. He groped for his eyeglass, and jammed it into his eye and gave Joe Frayne a look of wrath.

"You feahful young ass!" he panted.

"I'm sorry—"

"You silly chump!"

"I—I kim 'ere to—to get houter their way!" gasped Joe.

"I'm sorry! I didn't see you when I run into you, Master D'Arcy. They was after me!"

"Wats!"

"You see, sir—"

"Oh, all wight!" said D'Arcy. "Nevah mind, if you're sowwy. Take that clothes bwush, deah boy, and bwush me down!"

"Yes, sir!"

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The pursuing juniors, jammed in the doorway, were viewing the scene bursting with wrath. They could not get into the study while Tom Merry & Co. were lined up to defend the doorway, but they were evidently very anxious to get hold of Joe Frayne.

Gore and Mellish and Crooke were among them, all of them cads; but there were some decent fellows in the throng, too, for Tom Merry recognised Kerruish, and Hancock and Macdonald and Kangaroo and Clifton Dane.

"Have him out!" roared a voice from behind.

Tom Merry held out his hand warningly.

"Easy does it!" he exclaimed.

"Rats!"

"Have him out!"

"Kick those Shell bounders out of the way!"

"Rush 'em!"

"Have him out!"

Tom Merry & Co. stood shoulder to shoulder. They looked so grim that the boldest of the invaders paused.

"Choose it!" said Tom Merry coolly. "You're after Frayne, are you?"

"Yes, we are!"

"What's he done?"

"I ain't done nothin', Master Tom!" said Joe eagerly. "Explain, Kangy!" said Tom Merry to Noble, of the Shell. "You're the most sensible chap here. What's Joe done?"

Kangaroo was as flushed and excited as the rest.

"The cheeky young beggar——"

There was a roar.

"Rush 'em! Have him out!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed the Cornstalk. "Let me explain to Tom Merry——"

"Hang Tom Merry!" exclaimed Mellish of the Fourth. "Who's Tom Merry? Let's have the young bouncer out, and rag him!"

"Oh, shut up, Mellish!" said Kangaroo.

"Have him out!"

"Shut up, I tell you. Look here, Tom Merry, that young villain has got us all into a row—nine or ten of us——"

"I ain't!" exclaimed Joe.

"Shut up, Joe, and let Kangy speak," said Tom Merry.

"Yes, Master Tom."

"We were in Herr Schneider's detention class," said Kangaroo. "We had German papers to do, and we did 'em, and left 'em on his desk. Then that unspeakable young villain went and daubed them all with ink!"

"We've got 'em to do all over again!" yelled Gore.

"Yah! Rag him!"

"Have him out!"

"It was a rotten trick, whoever did it!" said Tom Merry, frowning. "But how do you know it was Frayne? Did you see him?"

"Well, no——"

"Then how do you know?"

"Mellish saw him sneaking past the Form-room——"

Tom Merry sniffed.

"I wouldn't take Mellish's word against Joe," he exclaimed. "Mellish has always been against him, and you know Mellish doesn't tell the truth."

Some of the ragers chuckled. Tom Merry had a way of speaking out in the plainest of plain English—he always hit straight from the shoulder.

"Look here——" began Mellish.

"But that isn't all," said Kangaroo. "I don't see any reason to doubt Mellish's word in this case, but that isn't all. Frayne had no right in the Form-room at all—it was in the Shell Form Room that old Schneider had his detention class. There weren't any of the Third in it. Well, the young rascal left something of his in the Form-room—Gore found it in the grate—an ink-bottle with his name on the label!"

"Phew!"

"Was Gore alone when he found it?" asked Jack Blake, with a distrustful glance at the cad of the Shell.

Gore sneered.

"No, I wasn't," he exclaimed. "Kangaroo saw me take it out of the grate, and so did Dane, and so did Hancock."

"Right-ho! So we did!"

Tom Merry turned a troubled look upon Joe Frayne. He had stood that lad's friend steadily and truly ever since he had brought him to St. Jim's. The snobs of the school had been dead against Joe, but Tom Merry had always been true.

"Joe," he exclaimed, "you wouldn't play a rotten trick like this, would you?"

Joe shook his head earnestly.

"I wouldn't, Master Tom!" he exclaimed. "I swear I wouldn't. Some of them chaps 'ave been very 'ard on me—especially Master Mellish and Master Crooke—but I wouldn't do no 'arm to their work, sir. I never thought of such a thing!"

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"Have you been in the Shell-room since lessons?"

"No, I ain't!"

"Liar!" said Mellish.

"It's true, Master Tom."

"You haven't inked the detention papers?"

"No, Master Tom. I never knew there was a detention class in the Form-room at all, or that Herr Schneider had given out papers to be done, and I wouldn't 'ave 'urt 'em, anyway!" said Joe, with a look of great distress.

Tom Merry turned to the crowd of juniors.

"You hear what he says?" he said.

"He's lying!"

"Blessed slum bouncer—of course he's lying!" said Crooke.

"Yes, rather!"

"Weally, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I wegard it as extremewly bad form to doubt a chap's word without absolute pwoof——"

"It's proved!"

"Ring off, D'Arcy!"

"Have him out!"

Kangaroo advanced into the study.

"He's jolly well mucked up our detention papers," he exclaimed, "and we're going to bump him for it. If you stand by him, Tom Merry, there'll be trouble."

"Then there'll be trouble."

"Look here——"

"Get aside!"

"Rush 'em!" yelled Mellish from behind.

And the excited juniors made a rush.

CHAPTER 3.

Kildare's Inquiry!

"SHOULDER to shoulder!" sang out Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Buck up!"

"Have him out!"

There was a wild struggle inside the doorway. Tom Merry & Co. stood as firm as rocks, hitting out. The rush of the attackers bore them back into the study, but they did not separate, standing firmly together and hitting out hard.

Kangaroo and Dane rolled on the floor, and Gore rolled over them. Blake and Digby fell, too, and several more juniors stumbled over the fallen ones and went down.

Kangaroo struggled up furiously. As a rule, he was on the best of terms with Tom Merry & Co., but he was too excited to think of that now.

"Come on!" he roared.

"Hurrah!"

"Sock it to 'em!"

The rush was renewed, and this time force of numbers broke the line, and Tom Merry & Co. were mixed up with their assailants, and the study was full of fighting juniors.

The din was terrific.

The table went flying and the chairs were knocked over, and there was a crash of glass as someone put his shoulder through the bookcase.

Crash! Bang! Yell!

The juniors were too excited to hear loud footsteps and voices in the passage; but when Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, and Darrell, the prefect, appeared in the doorway with red and angry faces they realised that the noise they were making had been heard from afar.

"What's this row about?" roared Kildare. "Stop it at once!"

"Cave!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Stop, I tell you!"

The fighting ceased.

The juniors, very dusty and crumpled and breathless, stood gasping and looking at one another like a crowd of ill-tempered dogs, ready to begin again at a moment's notice.

Kildare looked at them grimly.

"I suppose you think it's fun to turn the Fourth Form passage into a bear garden!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, ladle out the lines!" said Blake resignedly.

"Weally, Kildare——"

"I'm not going to give you lines," said the captain of St. Jim's sharply. "Unless you can give me a good explanation of this row I shall march every fellow here to Mr. Railton to be caned!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh!"

"Now, then, what's the row about?" demanded Kildare.

The juniors looked at one another. Lines would have been bad enough, but a caning for a study row was too bad. True, the study row had been more in the nature of a riot, and very likely Mr. Railton himself had heard it in his own quarters.



Jack Blake stepped quickly and quietly to the study door and suddenly flung it open. A stooping form outside overbalanced in the sudden surprise. It was Mellish, who had been eavesdropping! "You cad!" exclaimed Blake.

"You see—" said Tom Merry.

"Weally, you know—"

"I'm waiting for an explanation!" said Kildare.

"Well, we came here to rag Frayne," said Kangaroo desperately. "That's how it was. Tom Merry stood up for the young bouncer!"

Kildare frowned.

"Oh, you came here to rag young Frayne, did you?" he exclaimed. "Am I to understand, Noble, that you are one of the fellows who have persecuted Frayne because he came from a poor place to this school, and is paid for by Tom Merry's uncle?"

Kangaroo flushed crimson.

"No, I'm not!" he exclaimed indignantly. "Tom Merry—Blake—any of the fellows will tell you that I've been against treating Frayne badly on that account."

"It's very true, sir," said Joe. "Master Noble has been very good to me. He ain't like Mellish or Gore."

"Then why were you after him?" asked Kildare.

Kangaroo hesitated.

"You've got to explain; go ahead!"

"I—I—we—"

"You see—" began Hancock.

"Well?"

"Master Noble thinks I mucked up the detention papers, sir," said Joe. "I never 'eard of 'em till jest now, sir. I jest came into the 'Ouse, and they swooped down on me, and I ran. I ran into 'ere because I thought Master Blake would 'elp me, sir."

"Quite right," said Jack Blake, who was caressing an extremely swollen nose.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And you didn't know why they were going for you, Frayne?"

"No, sir!"

"It's a lie!" said Mellish.

"Hold your tongue, Mellish!" said Kildare, who had no good opinion of the cad of the Fourth. "You say that Frayne has damaged your detention papers, Noble?"

"Yes, I may as well out with it, as he's told you himself," said Kangaroo. "We've been detained for German, and

Herr Schneider set us papers in the Shell-room. He left us to do them, and we left them on the desk when we had finished, each of us putting his papers there when we went out. We never imagined anybody would be rotter enough to go and damage them and get us into a row."

Kildare's brow darkened.

"Do you mean to say that somebody did, Noble?"

"Yes, Kildare. We've just been called up by Herr Schneider," said the Australian junior. "He was in a raging temper. He showed us the papers. They were blotted and smudged all over with ink. He thought we had left them like that out of defiance, and he wouldn't listen to a word. We've got the papers doubled to do over again."

There was a gasp of wrath among the ragers. German was not a favourite subject with most of them, and impositions were never popular. And to have an imposition doubled, after it had been once done, was simply unforgivable.

Kildare understood perfectly the feelings of the juniors. He had been a junior himself, and not so very long ago. His brow was dark and stern as he turned towards Joe Frayne.

"Frayne!" he rapped out.

Joe faced him, still holding a clothes-brush with which he had been brushing down the swell of St. Jim's. Joe's face was dismayed. After Tom Merry he regarded Kildare as the finest fellow breathing; and he was not far wrong. But Kildare was evidently very angry now, and Joe trembled.

"Ye-es?" faltered the little ragamuffin.

"You say you did not damage the detention papers?"

"I didn't, Master Kildare."

"You're on bad terms with most of these fellows, I believe?"

"Some of 'em, sir," said Joe. "Master Mellish and Gore and Crooke have been very hard on me, sir. They don't like a slum chap coming to the school, sir. But I wouldn't do them no 'arm."

"Yaas, wathah! Quite wight, Joe!"

"Silence, please, D'Arcy!"

"Weally, Kildare—"

"Silence! The other fellows, Joe—"

"Master Noble 'as been very good to me, and Master Dane, too," said Joe. "I 'ope they won't think so bad of me as to think I'd play such a rotten game on 'em, sir. I ain't no call to do it, 'cause they ain't been rotten to me like Mellish!"

"I suppose you went there to spoil Gore's and Mellish's papers, and did the lot while you were about it," said Kangaroo. "But, goodness knows, I don't want to be hard on you! I never thought you'd deny it; but if you say you didn't do it I'm willing to believe you."

"Same here," said Clifton Dane.

"Rats!" said Gore. "He did it right enough."

"Of course he did!"

"Cad!"

"Sweep!"

"Rotter!"

Kildare held up his hand for silence. Joe was looking so distressed that the captain of St. Jim's could hardly but believe the statement of the little ragamuffin. Joe had not impressed him as a fellow who would wantonly play such a dirty trick, and it seemed too much to believe that he had intended to spoil the papers of the boys he hated, and had from sheer wantonness spoiled those also of fellows who had been kind to him.

"What reason have you to suppose that Frayne did this?" Kildare asked. "I'm going to get to the bottom of this matter. If he did it I shall know how to deal with him in the future—very differently from the past. But I shall not believe it without proof. What proof have you?"

Gore held out an empty ink-bottle. On the label was written the name "J. Frayne." The fags of the Third generally wrote their names on their property, for in fag society property was held very much in common if a locker was left unlocked.

Kildare took the bottle.

"Is this yours, Frayne?" he asked.

"Yes," said Joe.

"I found it in the grate in the Shell class-room," said Gore. "After the row with Herr Schneider, we went back there to see if we could get a trace of the chap who had mucked up the papers. I found that."

"We all saw him," said Kangaroo.

"You were all together at the time?" Kildare asked.

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"Yes."

"And I saw the young cad dodging near the Form-room door, about a quarter of an hour before we were called in to be ragged by old Schneider!" exclaimed Mellish.

"I—I wasn't there!" exclaimed Joe.

"I saw you!"

"You didn't, Master Mellish. You've made a mistake!"

Kildare looked keenly from one to the other.

"When did the last of you leave the Form-room, leaving the papers there?" he asked.

Kangaroo reflected.

"I left about five," he said. "Which of you chaps was the last out?"

"I was," said Hancock. "It was a quarter-past five."

"When did Herr Schneider collect the papers?"

"He called us into his study at six, so I suppose he had got them from his desk in the Form-room."

"Then the ink was spilt on the papers between a quarter-past five and six o'clock?"

"Yes, certainly!"

"Very well." Kildare turned to Joe. "You say that you did not go into the Form-room, Frayne?"

"I swear I didn't, sir!"

"Very well. Where have you been the last hour?" asked Kildare quietly. "If you did not go into the Shell Form Room, you were somewhere else. Where were you?"

Every eye was turned upon Frayne of the Third. Kildare's question was a "clinger," as the juniors would have called it. If he had not touched the detention papers, he should have no difficulty in proving an alibi.

But could he?

Joe was silent, with crimson cheeks, and his eyes fixed upon the carpet. There was a long, grim silence in the study.

CHAPTER 4.

Nothing to Say!

TOM MERRY broke the silence in Blake's study. Joe's friends were standing silent, with uncomfortable looks. Kangaroo and the rest, their belief strengthened and confirmed by Joe's silence, looked at one another.

There was no longer the slightest doubt in their minds that Joe was guilty; and Tom Merry & Co. were beginning to waver, too, in their belief in the little waif's innocence.

"Speak up, Joe!" said Tom Merry, in a strained voice. "Speak up! The question's easy enough to answer, kid."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "Speak up, Joe!"

Joe was silent, with downcast looks.

Kildare's lip curled.

"Have you nothing to say, Frayne?" he asked.

"Ye-es, Master Kildare."

"You were not in the Form-room between a quarter-past five and six o'clock?"

"No, sir!"

"You say that Mellish did not see you near the Form-room?"

"No, sir!"

"Then where were you?"

"I—I was out, sir," faltered Joe.

"Out in the quad?" asked Kildare. "I suppose somebody saw you there, then? Were you with your friend, D'Arcy minor?"

"No; I ain't seen Wally since classes."

"Was anybody with you?"

"No."

"But somebody in the quad would have seen you?"

"I—I wasn't in the quad."

"Do you mean that you had gone out of the school?" asked Kildare, while some of the juniors grinned derisively at what they regarded as the helpless floundering of a liar caught in his own toils.

"Yes, sir."

"Had you a pass out of gates?"

"N-no."

"Then you broke bounds?" asked Kildare sternly.

"Ye-es."

"Can you prove it? If you went out or came in by the school gates, Taggles would have seen you. Are you willing for the school porter to be asked?"

"E never saw me."

"How so?"

"I got over the wall under the elm-trees, sir."

"Why?"

"I didn't want to be seen going hout, sir."

"Oh! Where did you go?"

"Down the lane, sir."

"What for?"

Joe was silent.

Again there was a deep and significant silence in the study. Why did not the waif of St. Jim's reply? To most of the fellows present it seemed only too clear that he had been floundering on from one lie to another, and was now driven to his last ditch, as it were.

"Well, Frayne," said Kildare, "answer me! What did you go out of the school for?"

"I—I'd rather not say, sir."

"Why not?"

"I—I don't want to."

"Come, come, that won't do, Frayne! I order you to explain!"

Joe's lips set obstinately. Tom Merry looked at him with deep anxiety. Was it possible that Joe, after all, had been lying? Tom Merry would never have believed it of him. Yet—

"Speak up, Joe!" said Tom Merry.

"I hain't nothing to say, Master Tom."

"You can tell Kildare what you went out for."

"I—I can't."

"Why not?"

"I—I can't, Master Tom."

There was a look of deep distress in Joe's face that went straight to Tom Merry's heart. He pressed Joe's shoulder.

"You needn't be afraid to tell Kildare, Joe," he said softly. "Kildare is only thinking of getting at the truth, not of punishing you for breaking a school rule."

"That is true," said Kildare.

But Joe did not speak.

Kildare waited a few minutes; and then, as Joe did not speak, the captain of St. Jim's went on, in a harder and colder voice:

"You cannot explain where you were, then, Frayne?"

"N-no, sir."

Kildare smiled scornfully.

"And you expect me to believe that you did not go into the Form-room, when you refuse, for no reason whatever, to say where you were at the time?"

"I—I—I—"

"Well?"

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

"Very well, Frayne. It is perfectly clear to me," said Kildare icily. "You did exactly as these juniors suspect, and you have been lying about it!"

"I ain't, sir."

"I cannot allow them to rag you," said Kildare, in a hard voice. "But if ever a fellow deserved ragging, you do."

"Hear, hear!" said Gore.

"But I can cane you for performing a cowardly and ill-natured trick, and for lying about it," said the St. Jim's captain, "and I will. Follow me to my study!"

"Yes, sir," said Joe heavily.

"I say, Kildare!" exclaimed Kangaroo. "Excuse me, but—but I wish you'd let him off, you know. I've been telling you what happened, and if you cane him it puts me in the position of sneaking. You made me tell you."

Kildare hesitated.

"Very well!" he said, after a pause. "I will let Frayne off. Mind, you fellows, understand that you're not to take the matter into your own hands. Not one of you is to lay a finger on Frayne, or I shall let him hear of it. Remember that. As for you, Frayne, I let you off because Noble has spoken up for you, not because you do not deserve a sound caning, you young rascal. Mind, no more rows here, or you'll hear of it. Come on, Darrell!"

Darrell paused a moment. He dropped a hand on Joe's shoulder.

"If you've got anything to say, kid, why don't you say it?" he asked kindly. "There's no need to keep a secret, surely?"

"I ain't anything to say, sir," said Joe.

Darrell said no more. He followed the captain of St. Jim's from the study.

Kangaroo fixed his eyes upon Joe.

"It's pretty clear about you!" he exclaimed. "You're a disgraceful young scoundrel, and you ought to be ragged bald-headed!"

"Let's rag him!" exclaimed Gore.

"You heard what Kildare said!" replied Kangaroo sharply. "We're not going against that. Let the young cad off! I shouldn't care to be in his shoes, anyway."

"I suppose even Tom Merry won't stand up for the little cad now!" sneered Mellish.

Tom Merry did not speak.

Kangaroo strode from the study, and the rest of the ragers followed him, most of them hurling some sneer or gibe at Joe as they went.

Jack Blake closed the door after the last of them.

"Well, my only hat!" Blake exclaimed,

CHAPTER 5.

The Eavesdropper!

JOE FRAYNE stood silent in the study. The eyes of the chums of the Fourth and the Shell were turned upon him, but he did not appear to be able to meet them.

His cheeks were burning, and there was a glimmer of moisture on his eyelashes; but his lips were set and very firm.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, breaking an uncomfortable silence. "This is a most uncomfortable occurrence!"

"Rotten!" said Monty Lowther.

"Beastly!"

"I must say that I should never have thought it of Frayne," Digby remarked.

"Nor I," said Herries. "I thought Frayne was decent. I let him feed my bulldog one day, and Towser seemed to like him. I'm very much disappointed in Frayne."

"Weally, deah boys—"

"It's rotten!" said Manners. "You shouldn't have done it, Joe!"

"I suppose the poor little chap's not to be blamed," said Tom Merry, with a shake in his voice. "You know how he was brought up. I thought I had cured him of telling lies. But I suppose he doesn't really understand."

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER!

Plumber: "I've come to mend the leak, madam."

Householder: "But I didn't send for you."

Plumber: "Then it must have been the people who lived here before you!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to S. Helman, 2, Jenner Road, Stoke Newington, London, N.16.



Joe gave a sharp cry.

"Master Tom!"

"Well, Joe?"

"I ain't told any lies."

Tom Merry bit his lips.

"How can I possibly believe you, Joe? I wouldn't take Mellish's word about his seeing you near the Form-room. I know Mellish is a cad, and that he's got a spite against you. I couldn't even pay much attention to the ink-bottle being found there—somebody might have put it there. But if you weren't in the Form-room, where were you?"

"Yes, rather!" said Blake. "Of course, you might have chosen that very time for breaking bounds. But where did you go—and why? Why can't you explain?"

"I—I can't!"

"Why not?"

"I can't tell you."

Tom Merry's face hardened.

"Do you mean to say, Joe, that you were doing something outside the walls of the school that you can't possibly explain to your own friends—something disgraceful?"

"N-no."

"Then how were you occupied?"

Joe did not answer.

"You can't tell me, Joe?"

"No, sir."

Tom Merry made a weary gesture.

"You'd better go, Joe. It's no use talking to you, I can see that."

Joe gave a gulp.

"Very well, Master Tom. But it's—it's 'ard you should think so bad of me. But it can't be 'elped, I s'pose."

Joe moved slowly to the door.

Not a word was uttered as he opened the door, passed slowly out of the study, and closed the door behind him.

His footsteps died away down the passage.

There was silence in the study. The juniors weren't in a humour to discuss a question of cricket, as they had been doing before Joe entered. All the cheerfulness was gone out of their faces.

They had always backed Joe up, they had always frowned down the snobs who had endeavoured to excite feeling against the waif of the slums.

It was a shock to discover that the snobs had been in the right, and that they themselves had been in the wrong—and that was what it looked like now.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was very silent, with a deep shade of thoughtfulness upon his aristocratic brow. The swell of St. Jim's was evidently thinking the matter out very seriously.

"I suppose there's nothin' more to be said about it!" Blake exclaimed at last. "Are we going to settle that cricket question now, Tom Merry?"

The hero of the Shell shook his head.

"Hang it all, no!" he exclaimed. "I don't feel inclined to talk cricket now—and it will keep, anyway."

"Look here, this is a rotten affair. It's made me feel utterly rotten. It looks as if there can't be any doubt about it; but I don't like to give up my faith in Joe. The poor little chap was brought up to lie as naturally as he breathed; and I suppose it was no use thinking of a few weeks making much difference to him."

"I suppose not."

"Pway listen to me, deah boys—"

"Oh, go ahead, Gussy!"

"You may wemembah, before Joe wushed into the study in that weekless way," said the swell of St. Jim's—"you may wemembah that I was about to make a wemark, and that Blake intewwupted me in his wude way. That wemark—"

"We'll be going, I think," Monty Lowther remarked.

The swell of St. Jim's turned his eyeglass upon the Shell fellow.

"Pway wait till I have finished, Lowthah!" he exclaimed.

"It will be bed-time in three hours," said Lowther blandly. "Can't be done."

"Weally, you ass—"

"Oh, wire in, Gussy, and get it over!" said Tom Merry.

"I was about to wemark, as I have before observed," said D'Arcy—"I was about to wemark that Joe was in need of a fwiend to look aftah him. That is the wemark I was goin' to make, when Blake took out his watch and diswepctfully suggested a wotten time limit. It appeahd to me that Joe wasn't bein' pwopahly looked aftah."

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Joe was looked after as well as I could look after him," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, that is vewy twue. But what is wequiahed in a mattah of this sort is a fellow of tact and judgment," D'Arcy explained. "As a mattah of fact, I have decided that I was the pwopah person to look aftah Joe, you know. In mattahs of personal attire, and that sort of thing, you know, I am the wight and pwopah person to guide the youthful minds, and teach the young ideah how to behave."

"How to behave like an idiot?" asked Lowther.

"Pway don't be a widiculous ass, Lowthah. I had already resolved that I was the pwopah person to take young Fwayne in hand; and what has happend makes no difference to my wewolve. I'm goin' to take him up."

"After what has happened?"

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"Yaas, watah! If he is such a feaful young fibbah as appeahs he will need a firm, guidin' hand to keep him to the stwaight path. It's not the place of a fwiend to desert a chap when he's goin' wong, is it? That's the time when a chap should cling closah."

Tom Merry gave the swell of St. Jim's a slap on the shoulder.

"Bravo, Gussy!"

"Ow!"

"What's the matter?"

"Ow! You ass! You have cweased my jacket, and thwown me into quite a fluttah! Pway don't be such a wuff ass! Look here, I am goin' to take young Fwayne up. As a mattah of fact, deah boys, I believe him."

"What!"

"I believe in his statements. I fancy he has some widiculous weason for not tellin' us what he was doin' outside St. Jim's, and pewwaps he will explain. I am goin' to see him, and if he gives me his word of honah that he has told the twuth, I shall believe him."

"Good old Gussy!"

"I shall also endeavour to cleah him of suspish," said the swell of St. Jim's. "You fellows know how keen I am when I bwing my bwain down to a thing."

"Yes, rather. Ha, ha, ha!"

"I believe Mellish was lyin'—"

Jack Blake gave a sudden start, and stepped quickly and quietly to the door and flung it suddenly open.

A stooping form outside the keyhole rolled over in the sudden surprise.

It was Mellish!

The juniors uttered an exclamation of disgust.

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Mellish had been listening at the keyhole. In a moment the eavesdropper was upon his feet, and would have dashed away down the passage, but Blake caught him by the shoulder and swung him into the study.

"You cad!" he said.

"I—I was just going to knock!" stammered Mellish haltingly.

"Don't lie!" said Tom Merry contemptuously.

"I—I—"

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his monocle upon Mellish. "Bai Jove, you uttah wottah! You were listenin' at the keyhole!"

"I—I—"

"Bai Jove! I pwopose makin' an example of that uttah wottah!" said Arthur Augustus. "As he is so fond of keyholes, fasten him to the keyhole and leave him standing there, so that the fellows will know what he has been doing—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good egg!"

"I—I won't stand it!" shouted Mellish. "I—I—"

"You jolly well will!" exclaimed Blake, grasping the cad of the Fourth as he attempted to break away. "Mind, you'll get hurt if you struggle!"

"I tell you—"

"Shut up! Get a thin cord, Dig—a blindecord will do!"

"What-ho!"

Mellish's wrists were bound together promptly with the cord, then it was passed through the keyhole from outside, and fastened to the handle of the door from within, and the door was shut on Mellish.

The cad of the Fourth stood outside the study door, helpless to go—helpless to unfasten the cord. His face was pale with rage as he stood there.

CHAPTER 6.

Wally Wants to Know!

WALLY, the younger brother of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, came along the Fourth Form passage with his hands in his trousers pockets, and a smudge of ink on his nose.

He stopped, and uttered an exclamation at the sight of the eavesdropper outside the door of Study No. 6.

"My only Aunt Jane!" exclaimed Wally.

Mellish gave him an eager look.

"Untie me, D'Arcy—minor!" he exclaimed.

"Who tied you up?"

"Tom Merry and Blake?"

"What for?"

"Because—because they've got a spite against me."

"Rats!" said Wally. "If Tom Merry had anything up against you, he'd have it out with you. You've been up to some rotten trick—that's what's the matter with you."

"You young bound!"

Wally opened the study door and looked in. The chums of the School House were still talking over the late occurrence, careless whether Mellish heard them or not. It was not that they cared for his eavesdropping. It was, as Blake remarked, for the principle of the thing that they made an example of Mellish.

"Hallo!" said Wally, in his cheerful, cheeky way.

"Weally, Wally—"

"Now don't you begin, Gussy," Wally remonstrated. "I know my face isn't up to the mark, and my collar wants changing, and my jacket is dusty. No need to go over ancient history, you know. I'm not going to listen to you unless you put on a new record."

"You uttah young wascal!"

"Where's Joe?" demanded Wally, looking round the study. "I've been looking for him ever since afternoon school, and somebody said he was here, having a row."

"Haven't you seen him since lessons?" asked Tom Merry keenly.

"Not a hide or hair of him."

"Has he been out of the school, do you know?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know whether he's been in the Shell Form Room?"

"Not much. I've been punting a footer about with Jameson and Gibson," said Wally. "I'm looking for Joe to have tea. Where is he?"

"I don't know."

"What's happened?" demanded Wally, in his business-like tones. "If you've been doing anything to Joe, you'd better look out for me, I can tell you."

"Weally, Wally—"

"Oh, keep off the grass, Gus! What's the matter, anyhow?"

Tom Merry explained in a few words. Wally listened, with his cheerful face growing long and serious.

"Oh, that's rotten!" he exclaimed.

"Yaas, wathah! But—"

"But I don't believe Joe did it," said Wally, with a shake of the head. "I don't know what he's playing the giddy goat for, but I don't believe he did that rotten trick. Anyway, I'll soon have it out of him. I'll put it to him like a man and a brother, and make him own up about it, or punch his head! You leave it to me."

Wally quitted the study.

"Untie my hands, D'Arcy minor!" Mellish begged.

"Don't do anything of the sort!" called out Blake.

"We've stuck that cad there for listening at the keyhole. He's going to have enough keyhole before he's finished."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

He looked round in the darkening quad, and in the passages and Common-room for Frayne, but did not see him.

Joe seemed to have disappeared.

Wally was feeling very uneasy as his search lengthened without success.

"My only aunt! There's the dorm!" Wally muttered.

He had not thought of looking there. He could see no reason why Joe should go up to the dormitory. But as everywhere else had been drawn blank, it was worth while to look, at all events.

Wally hurried upstairs.

He approached the Third Form dormitory and opened the door. All was shadowy within, but on one of the beds was to be seen a dark figure extended.

Wally ran forward. He had found the waif of St. Jim's



"Gweat Scott!" gasped Gussy in dismay, as he gazed on the scene of wild disorder in the study. The fags had wrought havoc with his property! His silk hats were like concertinas! Shirts, socks, and ties were strewn out of drawers, and a weird figure in imitation of D'Arcy had been set up. "The fearful young wottahs!"

And Wally hurried off without taking any notice of Mellish. He went away in search of Joe Frayne.

But the waif of St. Jim's was not easy to find. Wally looked in the Third Form Room first. It was nearly time for evening preparation, and the fags were gathering there, but Joe Frayne was not among them.

"Seen Frayne?" Wally called out.

"I haven't," said Curly Gibson. "I hear he's been mixed up in a row with Kangaroo in the Fourth Form study."

"Yes; but since then—"

"Haven't seen him."

"Chaps are saying he mucked up some detention papers," said Hobbs, the leader of the snobs in the Third who were "down" on Joe. "I expect it's true. The little outsider would do anything mean."

"Oh, yes, rather!" said Picke.

Wally snorted.

"You shut up!" he exclaimed. "If I had time, I'd knock your silly nappers together; but I haven't! Yah!"

And Wally quitted the Form-room.

at last. Joe Frayne had not heard him coming. The little waif was extended across the bed in an attitude of utter dejection. His face was buried in his hands, and his whole body was shaking with sobs.

Wally was strangely affected as he looked down at him.

The scamp of the Third was not one of the crying kind himself, and he could but dimly understand tears in others. He regarded a fellow who "blubbed" as "soft." But Joe, too, was a tough little rascal, as a rule, and Wally did not remember ever seeing him "blub" before. When a fellow like Picke or Mellish blubbed, it was all "gammon," and there was nothing in it. But when Joe cried Wally felt a profound uneasiness, a feeling as if things generally were out of joint.

He hardly knew what to do as he gazed down at the grief-stricken figure of the little waif. He dropped his hand upon Joe's shoulder at last, and shook him gently.

"Joe!" he said.

Joe gave a violent start, and a shiver ran through him. He looked up quickly and miserably at Wally.

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"Who is it?" he muttered.

"It's me—Wally!"

"Oh!"

"What's the matter, Joe?"

"Nothing."

Wally sat down on the bed.

"It's no good telling me that nothing's the matter, my son, when you're blubbing like a blessed old woman," he said. "Better make a clean breast of it."

Joe was gasping for breath, trying to control his emotion. He had not expected to be tracked to the dormitory, and he was ashamed of having been discovered with the tears running down his cheeks. He wiped them away with his sleeve, keeping his face half-turned from D'Arcy minor as he did so.

"I—I wasn't exactly blubbing," he said cautiously.

Wally chuckled.

"You young ass! Think I haven't got any eyes? Now, then, what's the matter? I've heard about it all from Tom Merry of the Sholl. It seems that the chaps suspect you of mucking up the detention papers, and you can't explain where you were—can't prove an alibi."

"Ye-es, Master Wally."

"Why don't you explain?"

"I—I can't!"

"Why not?" demanded Wally magisterially.

"I—I can't tell you."

"Look here!" said Wally. "I'm your friend, ain't I?"

"Yes."

"Then tell me."

"I can't!"

"Do you want a thick ear?"

"N-no!"

"Then tell me!" said Wally impressively. "I'm your friend, and you'll get a prize thick ear if you don't confide in me! Go ahead!"

"I—I don't care," said Joe miserably. "Master Tom don't believe me, and I—I don't care for anybody or anything else!"

CHAPTER 7.

Wally's Way!

JOE sat miserably on the bed as he spoke. Wally snorted with wrath. To Wally's mind he was a much more important personage than Tom Merry, in this case. Wasn't he Joe's own chum in the Third—a fellow who stood by him in a hundred rows?

"Look here, kid!" he exclaimed. "Never mind Tom Merry! I'm the chap you've got to think about! If I think you didn't do what you're accused of it's all right. Tom Merry can go and eat coke."

Joe did not reply.

"You were somewhere else, and not in the Form-room at all, eh?" said Wally.

"Yes."

"Where were you?"

"Out of school."

"Then what were you doing? You've only got to explain to make everything clear," said D'Arcy minor.

"But I can't!"

"Why not?"

"I can't!"

"Mind, you needn't explain to Tom Merry," said Wally.

"You needn't explain to anybody but me. But if I'm going to stand by you, and stick to you, I shall have to know. I can't stand by a chap who does such a dirty trick as spoiling detention papers."

"I didn't do it, Wally."

"Then explain."

"I can't!"

Wally pushed back his cuffs.

"Stand up!" he said.

"What for?"

"I'm going to give you a hiding!"

"Oh!"

"It's for your own good," said Wally. "I can't have this rot, you know! Stand up and take your licking!"

Joe did not move.

"Are you going to stand up?" roared Wally.

"I can't fight you, Wally. And there's nothing to fight about. It's rotten enough as it is," said Joe, with a gulp.

"Bosh! Explain yourself. Do you think you're going to be allowed to have mysterious secrets like the hero of a newspaper serial?" demanded Wally angrily.

"I can't help it."

"You jolly well can help it, and you shall!"

"I can't explain."

"You've got to, or I shall give you a licking for your own good," said Wally. "Now, are you going to explain?"

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"I can't!"

"Then stand up!"

"I won't!"

"My only Aunt Jane! I'll soon see about that!"

Wally was in deadly earnest. Wally had his own way of doing things, and this was it. He had found few difficulties in his career that could not be overcome by punching somebody's head. He grasped Joe Frayne by the shoulders and yanked him off his bed and stood him upon his feet.

"There you are!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, Master Wally!"

"Now put up your hands!"

"No, I won't!"

Rap, rap, rap!

Wally's knuckles came hard upon Joe's nose. It was dusk in the Third Form dormitory, but quite light enough for the purpose. Joe staggered, and gave a yell. The raps on his nose began to rouse the fighting blood in the waif of Blucher's Buildings.

"Look 'ere!" he roared. "You stop it! You 'ear me!"

Wally chuckled.

"I hear you!" he said. "Come on!"

"Look 'ere—"

"Oh, rats! Come on!"

"I tell yer—"

Rap, rap, rap!

Wally was not hitting hard, but hard enough. Joe put up his hands and guarded, and hit out in return.

Then in a few seconds more the two fags were "going it" hammer and tongs.

Wally was the better boxer of the two, but Joe was wiry and strong, and had plenty of pluck, and he had picked up some knowledge of using his hands, too, since he had been at St. Jim's.

They seemed well matched as they tramped and panted to and fro, guarding, lunging, punching, and dodging.

Joe had forgotten his grief by this time, and forgotten, apparently, that Wally was his closest chum.

Both of the fags had their fighting blood up, and they might have been the deadliest enemies by the way they slogged at one another.

"Ow!" gasped Wally suddenly, as Joe's fist landed in his left eye, and he went sprawling across a bed in the dusk. "Yow!"

Joe stood back, panting.

"I'm sorry, Master Wally!"

"Rats!"

"Look 'ere—"

"Oh, come on!"

Hammer and tongs again! Wally had a gleam in his eyes now, and he was pressing hard. One of the left-handers for which Wally was famous in the Third Form caught Joe under the chin, and the waif of St. Jim's went staggering back.

He dropped with a crash on the floor of the dormitory.

Wally panted.

"My only Aunt Jane! Are you coming on again?"

Joe scrambled up.

"Yes, I am!" he yelled. "You see! 'Ere goes!"

"Good!"

Hammer and tongs again! Pummel and punch, tramp and gasp. To and fro, round and round went the combatants, breathing fury.

Much punishment was given and taken on both sides, and both faces showed traces only too plainly of it.

The darkness was thickening in the dormitory, and by mutual consent the combatants had edged off towards a window, where the last glimmer of light fell in.

In the deepening gloom they fought hard.

Joe was giving in now.

His training had not made him so hard as the scamp of the Third, and he could not outlast the stern tussle so well.

Wally drove him back against a bed.

"Now then!" he gasped, breathless himself. "Have you had enough?"

"Ye-es."

"Are you going to explain?"

"No!"

"You—you cheeky young beggar!" gasped Wally in astonishment. "I—"

"I give in," said Joe sulkily. "I'm licked! Now lemme alone! I ain't going to tell you nothing."

Wally dropped his hands.

"Now look here, don't you be a sulky young beggar!" he exclaimed. "I've licked you fair and square, and now you ought to explain."

"I ain't going to!"

"You young boulder! It would serve you right if I kept on and hammered you till you couldn't breathe," said Wally indignantly.

"I ain't explaining nothing."
"It's not playing the game. You ought to explain now, now that I've licked you."

"I ain't going to!"

"Then you're a rotter! And I've jolly well done with you!" Wally exclaimed indignantly. "If you want to speak to me again you'll explain about that bisney, and until then you can let me alone!"

"I'll let you alone."

"Look here, Joe—"

"I don't care!"

"Oh!" said Wally, very much nettled. "If you don't care, I don't care, and that's all there is about it."

And Wally strode from the dormitory.

Joe sat down on a bed. He was dizzy from the fighting, and feeling miserable and utterly despondent. As he sat there the school clock chimed the hour. It was eight o'clock.

Joe started up. He had missed evening prep in the Form-room, and there would be trouble with Mr. Selby over that—for himself and for Wally. But that was not all. There was another thought in the mind of the little ragamuffin.

He hastily sponged his face at a washstand, put his collar straight, and left the dormitory.

He ran for his cap and left the School House, heedless of a voice that called after him from the door.

"Joe, deah boy!"

CHAPTER 8.

Breaking Bounds!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY had been looking for Joe.

He had looked nearly everywhere excepting in the Third Form dormitory, and so he had not found the waif of St. Jim's. But he caught sight of the lad as he left the School House after the combat with Wally.

Arthur Augustus hurried to the door as he saw Joe leave the House, and called after him into the dusk of the quadrangle:

"Joe! Stop, deah boy! Stop!"

Joe heard, but he did not heed.

He ran on, instead of walking, pretty evidently desirous of escaping the attention of the swell of St. Jim's.

But D'Arcy did not see it. He imagined that Joe had not heard him, and he shouted after the outcast of the Third:

"Joe! Weally, Joe! Joe, you know—"

Joe Frayne disappeared in the dusk.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "The young boundah must be gettin' quite deaf! Bai Jove!"

But D'Arcy was not to be beaten. He stepped out of the School House, and ran after Joe. The little ragamuffin had disappeared, but Arthur Augustus ran in the same direction, and in a few moments he heard Joe's footsteps.

The quadrangle was deserted now, the fellows having all gone in at dark. D'Arcy increased his pace, and the diminutive figure of Joe Frayne came in sight.

"Joe, deah boy!" D'Arcy called out.

Joe started.

He had his own reasons for not wishing to see the swell of St. Jim's just then, and he ran on at an accelerated speed, much to D'Arcy's astonishment.

"Joe, I want to speak to you!"

Joe dashed on.

"Bai Jove! He must be off his wockah!"

D'Arcy ran after Joe. The little ragamuffin had disappeared again, but D'Arcy heard a tell-tale sound of scraping and hard breathing in the darkness under the slanting oak close to the school wall.

He dashed up and caught Joe half-way up the wall, evidently climbing it with the intention of breaking bounds. Joe gave a gasp of affright as D'Arcy ran up, and endeavoured to drag himself over the wall, but the swell of St. Jim's caught him promptly by the ankle.

D'Arcy could be very quick sometimes.

"Joe, deah boy!"

Joe panted.

"Lemme go, Master D'Arcy, please!"

"You are goin' to bweak bounds, you young wascal!" said Arthur Augustus severely.

"Yes, Master D'Arcy."

"I wefuse to allow you to do anythin' of the sort. As your eldah, deah boy, I wequest you to come down immediately."

Joe's only reply was an attempt to drag himself to the top of the wall; but the swell of St. Jim's had a tight hold upon his ankle, and he could not.

"Joe, you young boundah!"

"Please let go, Master D'Arcy!"

"But what are you doing?"

(Continued on page 12.)



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.

NOT SO CLEVER!

"Do you know," said the young student of the agricultura college to an old farmer, "your methods of cultivation are a hundred years behind the times? Why," he went on, looking around him, "I'd be surprised if you made ten pounds out of the oats in that field."

"So would I," smiled the farmer.—"It's barley!"

A football has been awarded to J. Sherwood, 68, Wilson Street, West Hartlepool, Co. Durham.

NO LAUGHING MATTER!

Jones: "If I see anything funny I simply can't keep a straight face."

Bones: "I say, you must find shaving a rather dangerous business!"

A football has been awarded to C. Thomas, 62, Rugby Road, Dagenham, Essex.

THE LION-TAMER'S TERROR.

Circus Manager: "Who is making that unearthly noise in the dressing-room?"

Assistant: "Oh, sir, it's only Miss Sharp, the lion-tamer—she just saw a mouse!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to D. Holland, The Garth, Leicester Road, Dyston, Leicestershire.

"SOME" ORDER!

Lady: "How much are your peaches, please?"

Hawker: "Penny each, lady."

Lady: "I'll have one, please."

Hawker: "Givin' a party, lady?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. Sibley, 12, Goldie House, Hazelville Road, Hornsey Rise, London, N.19.

CANDID!

A theatrical star was boasting of his great popularity to the theatre manager.

"What do you think?" he said proudly. "They're going to name a new cigar after me."

"Really?" replied the manager. "Well, I hope it draws better than you do!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Smith, 3, Lixmount Avenue, Edinburgh.

A LOT TO LEARN!

Colonel: "How is the new recruit getting on, sergeant?"

Sergeant: "Well, sir, I've taught him all I know, but he still knows nothing!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. Marshall, 69, Ardmay Crescent, King's Park, Glasgow, S.4.

CAGED!

Magistrate: "Why did you break the jeweller's window?"

Prisoner: "I did it for a lark, sir."

Magistrate: "We have cages for larks; you can have the use of one for three months!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to G. Leitch, 54, Bowness Street, Stretford, Manchester.

HARDLY WORTH IT!

Rastus: "Here am dat shillun I done borrowed from yuh las' year."

Sambo: "Yuh done keep it so long dat I don't know if it am worth while fo' me to change mah pinion of yuh jes' for a shillun!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Billington, 38, Kenilworth Road, St. Leonards-on-Sea, Sussex.

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"I'm going out."
 "That's bweakin' bounds, Joe."
 "I—I can't help it, Master D'Arcy! I can't!"
 "What are you goin' out for?"
 "I—I must!"
 "But you have a weason, I suppose?"
 "Yes, yes."
 "What's the weason?"
 "I can't tell you."
 "Look here, Joe, you young ass, you are altogether too mysterious lately!" Arthur Augustus exclaimed. "I weally do not undahstand you in the least."
 "Please let me go!"
 "I wufuse to do anythin' of the sort! I am afwaid you are gettin' into vevy bad habits, Joe. But I cannot have you bweakin' bounds in this weckless way."
 "I must go!" moaned Joe.
 "Are you going to meet somebody?"
 Joe did not reply.
 "Pway get down, Joe, and let us talk this mattah ovah quietly," said D'Arcy.
 Joe clung convulsively to the coping of the wall. His arms were beginning to ache, but Arthur Augustus D'Arcy showed no signs of relaxing the grip upon his ankle.
 "Lemme go!" Joe pleaded.
 "Imposs, deah boy!"
 "I—I—I must!"
 "Wats!"
 Joe Frayne began to struggle. D'Arcy tightened his grip.
 "You cannot get away, Joe," he said. "As your eldah, I cannot possibly allow you to go. Pway descend at once."
 "I can't! I won't!"
 "You will, deah boy. Othahwise, I shall have no wesource but to pull you down," said Arthur Augustus calmly.
 "Do let me go, Master D'Arcy!" Joe cried out. "You can't understand, but I must go."
 "I shall undahstand if you explain."
 "I can't explain."
 "Wats! Pway do not imagine for a moment," said D'Arcy, with stately dignity, "that I wish to pwy into your pwivate affairs, Joe. Nothin' of the sort! I twust I am incapable of such wotten bad form as inquisitiveness. But I wegard you as bein' a youngstah undah my pwotection, you see."
 "Please let me go!"
 "Imposs."
 The fag struggled again. Arthur Augustus changed his grasp from Joe's ankle, reaching up with both hands, and seizing him round the body. Then, with a jerk, he drew Joe from the wall and landed him on his feet.
 Joe stood trembling. D'Arcy's hand still upon his shoulder, in case he should attempt to bolt.
 "Now, Joe, deah boy," said D'Arcy, in his kindest tone. "I want you to undahstand that I am your fwien, deah boy—I wathah think, at the pwesent moment, the only fwien you have. Pway confide in me, Joe."
 "I can't."
 "Why not?"
 "I can't."
 Joe repeated the words miserably, hopelessly. There was a keen distress in his quavering voice that went straight to D'Arcy's heart.
 "My deah kid," said the swell of St. Jim's, "I know vevy well that you are in some twouble, you know."
 "Yes, yes; I am, sir."
 "Why won't you tell me what it is?"
 "I can't, sir."
 "I will not pwess you, Joe. You can please yourself about tellin' me. But I am your fwien, Joe, and you are under my pwotection. You cannot bweak bounds aftah dark, Joe. I cannot allow it."
 "I must go."
 "Imposs!"
 They stood for a moment, silent. Then Arthur Augustus linked his arm in Joe's and drew him towards the School House.
 The swell of St. Jim's felt keenly for the little waif; but he felt, too, that he could not allow Joe to leave the school. It was clear that the waif was in some trouble, and D'Arcy knew what kind of trouble came of breaking bounds after dark. It was impossible to let Joe break bounds.
 Joe did not plead any longer.
 He seemed to yield to his fate, and he walked quietly, almost sullenly, beside the swell of St. Jim's, in the direction of the School House, where the lights were gleaming from the windows out upon the shadowy quadrangle.
 But it was only in seeming. Joe was desperate.
 "You will think bettah of this, Joe," D'Arcy said consolingly. "You will see that I am quite wight, upon reflection, deah boy."
 "Yes, sir."
 "Come into the House now, Joe."
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Frayne walked on as meekly as a lamb, but the moment D'Arcy's vigilance relaxed the little waif made a desperate wrench at his arm and tore it away. In an instant he had darted off into the darkness.

D'Arcy stood for a moment, dumbfounded; then he ran after Joe, shouting:

"Stop, Joe! Come back!"

There was no reply from the fag, but D'Arcy knew where he would be, and he dashed on towards the slanting oak at the school wall. There was a sound of scraping, of desperate breathing.

Joe was climbing the wall. D'Arcy dashed up breathlessly, but this time he was a second too late. The desperate fag had not lost a second, and his heels vanished over the wall just as Arthur Augustus made a clutch upwards at him.

D'Arcy heard Joe pant as he dropped into the road on the outer side of the school wall.

"Joe!" shouted D'Arcy.

There was no answer from Joe. All the sound that came back was the sound of running feet, dying away in a few moments into the silence of the night.

CHAPTER 9.

Gussy Rallies Round!

"BAI JOVE!"
 Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood staring at the school wall in dismay.

The little ragamuffin's footsteps had died away into the night, and it was clearly useless to pursue him. It would be the easiest thing in the world for him to dodge a pursuer in the shadowy lanes.

That was useless. D'Arcy stood staring blankly at the wall for a few minutes, and then he turned slowly back towards the School House.

"Bai Jove!" he said again.

He met Wally as he entered the School House. Wally had been bathing his face, but he had not been able to bathe away the signs of the conflict in the dormitory. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy forgot Joe in a moment, as he gazed in horror at the disfigured countenance of his minor.

"Wally! What ever has happened?"

Wally grinned, with a peculiar effect upon his swollen nose, his twisted mouth, and his half-closed eye.

"What do you think?" he replied.

"You have been fightin'!"

"Well, I certainly haven't been reading 'Good Little George' and 'How He Loved His Kind Teachers,'" said Wally sarcastically. "That wouldn't make my chivvy in this state!"

"You young wascal—"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus!"

"You look a feahful young wepwobate. But, weally, Wally, I twust you are not hurt vevy much," said D'Arcy anxiously.

"Oh, that's all right! I've been through this before."

"Whom have you been fighting with?"

"Oh, a chap in my Form!" said Wally evasively.

"I twust you licked him?"

"Yes, rather! Hollow!" said Wally, with a grin.

"You have not been lookin' aftah young Fwayne vevy well, Wally."

Wally chuckled.

"Haven't I? I was devoting a lot of attention to him in the dorm about a quarter of an hour ago."

"Well, there is somethin' up. He has just bwalken bounds."

"Oh, has he?"

"Yaas, wathah! There is somethin' vevy odd about him, Wally. I don't believe that he mucked up those detention papahs in the Shell Form Woom."

"Who did, then?" demanded Wally.

"Weally, I could not say."

"Why doesn't he own up where he was at the time?"

"Imposs for me to say, deah boy!"

"Well, then, so long as he won't explain, even after a chap has hammered him for his own good, he can't expect anything but the cold shoulder."

Arthur Augustus started.

"Have you been hammewin' him, you young wascal?" he asked.

Wally looked dogged.

"I made him a fair offer," he replied. "I meant to treat him as a friend, and I gave him the chance of explaining or being licked. He chose to be licked, and even then he wouldn't explain!" said Wally indignantly.

"You wuffianly young boundah!"

"Well, I like a chap to be reasonable," said Wally. "Hang it all, a chap can't do more than I've done, I think. But I don't care. If Frayne wants to keep rotten secrets, he can keep them without my help. I'm done!"

(Continued on page 14.)

GET TOGETHER WITH YOUR EDITOR FOR ANOTHER CHAT.



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! We have had some masterly efforts in the way of St. Jim's stories recently from the pen of popular Martin Clifford, and the grand yarn in this number is yet another example of our author's undoubted ability to provide for you all every week the best school story of the week bar none. Whether the story is thrilling, humorous, or exciting, it is always treated in that fascinating and inimitable style that has earned for Mr. Clifford the reputation of being the finest school-story writer in the world.

In next week's great story of Tom Merry & Co., he handles a highly dramatic theme in his usual entertaining manner—hence you have another powerful yarn to look forward to that you will all admire for its strong appeal and real human interest. It is entitled:

"THE CRACKSMAN'S DUPE!"

The character who stars in this story is again young Joe Frayne, the waif of the Third Form. In his early life, before coming to St. Jim's, Joe had more kicks than ha'pence from the man he remembers as his father—Bill Frayne, an ex-convict and bully. So it comes as a big surprise to Joe when a repentant Bill Frayne comes secretly to St. Jim's. His object, he says, is to wish his son good-bye before he goes to Canada; but there is more in the apparently innocent visit of the cracksmen than Joe foresees. What transpires is full of exciting and surprising situations that will compel your avid interest to the last line.

For those readers who revel in thrills there is another nerve-tingling instalment of our popular serial:

"TREASURE ISLE!"

In the next chapters Mr. Brooks vividly tells of the further amazing adventures of Handforth and his chums and the breath-

taking experience of Nelson Lee & Co. when they are drawn into a whirlpool. Don't miss these startling developments.

Have you taken a look at the first ripping number of "Tom Merry's Weekly"? Great, isn't it? There'll be another bright and breezy issue next Wednesday. And, of course, this tip-top number will also contain another column of readers' prize-winning jokes. Have you won a football or half-a-crown yet? There's plenty more to be won!

WEALTH—FOR A WHILE!

Here is an amazing story of what happened in the Savoy Hotel, in London, one evening. A man walked in with a brown-paper parcel tied up with string. He handed it to a page-boy, telling him to look after the parcel while the man had dinner. After his dinner the man sent for the boy and asked for his parcel. When the page-boy handed it to him he said: "I bet you can't guess what is in this parcel?" The boy tried, but he was not successful. The man opened one end and poured out on the table a mass of old gold! There were bracelets, watch-cases, and sovereigns, and all sorts of things; in fact, the man told the page that there was £12,000 of gold in that parcel!

THE MECHANICAL GNAT.

Have you ever watched a swarm of gnats dancing in the air on a fine summer's evening, and marvelled at the amazing aerobatics they can perform? They seem to have the most perfect flying abilities of any living creatures—they can dart forward or backward, hover stationary, or swoop up and down vertically at will.

Twenty-five years ago, a Mr. Dring, of Hampshire, was so amazed at the astonishing aerobatics of these tiny creatures that he determined to study them until he could find out how to build

an aeroplane which would fly like them. And now, at last, he has decided he knows enough to build such a plane, and soon his invention will be put to the test. He has built a flying machine in which two motors force compressed air under the wings, thus buoying them up when in flight, and this he declares, is the mechanical equivalent of the secret of the gnat's air-mastery. If his invention is successful, it will mean that he has found the perfect plane, so the whole world is waiting to see the results.

THE BAKER'S BURGLAR TRAP.

The other day, someone broke into a baker's shop and attempted to burgle the place, then went away, fondly imagining he had not left a single clue behind. Yet within a few hours the police had got on his track and arrested him—because he had carelessly walked on a tray filled with unbaked bread and left his footprints in the dough. Those footprints were as damning evidence as if he had written his name on the wall, for his shoes matched the marks in every detail.

THE FASTEST LINERS AFLOAT.

I heard two fellows arguing recently about which liner can claim to be the fastest passenger ship afloat. One said it was the 51,000 ton Italian liner, Rex, the other declared that the 30-years-old Mauretania still held the record with a Transatlantic crossing of 4 days, 10 hours, 41 minutes, against the Rex's best time of 4 days, 13 hours, 50 minutes. So I decided to find out which of them was right—and discovered they both were! You see, the Mauretania holds the record for the fastest speed ever put up by a liner with 32 knots (not far short of 40 m.p.h.), but the Rex holds the record for the Transatlantic crossing. The Mauretania's Atlantic run mentioned above was from Queenstown, Ireland, to New York, while the Rex's figures were from Cherbourg to New York, which is a longer journey. On the Cherbourg-New York route, the gallant old Mauretania is 8 hours slower than her Italian rival.

GREAT FEET!

Tom Ashburn, of Kensington, writes to ask me if I can tell him what is the largest size in boots ever made. To the best of my knowledge, the largest size is 22. These were made 25 years ago by a London bootmaker for Machnow, the Russian giant, who stood 9 ft. 6 in. in his stocking feet! Incidentally, the bootmaker was so pleased with his work that he decided to make another pair the same size just to show the public what he could do. So far, no one has been found with feet large enough to wear them.

THE EDITOR.



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

B. Gibbons, 65, Ripon Road, Winton, Bournemouth, wants correspondents interested in old "Gems" and football; ages 10—12.

M. Reynolds, 5, Hayling Avenue, Copnor, Portsmouth, wants a correspondent in U.S.A.

Alec Swainson, 40, Somervell Road, South Harrow, Middlesex, wants correspondents in Liverpool; ages 12—14.

Donald A. Clark, 23, Blenheim Road, East Ham, London, E.6, wants a correspondent in Sydney; reading and cricket; age 10—12.

W. Walford, 242, High Street, Rochester, Kent, wants correspondents in Europe; reading and cinemas; ages 13—15.

Miss D. Butcher, 42, Windsor Terrace, Beckton, East Ham, London, E.6, wants a girl correspondent, age 14—15.

Miss Audrey G. Crane, Meryula, 18, Albert Road, Strathfield, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia, wants girl correspondents in the British Empire; ages 15—18; pets, dancing, books, riding.

Albert F. Barnes, 21 De Beauvoir Square, Kingsland Road, Hackney, London, N.1, wants correspondents interested in films, postcards, and snaps.

Barnett C. Kinsor, Bassauer Street, 37a, Berlin, W.50, wants to hear from correspondence clubs that publish a magazine; also from readers anywhere—especially those interested in aviculture.

Harry William Smart, 103, De Beauvoir Road, London, N.1, wants correspondents; ages 17—20.

John Dales, 83, Alexandra Road, Newland Avenue, Hull, wants a correspondent overseas; age 13—14.

I. Hollington, Admiralty House, Mount Wise, Plymouth, wants a pen-pal in Sydney or Canada; age 11—13.

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The Fag's Secret!

(Continued from page 12.)

And Wally walked away with his hands in his pockets, whistling. Arthur Augustus wore a very thoughtful expression as he proceeded on his way. He could see that Joe had quarrelled seriously with Wally—not for the first time. Rows were not of uncommon occurrence among the cheerful spirits who formed the Third at St. Jim's. But it was specially unlucky for Joe at this moment, when he required all his friends to rally round him.

"Howevah, I shall stick to him, though he has tweated me in a most diswespectful mannah," Arthur Augustus murmured, as he went on to the Common-room.

Blake and Herries and Digby were there. They looked round at the swell of St. Jim's as he came in.

"Well, have you found him?" asked Blake, with a grunt.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Where is he?"

"Nevah mind for the pwesent moment. I have been thinkin', deah boys—"

"What with?" asked Digby.

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon Digby with a scornful glare.

"I refuse to wreply to that widiculous question, Dig. I have been thinkin' that this is a time for Joe's fwriends to wally wound him."

"Eh?"

"You see, the poor kid is suffewin' undah an unjust accusation."

"How do you know it is unjust?"

"Well, I think it is."

"Say you think so, then?" said Digby tartly. "As a matter of fact, there doesn't seem to be any doubt about it in my mind."

"Weally, Dig—"

"Nor in my mind," said Herries in his slow way. "It looks to me as if the case is quite made out. That's my opinion."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"And I can't help thinking the same," said Jack Blake, with a shake of his head.

"If Frayne didn't touch the detention papers, who did?"

"I wathah think we ought to find out, deah boy."

"Then the first step is for Joe to prove an alibi. If he wasn't in the Shell Form Room, Mellish was lying when he said he saw him there—and Mellish could only have one reason for lying about it."

"Yaas, wathah; it was Mellish who did it!"

"But Joe could prove that right up to the hilt by proving that he was somewhere else. He says he was somewhere else. Why doesn't he say where?"

"I weally do not know."

"Well, then, he's placed out of court till he explains," said Blake sharply. "I know Mellish is a cad, but I don't see why we should accuse him of lying when it's pretty clear that it's the other party that's telling the lies."

"Hear, hear!" said Kangaroo.

D'Arcy shook his head.

"In makin' up a chap's mind on a mattah like this, what a chap wants is tact and judgment," he remarked. "I weally think that Joe is all wight, you know—twoe blue!"

"Rats!"

"At a time like this I think his fwriends ought to wally wound him—"

"Let him prove first that he deserves to have friends," said Blake.

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No. 1. Vol. 1 (New Series.)

JOIN UP! JOIN UP!

Cut out the Flying Squad badge and mount it on cardboard. This makes you a full member of Tom Merry's Flying Squad, and entitles you to carry out flights and organise a squadron.

When you have got three of your chums to become members of the Flying Squad, you rank as a Squadron-Commander, and to signify it you are entitled to colour the centre of the badge yellow.

When you have got four chums to join, you rank as an Air Commodore, and you are entitled to wear the badge with the centre coloured green.

When you have got five of your chums to join, you rank as an Air Vice-Marshal, wearing the badge with the centre coloured blue.

When you have got six chums to join, you rank as a full-fledged Air Marshal, and you are entitled to colour the centre of the badge red.

THE FLYING SQUAD SALUTE

All members of the Flying Squad greet each other with this salute: Raise the right arm, bent, so that the hand comes level with the head. The hand should be presented edgewise to your fellow member, parallel with the side of your head, and should be brought into position smartly. Try it!

The unbreakable rule of the Flying Squad is:

Be ever ready to fly to the assistance of your friends.

(Signed) TOM MERRY
(Air Marshal in Chief).

FLYING SQUAD REPORTS STUDY BOMBED!

Depression in Study No. 6. Herries was caned for bringing his dog Towser into the House. Two strokes from Knox. Flying Squad flew to Knox's study. Bombed everything. Not a stick left standing. Celebration in Study No. 6 interrupted by visit from Mr. Railton, Housemaster. Knox had complained. Mr. Railton used tear gas. Devastating! Better luck next time, we hope! Knox granted Order of the Dot on the Nose. To be delivered later—with (iron) bar!

SCHOOL PLATE SAVED!

Suspicious sound at dead of night awakened Flying Squad. Reconnaissance flight revealed light flashing in Head's house on ground floor. Electric torch. Flying Squad swiftly on scene. Cracksmen discovered in act of opening Head's safe. Flying Squad swooped and let go all bombs. Cracksmen practically demolished. Remains hauled before Dr. Holmes, who rang for police. Flying Squad commended and each member granted special half-holiday. Long live the Flying Squad!

ST. JIM'S NEWS

REEL

Mr. Ratcliff, the unpleasant Housemaster of the New House, says his wisdom teeth have not yet arrived. We thought so!

Gerald Crooke refurnished his study, the stuff being delivered in a plain van. Fags raided his study and Crooke is now in the cart!

Lowther says: "Though Gore may be shed, a Merry heart, good Manners, and a Noble mind will help you to Wynn your battles with Dig(n)ity, even if you don't Kerr to stoop to Crooked methods. Believe it or not!"

Harry Manners and George Kerr began a "no time-limit" game of chess last term. Honours are even so far. Manners has only taken a week over his current move, and is expected to make it any day now!

D'Arcy says the well-dressed fellow needs at least fifty "toppers" in stock. His minor, Wally, agrees. The more "toppers" Gussy gets, the more "footballs" they make for the fags who knock them off!

Herries' bulldog, Towser, can bark on thirty-seven different notes, reports Herries. All of them horrid!

Jack Blake is Yorkshire, and proud of it. He agrees, however, that the St. Jim's Junior Eleven is as good as they had at his old school in the North—if not better!

LOOK THROUGH OUR TELEVISOR GUSSY SPEAKING



Hearty greetin's, deah boys, an' all that you know. It is vevy pleasant to meet you face to face over the televisior.

Blake wanted me to wash down an' bwoad-cast this speech before I had twied on half a dozen suits, but I wufused to be huiwied. Imagine the embawwssment of facin' thousands of my fwriends for the first time and findin' that my tie was not on stwaight, or that I had forgotten my eyeglass!

Of course, Blake is a vevy fine fellow, but he is wathah slack in wegard to dwess. I despair of evah impressin' him with the importance of maintainin' a ewease in his twousahs!

Some fellows weally dwess any old how. I think the most disgwaceful wagamuffin at

(Continued at foot of next column)

Merry's Weekly



Week Ending, February 17th, 1934.

FOOTBALL— LATEST

SAINTS v. GRAMMARIANS

St. Jim's began disastrously in their match with Gordon Gay & Co. at Rylcombe Grammar School. In the very first minute they were a goal down, owing to a slip in the treacherous mud which let Gay through with Fatty Wynn unprepared. A few minutes later the disaster was repeated, Kerr miskicking close in and giving Frank Monk an equally easy opening. Saints rallied magnificently under Tom Merry's dashing leadership, and for a sustained period they bombarded the home goal. Only marvellous goalkeeping by Carboy held them at bay. Tom Merry was very unlucky with a shot which hit the crossbar, with Carboy beaten. The ball rebounded into play, but Blake put behind.

The Grammarians attacked again in their turn, but this time the St. Jim's defence was firm as a rock. Kerr distinguished himself in stopping the dangerous Grammarian right wing, and he and Figgins played like Trojans at back, with Fatty Wynn over safe and sure in goal.

Just before the interval Tom Merry broke clean through on his own, and netted with a grand cross-drive which beat Carboy all ends up!

The second half saw a Grammarian revival, and Gordon Gay put his side still further ahead with a smashing shot from twenty yards. The Grammarians deserved this one, though their earlier goals had been lucky.

Saints remained undismayed, and proved that cool heads can stop a panic. Blake took a difficult chance and sent in a wonderful shot, which curled under the bar just out of Carboy's reach, making the score 3—2 against St. Jim's. With ten minutes to go, D'Arcy, mud-spattered but covered with glory, bobbed his head up amid a throng of players and popped the leather past Carboy for the equaliser.

The struggle for the winning goal was ding-dong, but the Saints had their opponents' measure by now, and steady pressure resulted in Tom Merry tricking Wootton major and netting the fourth and final goal for St. Jim's—thirty seconds before the last whistle shrilled. Well played, St. Jim's! And three cheers for the gallant losers!

(Continued from previous column)

St. Jim's is my minor, Wally. I believe he has a clean collar once a term! Nothin' I say has any effect, however. Skimpole is almost as bad. He is so lost in his scientific studies that the othah day he appeared in 'lass wearin' an odd pair of socks! That shows you what too much studyin' will do for you!

What I particularly wanted to say was that I am always weady to give advice to any fellow on dwoss mattahs. Without wishin' to swank, I have made a life study of dwoss, and I may be able to give you a few useful tips. Dwop in any time you are passin' St. Jim's. You will find me in Study No. 6, Fourth Form passage—if we are not at classes! Chceerio!

MONTY LOWTHER CALLING

Hallo, everybody! Talking of rain, the least shed the better. Oh, yes! That reminds me. Digby was telling me he wants to become an artist. I warned him that it's very difficult to make a living. That's where the "art" comes in! Yes, and there's my uncle from Scotland—he has such good brakes on his car that he can stop on a shilling. The trouble is he can't find a shilling. Poor old uncle! We took him down to Margate last summer. Just for fun we piled sand on him. I'm afraid he's still there, because we looked away and forgot where we buried him! Does anybody know the chief use of cowhide? Cowhide—any of you? No? Well, it's to keep the cow together. The other day I met a salesman. He told me he travelled in gas ovens. I said: "Can't you afford a car?" S'fact! Some shopkeepers are rude. A man tossed a half-crown on the counter of a shop in Wayland. The shopkeeper looked at it and remarked: "I don't like the ring of that half-crown!" The customer replied: "What do you expect for two-and-six—a peal of bells?" Of course, you've heard that an occasional quarrel widens a man's outlook? He sees things from another "wrangle," as it were! One to finish. Two tug-of-war teams from the School House and New House were straining against each other the other afternoon, when Dame Taggles came along. She exclaimed: "Deary me! Wouldn't it be simpler to get a knife and cut the piece of rope?"

More next week.

Ephraim Taggles, the school porter, has put in nearly fifty years at St. Jim's, coming in 1885 as a boot-boy.

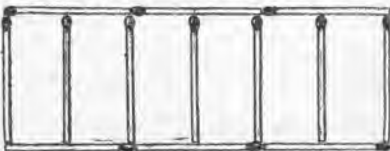
Fatty Wynn can beat any fellow for girth. He measures 45 inches round the waist.

CALIBAN'S PUZZLE CORNER

The name of Caliban hides the identity of a St. Jim's junior. He sets you a problem here to test your wits. Can you beat Caliban?

Farmer Blunt, near St. Jim's, had thirteen hurdles, which you can represent with matches, with which he enclosed six separate sheep pens, as in the illustration. One of these hurdles was stolen, and Farmer Blunt did not know what to do, until Kerr, the canny Scot, told him how to rearrange his remaining twelve hurdles so that they would still enclose six separate sheep pens.

Can you do it? Solution next week.



"Yes, rather!"

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass round upon the Fourth Formers with a slow and rather aggravating stare.

"Weally, deah boys, I am surprised at you!" he said.

"What are you surprised at, ass?"

"I wefuse to be called an ass! I am surprised at your not seeing that Joe is quite innocent, though cires are against the poor chap."

"Fathead! Let him explain!"

"I decline to be called a fathead! I wegard it as a witten oppwobvious expwession. I should think that in the matter of Joe you fellows might take my word for it," said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity.

"Take your word?"

"Yaas, wathah! I suppose a fellow has a wight to expect his fwiends to take his word?"

"Ass!" shrieked Blake. "Of course, we'd take your word in anything you knew about, but you're only guessing now. You don't know anything more about it than we do."

"And a fellow of tact and judgment is—"

"Oh, rats! Piffle!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, cheese it, Gussy, you make me tired!" said Digby. "Let Joe explain before he expects us to stand up for him."

"Yes, rather!" said Blake, with emphasis.

"Wats! I wegard this as a time to wally wound Joe, and if you chaps won't wally wound him with me I shall wally wound him myself!" said D'Arcy, with dignity.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, deah boys, I wegard this laughah as fwivolous. I am goin' to wally wound Joe and stand up for him like—like anythin'!"

And Arthur Augustus walked away with great dignity. He left the chums of the Fourth half laughing and half angry. D'Arcy's loyalty to the little waif was just like Gussy, but it was a little exasperating to the chums of the Fourth. It made them feel as if they were unjustified in the attitude they had taken up, and they had been feeling very justified indeed.

"Bai Jove! I'm surprised at those chaps!" Arthur Augustus murmured, as he departed from the Common-room with his nose in the air. "I wegard this as too bad! It's wathah hard if a chap's own fwiends can't wely on his judgment! I suppose I had bettah see Tom Mewwy about it. I twust he will have more discwetion."

And Arthur Augustus went up to the Shell quarters. As he reached the head of the stairs a burst of loud laughter greeted him, and he glanced along the passage and saw Mellish and Gore and Crooke.

Arthur Augustus coloured. He would have walked on, however, without taking any notice of the cads of the School House, but Crooke called out to him.

"Been looking after your giddy protege, Gussy?"

The swell of St. Jim's paused and jammed his monocle into his eye, and fixed a withering stare upon the cad of the Shell.

"My name is D'Arcy," he said haltingly. "I am only called Gussy to my fwiends, Cwooke, and I do not include you in the numbah!"

Crooke grinned.

"Well, I don't know that I'm anxious to be put on a list that includes slum bounders and young pickpockets," he remarked.

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"Do I undahstand you to allude to my fwiend Fwayne?" asked D'Arcy with chilling dignity.

"You know he's a pickpocket and the son of a convict or something," said Crooke, with a sneer.

"Yes, rather!" said Mellish. "Didn't I see him talking at the gate the other day with a filthy tramp—an old friend of his from what I could make out?"

"Nice for St. Jim's, I must say!" said Gore. "I don't envy Gussy his friends."

D'Arcy took no notice of Gore or Mellish. His eyes were fixed upon Crooke, who was looking uneasy under his steady stare.

"I will twouble you to take that wemark back, Cwooke," said D'Arcy. "I do not allow anybody to allude to my personal fwiends as boundahs!"

"Rats!"

"Will you withdaway your diswepctful allusion to my young fwiend Fwayne?"

"No, I won't!"

"Then pway put up your hands, deah boy!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy pushed back his cuffs and advanced upon the cad of the Shell in a very war-like way.

CHAPTER 10.

The Only One.

CROOKE receded a pace or two, his face changing colour. He was more than a head taller than D'Arcy, but he had not D'Arcy's unbounded pluck or his physical fitness, for in spite of his elegant ways Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was clear steel all through.

There were few more regular attendants at the gym and the footer ground. D'Arcy could have knocked out two Crookes quite easily without dropping his monocle, and Crooke realised it—a little too late.

He put up his hands in a clumsy way, and Arthur Augustus sailed in.

Biff, biff, biff!

Right and left, left and right!

Crooke staggered back and measured his length upon the linoleum in the passage.

"My hat!" murmured Gore, stepping back.

He had no desire to interfere. Mellish was already walking away with an air of exaggerated nonchalance.

D'Arcy's eyes gleamed down at the fallen cad of the Shell.

"Have you had enough, deah boy?" he asked.

Crooke did not reply, but he made no motion to rise, and D'Arcy had to take silence for an answer. He turned away from the savage-faced cad of the Shell and glanced at Gore for a moment. Gore stepped farther back.

"You will oblige me by not speakin' diswepctfully of my fwiends, Gore," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy very distinctly. "I wegard Joe Fwayne as suffewin' undah a gweat injustice, and I am wallyin' wound him. Any chap speakin' diswepctfully of my young fwiend will be wequested to put up his hands."

And D'Arcy walked on to Tom Merry's study without a glance behind.

The swell of St. Jim's tapped at Tom Merry's door and went in.

The Terrible Three were having tea rather late for once, and there was a pleasant scent of toast and tea in the study; but the chums of the Shell were not looking so cheerful as usual. The affair of Joe Frayne was weighing upon their minds. Tom Merry was bitterly disappointed in the waif of St. Jim's, and his mood had communicated itself to the other two.

"Hallo, Gussy!" said Tom Merry. "Had tea?"

"Yaas, some time ago, thank you, deah boy! I have looked in to speak to you about young Fwayne. At a time like this," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in a stately manner, "I wegard it as the duty of all young Fwayne's fwiends to wally wound him."

"But he's acted rottenly," said Manners.

"Not at all, deah boy. I wegard him as innocent."

"I wish I could think the same, Gussy," said Tom Merry, with a sigh.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"You're a good little chap, Gussy," said Monty Lowther, "but you're off the mark this time. Joe did it."

"I wefuse to be chawacterised as a good little chap, Lowthah. I wegard the expwession as wotten and patwonisin'. Speakin' of Joe, I considah him quite innocent, and as you fellows can't see the mattah in the same light I think I'm entitled to expect you to take my word for it."

Tom Merry smiled.

"I wish I could, Gussy. But—"

"Weally, deah boy, as a fellow of tact and judgment, I weally think I have a wight to ask you to wespert my opinion in the mattah."

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Tom Merry shook his head. He liked D'Arcy all the better for his faith in Joe, but he could not share it.

"I wegard it as a time for all Joe's fwiends to wally wound him," said Arthur Augustus. "Blake, I am sowwy to say, takes the asinine view of the mattah that you take—"

"What?"

"But I had hoped to be able to make you see sense. I may wemark that if all Joe's othah fwiends dwop him I shall wally wound him by myself."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause 'for wibald laughtah. Monty Lowthah! The question is, are you fellows goin' to wally wound young Fwayne?"

"I wish we could, but—"

"Pway wely on my judgment!"

"Rats!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Can't be did!" said Manners.

D'Arcy swept his eyeglass round at the Terrible Three in an extremely dignified manner.

"Then there is no need to pwolong the intahview," he said.

And the swell of St. Jim's quitted the study.

D'Arcy paused in the passage to reflect. He was feeling just a little downhearted. Of all Joe's friends he seemed to be the only one who still believed in the little ragamuffin or was inclined to stand by him.

But his face brightened up suddenly.

"Aftah all, the Third will stand by him," he murmured. "Wally is bound to wally wound. I will put it to them pwopahly, and they cannot fail to wally wound."

And D'Arcy went down to the Third Form Room. Evening preparation for the Third was over, and the fags were mostly in the Form-room, some of them cooking various unappetising things at the big grate, and the others talking or indulging in the horseplay with which fags commonly passed their time. General attention was attracted by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as he entered.

"Hallo, Wally, here's your tame major!" said Gibson.

Wally grunted.

"Where did you get that necktie?" asked Curly Gibson.

"Where did you dig up that face?" asked Thane.

"Get your hair cut!"

"Yah! Fourth Form cad!"

"Get out!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy took no notice of those impolite remarks. He walked on into the Form-room with a dignified stride.

"My deah young fwiends—" he began.

His dear young friends interrupted him with a howl worthy of a tribe of dear young Red Indians.

"Yah! Fourth Form cad!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Oh, buzz off, Gussy!" said Wally in a tone of patient remonstrance. "You know it's rotten for a chap to have his major hanging about in the Form-room in this way."

"Weally, Wally—"

"Buzz off!"

"Clear!"

"Outside!"

"I have come here to speak upon a vowy important mattah which weally concerns the honah of the Third Form at St. Jim's," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. And then the fags were silent from sheer astonishment.

"My hat!" said Curly Gibson. "What's he babbling about now?"

"Oh, he'll jaw; there's no stopping him!" said Wally resignedly. "He always goes on for a certain time when he starts! Let him rip!"

"My deah young fwiends, a membah of your Form stands accused of actin' in a caddish way, and I wegard this as a time for all his fwiends to wally wound him."

"Oh, young Frayne!" said Jameson. "He's been muckin' up the detention papers. A rotten, caddish trick, I call it; though, of course, the Shell cads deserve it."

"Just like that guttersnipe, though!" sneered Hobbs.

"I wegard Joe as bein' perfectly innocent—"

"Oh, rats!"

"He did it!"

"If he didn't, why doesn't he explain where he was at the time?" said Wally. "I've stuck to him as long as anybody, but there's a limit!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Oh, ring off!"

"I wefuse to wing off! I wegard this as a time for Fwayne's fwiends to wally wound him and show that they twust him!"

"But we don't trust him!" said Jameson.

"Not an inch!"

"Oh, travel along, Gussy!"

"Buzz off!"

"I decline to buzz off! I'm here to explain!"

"Chuck him out!"

"Give him the frying-pan, Picke!"

Picke was cooking a herring in the frying-pan and a sea of butter at the Form-room fire. He jerked the pan off the fire and advanced towards Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Keep off, you young wascal!" shrieked D'Arcy.

There was a yell from the Third.

"Go it, Picke!"

"Give it him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy backed away towards the door. D'Arcy would have faced fearful odds as courageously as Horatius of old, but he could not face the risk of having his elegant attiro swamped in fishy butter.

"Go it, Picke!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Grease him!"

"Spoil his bags!"

"You uttah young wascals! Oh!"

D'Arcy retreated step by step to the Form-room door. Picke, grinning, followed him up with the frying-pan extended.

The swell of St. Jim's reached the door, and retreated from the Form-room. A yell of laughter followed him into the passage. Jameson kicked the door shut.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the fags.

"The silly ass!" said Picke. "As if I would have wasted my melted butter on him, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked away somewhat disconsolately from the Third Form Room. It was evidently of no use seeking to get the Third Form to rally round Joe Frayne.

All the rallying that was to be done would clearly have to be done by D'Arcy himself—Joe's only champion.

CHAPTER 11.

Well Licked!

THE next morning D'Arcy looked for Joe Frayne as soon as he came down. It was a bright, fresh, clear morning, and most of the juniors were out in the quadrangle before breakfast. Joe Frayne was walking along under the elms with his hands thrust deep into his pockets when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy bore down upon him.

The wail of St. Jim's seemed inclined to bolt, but he stood his ground, watching D'Arcy with peculiar harassed expressions in his eyes.

"You here, you young wascal!" said D'Arcy.

"Yes, Master D'Arcy," said Joe humbly.

"Some of the fellows were sayin' last night that you were goin' to run away from the coll, Fwayne."

"I wouldn't do that, sir."

"I know you wouldn't, Joe," said Arthur Augustus. "I did not have any doubts on that point, deah boy. Were you found out for bweakin' bounds last evening?"

"No, sir."

"You got back all wight?"

"Yes, thank you, sir!"

"And you're keepin' the bisney a secwet?"

Joe flushed uncomfortably.

"Yes, Master D'Arcy."

"Vewy well," said Arthur Augustus. "I do not approve of this keepin' things secwet, but all the same I'm goin' to stand by you, deah boy. I don't believe that you nucked up the detention papahs, and I'm goin' to stand by you like—like anythin'!"

"You're vewy kind, sir," said Joe, with a moisture in his eyes.

"Not at all, deah boy; it's a mattah of duty. If you evah feel inclined to confide in me, I'm quite weady; and, anyway, I'm goin' to look into this mattah, and cleah you of suspish if I can."

"You're vewy good to me, sir."

D'Arcy waved his hand gracefully and sailed away. Joe drove a grubby hand into his eye. Kindness to the little vagrant always touched him deeply, and Joe had been through some sore trials of late.

The little fellow was feeling very isolated and miserable. He was suddenly brought out of a gloomy reflection by a hand grasping his shoulder. He was swung round, and he found himself looking at Mellish of the Fourth.

There was a disagreeable grin on Mellish's face. Mellish would not have been bad-looking if his face had worn a pleasanter expression than it ever did. But there was always something mean and sly in Mellish's mind, and it was reflected in his face—as such feelings generally are.

"Snivelling—hey?" said Mellish, with a sneer.

Joe removed his hand from his eye.

"Wot's that got to do with you?" he asked roughly. "It ain't your business, I suppose, Master Mellish!"

"None of your cheek, you rotten little ragamuffin!" said Mellish. "I think you've got it in the neck this time, you cad. It was like Tom Merry's cheek planting you here in a respectable school, and from the first I never meant to stand it. I think this will mean the kick-out for you."

Joe looked at him sullenly.

"I dessay you fixed this on me, if the truth was known," he said.

Mellish gave a sneering laugh.

"Any proof of that?" he asked.

"Master D'Arcy is going to look into it," said Joe, who had an unbounded admiration for the swell of St. Jim's. "If you did it, I dessay he'll find you out."

"You young cad!" said Mellish, and he gave Joe a smack upon the face that rang like a pistol-shot. "And if you give me any more of your cheek I'll—"

Mellish broke off.

A grip of iron was upon his shoulder, and he was swung round to face Arthur Augustus. The swell of St. Jim's was quite pale with anger.

"Ow!" exclaimed Mellish. "Let go!"

"You uttah cad!"

"Let go! I—"

"Yaas, wathah! I'll let you go, but you are goin' to put up your beastly hands!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, releasing Mellish. "You can wetiah, Joe, and leave this uttah wottah to me."

"Yes, sir," said Joe, and he retired obediently, but only to a spot from which he could see what was taking place. Joe did not mean to miss the fight.

D'Arcy took off his silk hat and his handsome, well-fitting jacket, and dropped his monocle from his eye.

"Are you weady, Mellish?" he asked.

The cad of the Fourth breathed hard.



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"I'm not goin' to fight you," he said huskily. "I've no quarrel with you, D'Arcy."

"Wats, deah boy! You have assaulted a friend of mine in the most brutal and unwelcome way."

"Look here—"

"I warned you yesterday that any wottah who touched young Fwayne would have to answer to me," said D'Arcy. "Are you ready?"

"I tell you—"

"Pway put up your hands, deah boy!"

"I won't!" snarled Mellish.

"You may as well, as I'm goin' to lick you in any case," said the swell of St. Jim's calmly. "You can resist or not, as you like, but you are goin' to have the lickin'."

"You—you—"

Smack!

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's open palm came with a ringing report across Mellish's cheek. The cad of the Fourth drew a quick, hissing breath and sprang at D'Arcy like a tiger.

"Come on, deah boy!" said D'Arcy.

And they were at it hammer-and-tongs in a twinkling. Mellish had little courage, but a rat will fight when driven into a corner. Mellish had to take the licking; D'Arcy was determined upon that. The cad of the Fourth felt that he might as well fight as to take it lying down.

Take it he certainly did! The swell of St. Jim's was in fine form that morning, and he simply played round Mellish. Right and left he drove in the blows, and the cad of the Fourth recoiled to right and left.

Once or twice his savage hands came home upon D'Arcy, punching, clawing—even scratching—and the elegant junior was hitting fairly all the time; nothing would have induced him to imitate his opponent's cowardly tactics.

But nothing would serve. Mellish was driven round and round, till finally a heavy right-hander swept him off his feet, and he dropped in a heap on the ground.

D'Arcy stood back, breathing hard. Mellish did not move; he lay gasping.

"I am waitin' for you, Mellish," said Arthur Augustus at last, quietly.

"Ow!"

"Are you goin' to get up?"

"No—hang you!"

"Have you had enough, you wottah?"

"Hang you! Yes!"

"Vewy well," said D'Arcy quietly, putting on his jacket and hat. "If you have had enough, Mellish, I will let you off. But pway remembah that you are not to be rude to my friend Fwayne again, or I shall be obliged to give you another fearful thwashin'!"

Mellish made no reply. D'Arcy walked away—not with the least swagger, but with the air of a fellow who had satisfactorily performed a painful but necessary duty. Mellish lay on the ground, still on his elbow, looking after him—as well as he could through his darkened, half-closed eyes. The cad of the Fourth felt too thoroughly licked to do anything but lie there and grunt.

CHAPTER 12.

A Third Form Raid!

"HES coming!"

It was Curly Gibson of the Third who uttered the warning. Curly Gibson was posted at the head of the stairs in the School House, and he called out the words in a shrill whisper, as the elegant form of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was seen mounting the stairs.

There was a sound of scuffling feet farther along the passage, and several fags came hastily out of Study No. 6—the famous apartment belonging to Jack Blake, Herries, Digby, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

D'Arcy was coming upstairs, quite oblivious of the fact that there had been fags in his study, and that they had been very busy there.

He reached the head of the stairs, but by that time the fags had profited by Curly Gibson's warning and they were all in the passage.

D'Arcy glanced at them.

"What are you young wuffians doin' here?" he asked.

The fags chuckled.

"We came to see you," said Jameson.

"Weally, deah boy!"

"It's all right," said Fane. "We've left a message for you in your study."

And the fags roared.

D'Arcy looked at them in surprise. He did not quite see what there was in Fane's remark to make the fags yell with laughter.

"Weally I do not quite compwehend," he said.

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"You see, we came to explain things to you," said Jameson.

"In what way, Jameson?"

"You've interfered in the affairs of the Third," said Jameson. "We're down on young Frayne, and we're down on you. We don't approve of Fourth Formers bothering with our bisney. Do we, you chaps?"

"Rather not!" chorused the fags.

"Weally, you young boundahs—"

"You can stick up for that young burglar if you like," went on Fane. "But you're not going to swank into our Form-room to do it!"

"Not much!"

"No fear!"

"We came to tell you so," said Jameson blandly. "We found you out and left a message, that's all. You'll find it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you young wascals—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wefuse to allow you to cackle in this wotten way, you young scamps. I trust you have been gettin' up to no tricks in my study. If you have, I shall have no alternative but to administrah a fearful thwashin' all wound!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cheeky young beggahs—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Third.

D'Arcy turned pink with wrath. He made a movement towards the fags, but they melted away, dodging down the stairs and the passage. From a safe distance they sent back exasperating yells of laughter.

D'Arcy hurried on to his study, feeling decidedly uneasy. He had come up to change his collar after the fight with Mellish. His collar had not been damaged, but there was a speck on it, and Arthur Augustus was always a picture of elegance. Even specks were not allowed upon his attire.

He could not help suspecting that he had surprised the scamps of the Third in a raid on his study; and he trembled for his property.

D'Arcy had a chest of drawers in the study, and hat-boxes and tie-boxes and collar-boxes galore, and he could not help a shudder as he thought of what they might have suffered at the hands of reckless Third Form fags.

He fairly ran along the passage, and opened the door of Study No. 6 and burst into the room.

"Gweat Scott!"

D'Arcy staggered back with an exclamation of utter dismay.

Truly, it was a jape of the Third Form. The fags had been there—and they had left signs of their presence in the study.

"Bai Jove! Oh! The fearful young wottahs!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

He gazed at the scene of havoc in dismay. The study was in the wildest disorder. It was only D'Arcy's property that had been touched; Blake's and Herries' and Digby's things had been left alone.

But havoc had been wrought with D'Arcy's property. Boxes were open and drawers turned out, and shirts and ties and socks and collars sprawled over the floor.

Silk hats—several of them—lay about, and presented an appearance as if hasty attempt had been made to convert them into concertinas.

Standing by the chest of drawers was a broom, with some of D'Arcy's clothes arranged upon it in absurd imitation of D'Arcy—a pair of trousers and a jacket pinned over a cross piece of wood, with a collar and tie, and a battered silk hat stuck on the top of the broom-handle.

On the wall was scrawled a rough representation of the swell of St. Jim's, in the best style of Third Form art.

In case the unfortunate junior should not know that he was being caricatured, the juniors had signed their work, so to speak. Like the ancient Greek gentleman who wrote "This is an ox" below his picture, the fags did not mean that there should be any mistake upon the subject.

A cardboard was pinned across the breast of the absurd figure on the broom, bearing the legend "This is Gussy!" By the figure on the wall were scratched the words "D'Arcy, Esquire!"

"Bai Jove! The uttah wascals!"

D'Arcy dropped on his knees before the open chest of drawers and picked up a handful of ties. They were streaming with ink.

"Oh deah! Bai Jove! Wotten!"

The swell of St. Jim's rose to his feet.

He gazed round at the wreck and havoc in the study, with feelings too deep for words.

The Third Form raggahs had done their work well.

"The wottahs!"

There was a tramp of footsteps in the passage, and Blake and Digby came in.

They stopped just inside the study, staring.

"My hat!"



"What do you want here?" said Tom Merry to the ruffian. The Weasel pointed to Joe. "I want 'im!" he said. "Yes, and I'm goin' to 'ave 'im!" he added threateningly. "I'm goin' to take 'im to 'is father, I am!"

"Phew!"

D'Arcy turned towards them almost with tears in his eyes.

"Look at that, deah boys!"

"Well, my only chapeau!" exclaimed Blake in astonishment. "What have you done that for, Gussy?"

"What?" queried D'Arcy.

"What have you done it for?" asked Blake innocently. "If you wanted to get rid of your old clothes you might have found a neater way of doing it."

"You uttah ass!"

"Well, I must say I agree with Blake," said Digby. "It isn't the thing to chuck your preps about the study in this way, Gussy."

"You feahful chump!"

"What did you do it for?"

"You frabjous ass! I didn't do it!" shrieked D'Arcy. "The study has been waided by the fags, you silly ass!"

"Oh, I see!"

"Bai Jove! My shirts are thwown about, and my toppahs are wuined. My ties are uttably inkay!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus in despair.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You feahful ass; there is nothin' whatevah to laugh at!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Well, I suppose it doesn't seem funny to you," Blake said, wiping his eyes; "but it is rather comic, all the same. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Dig.

"I wergard you as a pair of cacklin' asses! Look here, I'm goin' to make those young boundahs sit up for this!" D'Arcy exclaimed hotly.

Blake rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"Well, I don't know!" he exclaimed. "You see, they may have thought that you gave too much attention to clothes, you know, and that this would be a lesson to you. What do you think, Dig?"

Digby nodded solemnly.

"Very likely," he assented. "I think that Gussy should give the Third credit for good attentions, at all events."

"You feahful asses! Are we goin' to have the study

waided by Third Form fags?" shrieked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy excitedly.

Blake gave a whistle.

"By George, I didn't think of that!" he exclaimed. "No, it would never do! We can't let them make a—a—what do you call it, Dig?"

"A muck?" asked Digby.

"No, you ass! A—a—a—"

"A dust?"

"No, you chump! A—a—what do you call it when a thing is done that's done over again because it's been done once?"

"A pancake?"

Blake gave his chum a glare of immeasurable scorn.

"No, you frightful ass!" he yelled. "Not a pancake, nothing of the sort! Trust you to think of something to eat! I mean a—a legal expression—something that means that if a thing's done once it can be done over again—a—a sort of—something that's referred back to you see—"

"A ledger?"

"Ledger! You ass! Oh, a precedent," said Blake, "that's the word! If we let the fags rag a Fourth Form study, it will create a precedent, and they'll be doing it over again, you see! We can't have that!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We'll give 'em jip!" said Blake. "Not because it's wrong to raid Gussy's togs—it's right—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Shut up, Gussy—but because we can't have a Fourth Form study raided by fags—we can't allow such a precedent to be established. We'll—Hullo, there's the bell for brekker."

"Pway lend me a hand tidyin' up, deah boy—"

"Bad form to keep brekker waiting, Gussy—besides, I'm hungry. Better tip the maid to put the things straight—you couldn't do it in two hours."

And D'Arcy finally decided to do so. But vengeance hung over the heroes of the Third—brooding vengeance, as a novelist would say.

CHAPTER 13.

Joe Requires a Fiver!

JOE! Joe, deah b^oys!" Joe did not seem to hear. He was going along the Shell passage with a deep and gloomy frown on his brow, and he did not even hear Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The swell of St. Jim's watched him in surprise, and saw him enter Tom Merry's study.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "That young boundah looks as if he had all the twouble in the world on his shouldahs."

Tom Merry thought so, too, as Joe came into the study. There was a grim and hunted look on the fag's face.

Tom Merry was alone in the study. Afternoon school was over, and Tom Merry had not joined Lowther and Manners and the other Shell fellows on the playing field. As a matter of fact, he was thinking about Joe.

He looked at Joe sadly as he came in. Tom Merry thought over the matter again, and he could not help thinking that the other fellows were right—that Joe had done what he was suspected of.

It was a heavy blow to Tom Merry. He had protected the lad, and believed in him—only for this!

HARD TO PLEASE.



A boy with a large mouth walked into a music shop to buy a mouth-organ. He was shown every make of mouth-organ in the shop, but could not be satisfied.

"Look here," said the assistant finally, "just try your mouth along this piano!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Sharman, 73, Idilecombe Road, Tooting, London, S.W.17.

"Well, Joe," he said, with an effort, as the boy came in. Joe looked at him from under his brows.

"Master Tom—" he choked and stopped.

"Yes, Joe?"

"You believe I did that—still?"

Tom Merry was silent.

"I ain't come here to argue about it, sir," said Joe, with a gleam of pride in his eyes; "but if you didn't believe it, it would make what I'm going to say easier."

"What are you going to say, Joe?"

"You told me to come and arsk you if I needed any-thing, sir."

"Of course."

"I want some money, Master Tom."

Tom Merry simply stared.

Joe was not particularly careful with his money; he generally managed to get through the allowance Tom Merry's uncle made him. But he had never asked Tom Merry for money before. Tom Merry had bidden him to do so if he ever needed any, but he had not. His request came as a surprise to the hero of the Shell. But he answered quickly:

"Yes, Joe! How much?"

"Five pounds, sir."

The Shell fellow started. He had expected Joe to ask for five shillings, perhaps ten! Five pounds! He doubted if he had heard aright.

"Five pounds, Joe?"

"Yes, sir!"

"My dear kid," said Tom Merry, half smiling and half pained, "I can't do it! I haven't as much money—half of it, either. I don't have fivers like Gussy, you know!"

Joe made a hopeless gesture.

"Do you really need the money?" Tom Merry asked.

"Straight I do!" said Joe.

"What for, Joe?"

The waif did not answer.

"What do you need it for, Joe? Do you owe somebody some money?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"You haven't been getting into debt?"

"No, Master Tom!"

"You want to buy something very much?"

Joe shook his head.

"Now, look here, Joe," said Tom Merry, "I don't pretend to feel towards you the same as I did before that happened about the detention papers. But I'm your friend as long as you stay at St. Jim's. Tell me what you want this money for."

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"I can't!"

"Why not?"

"I can't!"

"Have you got mixed up in bad company outside the school, Joe?"

Joe's face grew haggard, but he did not speak.

Tom Merry could see that his shot had struck home. His handsome face hardened a little.

"Make a clean breast of it, Joe, and I'll give you my word that I'll do my best to help you out," he said.

"I can't!"

"You won't tell me what you want the money for?"

Another shake of the head.

"Then I couldn't let you have it, Joe, even if I had a fiver in my pocket," said Tom Merry. "But I haven't—I haven't more than a few shillings. If you wanted the money for any necessity, or anything you could explain, I could raise it among the fellows, and pay them back afterwards."

"I can't tell you nothing, sir."

Joe turned blindly to the door.

"Joe!" called out Tom Merry.

But Frayne did not stop.

He left the study, closing the door behind him, and went slowly down the passage. He was looking crushed and broken like a fellow whose last hope had failed him.

He passed Study No. 6 without seeing Arthur Augustus D'Arcy standing in the open doorway.

"Joe!" said D'Arcy softly.

The waif started, and turned his head.

"Yes, Master D'Arcy?" he said huskily.

"Come into my study."

Joe came in, and D'Arcy closed the door. The swell of St. Jim's pointed to the armchair.

"Sit down!" he said.

Joe Frayne sat down.

"Now, tell me what's the mattah?"

Joe shook his head. But the tears welled over from his eyes and ran down his cheek. The waif of St. Jim's was choked with feeling.

D'Arcy's own eyes moistened.

"I'm afwaid there's somethin' vewy wong with you, Joe," he said. "I wish you would explain what's the mattah. In a case of this sort, what you want is a fellow of tact and judgment to help you, you know!"

The little waif groaned.

"You couldn't 'elp me, sir!"

"But what's the mattah?"

"They're all down on me," said Joe miserably. "Master Wally has dropped me, and even Master Tom has turned agin' me! I don't care what 'appens now!"

"You have a fwient left in me, deah boy!"

Joe looked up eagerly, his eyes glistening through his wet lashes.

"You mean that, sir?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Will you lend me some money, sir?"

D'Arcy laughed.

"Is that all that's the mattah, Joe?" he asked. "Of course I will. How much?"

"Five pounds, sir!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had very large and liberal ideas about money; but a request for five pounds from a fag in the Third Form startled him. But he did not falter. D'Arcy's money was always at the disposal of his friends.

"Bai Jove! How vewy fortunate!" he exclaimed. "I had a fivah fwom my governah this mornin', Joe, and I will lend it to you with pleasuah. Here you are!"

"I'll pay it back out of my allowance, sir, a bit at a time," said Joe, scarcely believing his eyes as his fingers closed on did not considah you to be an honouvable chap."

"That's all wight, deah boy! I know you will pay it back if you can. I should not wogard you as a fwient if I did not considah you to be an honouvable chap."

"Oh, thank you, sir; you're—you're splendid!" said Joe.

"But what do you want the tin for, Joe?" said D'Arcy gravely.

"I—I can't tell you, sir, if you don't mind."

"I don't want to be inquisitive, deah boy," said D'Arcy gravely, "but that is a gweat deal of money for a kid like you, you know!"

"I—I can't tell you. You can take the note back if you like, sir," said Joe forlornly, and he half held it out. He seemed unable quite to hold it out, lest D'Arcy should take it.

The swell of St. Jim's waved it away with a graceful gesture.

"Not at all, Joe. I've lent it to you—that's all wight! I twust you are not gettin' into mischief outside the school, Joe."

"I—I 'ope it will soon be all right, sir," said Joe.

And he left the study, leaving the swell of St. Jim's considerably puzzled by his last remark.

CHAPTER 14.

A Roland for an Oliver!

OUTSIDE!" Joe Frayne started. It was in the Third Form Room, shortly after evening prep was over. Joe had not missed prep this evening—he had been caned by Mr. Selby for missing it the previous evening. Worried as he was in his mind about his unknown trouble, Joe had managed to scrape through the preparation without incurring the fresh wrath of Mr. Selby.

The wrath of Mr. Selby was more trouble to Joe than the wrath of Achilles was to the Greeks of old. Mr. Selby had quitted the Form-room with rustling gown and frowning brows, and the fags were left to themselves.

When they had the Form-room to themselves the Third generally proceeded to turn it into a bear garden. This evening was no exception.

The Third had an additional motive for riot—their indignation about the Form outcast.

"Outside!"

A dozen voices shouted out the word.

That it was addressed to him, Joe Frayne did not realise for a moment. He had as much right in the Form-room as anybody else in the Third. But the fags did not appear to think so.

Wally walked out of the room. He would not take part against his old friend; but, thinking what he did of it, he could not defend Joe.

The other fellows gathered round the waif of St. Jim's in a body. Then Joe realised that he was the subject of their general attention.

"Wot's the row now?" he asked.

Hobbs pointed dramatically to the door.

"Outside!" he said.

"Houtside! Wot for?" said Joe.

"Yes, houtside!" said Hobbs, with an imitation of Joe's pronunciation that made the fags yell with laughter.

"Houtside, Frayne, if you prefer it like that!"

"Shut up, Hobbs!" said Jameson rather unreasonably.

"Let him get out; that's all we want!"

"Outside, you rotter!"

"I'll get bout fast enough," said Joe.

He walked to the door, and went out quietly into the passage. Some of the fags looked a little uneasy.

"After all, we don't want to be too hard on the kid!" Jameson remarked.

"Rats!" said Picke. "He got the Shell chaps into a row!"

"Well, yes, there's no doubt about that."

"And Wally has been like a bear with a sore head ever since the row, too," said Curly Gibson. "There's no standing Wally now; and it's all Frayne's fault!"

Jameson nodded without replying.

"Hullo! What's this?" exclaimed Hobbs suddenly, as the Form-room door opened.

The door was thrown back, and the doorway appeared blocked with juniors. They were all Fourth Formers, and their looks showed they were on the warpath.

Jack Blake was at the head of the party, and after him came Herries and Digby, and D'Arcy and Hancock, and Reilly, and Kerruish and Macdonald, and others—in fact, nearly all the School House portion of the Fourth Form.

The fags stared at them in dismay.

"What do you want?" demanded Jameson.

The invaders did not reply. They marched on, to the number of over a score, and the Form-room door was closed behind them.

"Look here," blustered Jameson, "you get out of our Form-room! You hear?"

"Get out, you Fourth Form cads!"

Blake chuckled.

"Explain to them, Gussy," he said.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy adjusted his monocle, and surveyed the surprised and uneasy fags of the Third.

"We've come here to treat you as you deserve," he remarked. "You have had the feahful cheek to waid a Fourth Form study—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"You must not suppose that I bear malice personally for your wotten conduct," went on D'Arcy loftily. "It is a mattah of principle with me. You will have to be put through it, to keep up the dig of the Fourth Form."

And the Fourth waded in with a vengeance. They went through the Third Form-room like wreckers, leaving ruin and havoc to mark their course.

The fags clustered together, and put up a desperate resistance. But of what use was a fags' fight against the heroes of the Fourth? The Third were driven and chased up and down the Form-room, while a group of the Fourth stood on guard at the door, and another contingent raided the Third Form property.

Lockers were opened, and the contents strewn in ruin

on the floor, desks burst, and books and papers scattered. Fags were rolled, yelling, in ink and ashes.

Before the Fourth Formers had been at work five minutes the Third were howling with wrath and dismay.

"I wathah think that will do, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, taking a calm survey of the wreck and ruin through his monocle. "Pway chuck it!"

Blake shook his finger at the furious fags.

"Look here," he said. "You mind your 'p's' and 'q's,' my sons, and don't cheek a senior Form in the future! We're letting you off lightly."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on, chaps! I think we're about done here."

It was certainly time the Fourth were done. They marched out of the Form-room laughing, leaving the Third almost in tears with rage.

The fags looked at one another with sickly expressions.

The Fourth had swept the Form-room like a cloud of locusts.

"Whose rotten idea was it to raid D'Arcy's study?"

grunted Picke at last.

"That's right, pile on me!" said Jameson.

"Well, you were an ass!"

"A chump!"

"A fathead!"

"Hullo! Here's Wally!"

Wally entered the Form-room. He stopped, and gave a

whistle of astonishment at the sight of the general havoc.

"My only Aunt Jane! What's been happening here—an

earthquake or a cyclone?"

"The Fourth Form rotters!" howled Curly Gibson.

"They've raided us."

"Serve you jolly well right!" said Wally. "What did you

let them do it for?"

And then Wally stepped out of the Form-room. Only just in time, for if he had remained ten seconds after that remark, he would have been reduced to a worse state than any fag in the room.

CHAPTER 15.

Wet for the Weasel!

IT'S 'im!"

Joe Frayne uttered the exclamation in low, scared tones, while every vestige of colour fled from his face.

A thick-set, coarse-featured man, with a skin coppered in hue by the continual use of strong liquors, had reeled into the open gateway of St. Jim's.

In the pleasant weather of the afternoon nearly everybody was out of doors. Many fellows were in the playing fields, others strolling about the quadrangle.

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther and Blake and D'Arcy were standing near the gates, talking, when the unkempt, ill-looking figure appeared.

Joe was the first to sight it, however. The little waif stared at it as if fascinated. To some of the juniors it was also familiar. More than one of them had seen the tramp hanging about the gates of St. Jim's, when, on a previous occasion, he had spoken to Joe Frayne, and had been kicked out by Kildare, captain of the school. It was the drunken, evil-faced vagrant who called himself the Weasel.

The man had been drinking now—that was clear, from the flush in his cheeks, and the unsteadiness in his gait—but he was not intoxicated. He was quite sober enough to be keen and alert, in spite of his unsteadiness.

"What on earth's that?" exclaimed Lowther.

"Look at Joe!" muttered Blake.

"Bai Jove!"

"Joe knows him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Joe had fixed his eyes upon the ruffian. The Weasel came towards the little waif, a threatening scowl on his face.

"You see I'm 'ere!" he said, with a leer. "I said I would come, didn't I?"

"You villain!" said Joe.

Tom Merry strode forward.

He planted himself in the ruffian's path, and, lad as he was, there was something in his look that made the Weasel halt.

"Who are you?" Tom Merry exclaimed sharply. "And what do you want here?"

"I'm the Weasel," said the man, with a leering smile;

(Continued on the next page.)

QX



SHOW FATHER

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"and I've seen you afore, my young shaver, and you've seen me. I've seen you out in the streets, picking pockets with the captain! He, he, he!"

Tom Merry looked at him hard.

Dimly to his memory came the evil coppery face. He had seen it before, in the days—not so long ago, yet seeming very far back—when he had been alone in London, and had been fain to obtain shelter in Blucher's Buildings—where little Joe Frayne had befriended him, and their strange friendship had begun.

"I've seen you before," he said. "What do you want here?"

The Weasel pointed to Joe.

"I want 'im!" he said.

"Joe? You want Joe?"

"Yes. And I'm goin' to 'ave 'im!" said the Weasel threateningly. "I'm goin' to take 'im to 'is father, I am!"

"His father?"

"Yes—Bill Frayne!"

Joe made a choking sound in his throat.

"It can't be 'elped, Master Tom," he said. "I've got to go! It can't be helped!"

"What do you mean, Joe?" he exclaimed.

"I've got to go!"

Fellows were gathering round from all sides now. Wally was one of the first to arrive, and the scamp of the Third was seen to range himself along with Joe and push back his cuffs. He had apparently forgotten that he was on bad terms with the wail of St. Jim's.

"The uthah wotthah is certainly not goin' to take you away, Joe!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "He cannot have any wight to do so."

Joe shook his head hopelessly.

"It's no good, Master D'Arcy. He's got me under his thumb, he has. Ever since he found me here by accident he ain't gone away; he's been hanging round the school, making me go hout and meet him, and take him money—"

Tom Merry uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Was that what you wanted the five pounds for, Joe?"

Joe's head dropped.

"Yes, Master Tom."

"Bai Jove!"

"He's had all I had, and all Master D'Arcy gave me," said Joe. "I have given him a lot of my things, too, to pawn. He's spent it all in drink."

Tom Merry's face was pale with distress.

"Joe, why did you do this?"

"Yaas, wathah! Why did you do it, deah boy?"

Joe Frayne groaned.

"He'll tell you."

The Weasel chuckled.

"I'm goin' to take 'im to 'is father," he said. "Can't a man 'ave his own son if 'e likes? You come with me, young shaver!"

"I paid 'im the money to let me alone," said Joe wildly. "He took all I could give 'im, and wanted more. He told me if I didn't bring 'im another five pounds to-day he'd come here and show me up before the fellows, and take me away with him. He said I could steal the money, if I hadn't got it."

"Bai Jove!"

"The scoundrell!"

"He said I was used to it," said Joe miserably. "He said I was a burglar's son, and could follow my father's trade. And so I might 'ave, once, Master Tom; but since I've been 'ere it seems different, somehow. I couldn't steal."

"My poor kid!"

D'Arcy squeezed Joe's arm. His heart was too full for words. Wally rubbed his eye as if some dust had got into it, and cast a fierce glance round as if to challenge anybody who might suppose that it was anything but dust in his eye.

"I can't keep it dark any longer," said Joe, with a gulp. "That villain is going to tell you all. He said he would if I didn't bring 'im some more money. My father's Bill Frayne, a burglar, and the police are looking for him now, and that villain is going to tell you about it. I don't care! I can't help what my father was, can I? I suppose nobody won't speak to me now; but I'm getting used to that. The best thing that can 'appen is for the 'Ead to let me go, even if I don't go with this chap."

"You shan't go with him!" said Tom Merry.

"Who says he won't?" demanded the Weasel fiercely.

"I do, you scoundrell!" said Tom Merry.

"I'm going to take 'im to 'is father," said the Weasel.

"If 'e won't come, Bill Frayne will come for 'im 'imself. 'Ow would 'e like that?"

Joe groaned.

"I must go, Master Tom! If my father came 'ere 'e

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would be seen, and caught, and sent to prison again, and I can't stand that! I don't care what he is—he's my father!"

"He won't come here," said Tom Merry quietly. "Do you think your father's ass enough to get himself arrested for the sake of claiming you? Bill Frayne will keep far enough away from here, Joe."

"But—"

"As for this scoundrell—how do you know that he comes from your father at all? It may be all a lie to frighten you. He may not even know where your father is to be found."

"I know where he is!" said the Weasel fiercely. "I know—"

"You know where Frayne, the burglar is?" rapped out Monty Lowther.

"Yes," said the Weasel defiantly.

"Then you're liable to arrest for not informing the police," said Lowther promptly. "You are aiding and abetting a criminal to escape justice. Collar him, lads, and we'll telephone for the police!"

The Weasel's face turned as pale as the inflamed colour of the skin would allow. He gave a wild look at the juniors, who were already closing round him, and then he made a dash for the gates.

The Weasel ran wildly for the gates. But the light-footed juniors were swifter. They gained on the ruffian, and overtook him as he ran into the road. He yelled and squirmed as their grasp closed upon him.

"Leggo!" he yelled. "Let me go, young gents! I don't know anything about Bill Frayne—I swear I don't! I won't speak to Joe again! I was only frightening him! It was only because I was 'ard up! Let me go!"

"Duck him!" shouted Blake.

There was a deep-flowing ditch on the opposite side of the road. The juniors dragged the Weasel towards it. He struggled furiously, but in vain. Headlong into the ditch they hurled him.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The ruffian rose to the surface of the water, smothered with mud and drenched with water. He was gasping and spluttering frantically.

"Oh! Oh! Oh, Help! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pelt him!" said Blake.

And the juniors pelted the rascal till he dragged himself out of the ditch on the opposite side, clambered over a fence, and fled madly across country. Then they returned to the school in high good humour.

The Weasel had been disposed of, and he was not likely to darken the gates of St. Jim's again.

Meanwhile, Joe Frayne had stood like one in a dream. It seemed impossible to the lad that he was relieved of the nightmare that for the past week had been weighing so heavily upon his mind and spirits.

The unfortunate lad had allowed himself to be frightened by the Weasel's threats—and no wonder! But his terror seemed to be dissipated now. The dreadful truth was told—all St. Jim's knew it. But it only made his friends the firmer. And, as for the snobs, they had always suspected something of the sort, and it could not make them worse than they had been.

"Buck up, Joe, deah boy!" said D'Arcy. "It's all wight! You're as safe as a bank, old son!"

Tom Merry pressed Joe's arm.

"Joe," he said, "answer me this. And listen, you fellows. You've been outside the school to meet that villain and take him money?"

"Yes, Master Tom."

"Was that where you had gone when the detention papers were mucked up in the Shell Form Room?"

"My hat!" murmured Kangaroo.

"Yes, Master Tom," said Joe simply.

"And this was why you couldn't explain—because you couldn't tell the fellows about this chap and your father?"

"Yes, Master Tom."

D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye, and turned a pardonable triumphant look upon the juniors.

"I hope I'm not the sort of fellow to say, I told you so," he remarked. "But I trust you fellows will wemembah that I told you this all along. I knew that Joe hadn't done it."

"I never did do it, sir."

"I believe you, Joe," said Tom Merry. "What do you fellows say?"

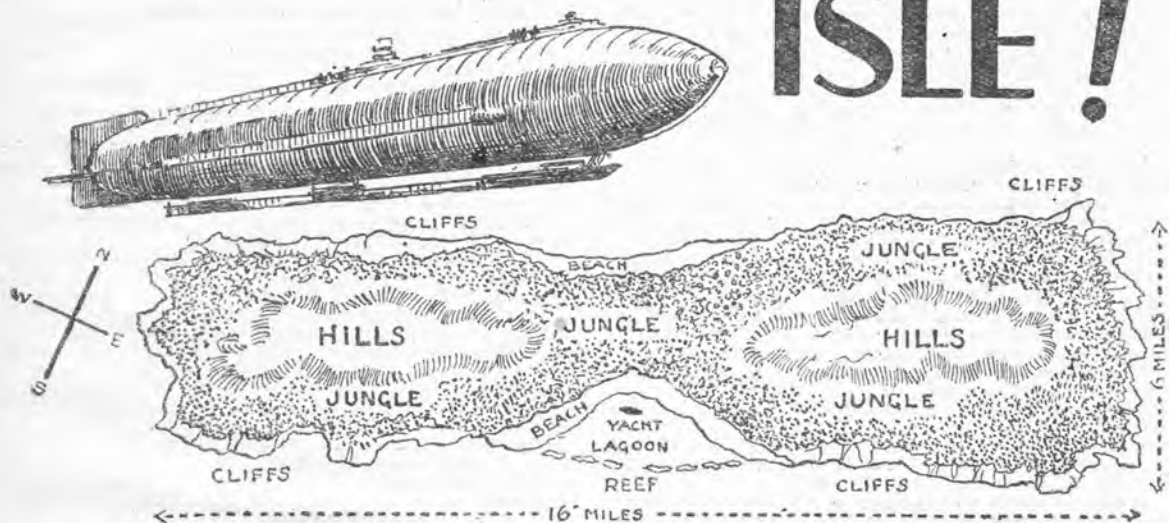
"The same thing, I expect," said Blake.

"Yes, rather!" said Kangaroo. "I'm sorry I suspected the young bonnder; but, after all, it was his own fault for not explaining. But look here, somebody mucked up the detention papers, and put Joe's ink-bottle into the

(Continued on page 23.)

THERE'S THRILL UPON THRILL THROUGHOUT THESE GRIPPING CHAPTERS OF—

TREASURE ISLE!



THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

The Sky Wanderer, the airship school of the St. Frank's chums, lands on Tao-Tao Island, in the Pacific, in response to a message for help from Mr. Beverton, an explorer treasure-seeking on the island. It transpires that Doc Haynes and most of the crew of the explorer's yacht have nuttided to seek the treasure. To ensure his own safety from the airship school, Haynes, who is friendly with the cannibals, captures twelve of the St. Frank's boys. But they escape again—only to run right into the enemy!

Out of the Frying-pan!

THE twelve St. Frank's schoolboys, running from the jungle, with the cannibals in pursuit, halted, stricken motionless by the dismay which filled them.

Once upon that silvery beach, they had expected to find their friends. Instead, they were almost in the enemy camp! The picture was vividly impressed upon their minds as they stood staring, their lungs almost bursting after their heroic efforts. Right in front of them stretched the beach, with Doc Haynes' bungalow and the other buildings standing squatly on the sands; farther on, the protected lagoon lay like a pool of silver, with the private yacht at anchor in the natural harbour. On the left of the boys tall palm-trees grew, and on their right black rocks rose unexpectedly, with here and there an opening. And in their rear the dense jungle—with the cries of the pursuing Tao-Tao blacks!

Nipper's own feelings were indescribable. It was he who had conceived the daring plan of escape; he who had put it into execution. But, for all his astuteness, he had rescued the party from the frying-pan, only to lead it straight into the fire!

It was just bad luck. The southern path and the northern path, leading from the native village, in mid-island, looked exactly the same. The boys had entered the first opening in the clearing—and not until this moment had they had any idea of the mistake they had made.

Now it was too late!

To retreat was impossible, for they would run into the arms of the pursuing savages. To advance was equally futile, for Doc Haynes himself, with several of his men, were right at hand. Some of them had caught up blazing brands from the fire, and they held these aloft as they approached. Haynes himself, fat cigar in mouth, was handling his big automatic pistol.

"Stand just where you are, kids," he said, in his pleasant, hoisterous voice. "Well, dang me for a lopsided shark! What's all this? Trying some of your funny tricks already?"

Before any of the boys could answer, confusion reigned. More than a dozen inflamed blacks came hurtling out of the

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.

shadows of the jungle, and so violent was their arrival that they crashed into some of the boys, knocking them over. Behind them came more and more blacks, all yelling. Ear-splitting shrieks of triumph were sounding, and Nipper and his companions found themselves grabbed with brutal force and held. Things might have gone badly for them but for the timely intervention of Doc Haynes.

"Pipe down, you scum!" he thundered, his manner becoming harsh and commanding. "What in heck do you think you're doing?"

He was a man of drastic action. Pointing the muzzle of his gun upwards, he pulled the trigger repeatedly, and five or six sharp reports cracked out on the still night air. Almost in the same moment Haynes dragged a long whip from one of his white companions, and the lash cracked and hissed as it fell cruelly upon the bare shoulders of the savages. In less than a minute Haynes cooled them off. Howling with fright and pain, they sorted themselves out, backing away, muttering ominously—but obedient.

"Keep them covered, boys—and if they start any funny business, give 'em lead!" said Haynes coolly. "Now, you kids, out here, into the firelight. Giving me enough trouble, ain't you?"

"If we hadn't made a mistake of the path, we should have been with our friends by now," said Nipper aggressively.

"So that's what happened?" asked Haynes, casting his eye over Nipper's bare form. "What do you think you are, sonny—one of them new-fangled Nudists? Or are you turning native?"

Nipper did not answer. Having discarded his own clothing, he was clad in nothing but a shred or two of the witch-doctor's grasses.

By this time the boys, surrounded, had been hustled forward over the sands, until they were in the full glare of the firelight. The head man of the village, too, was jabbering sixteen to the dozen, and Haynes apparently understood every word the man said.

"A clever trick, my fine young bucko," he said at length, staring at Nipper. "So you knocked the witch-doctor on the head and took his place? Hard luck when you took the wrong path! You deserved to get away." His eyes hardened. "After this, I'm going to look after you personally. You kids have got more spirit than I gave you credit for. Mebbe you'll like hard work!"

The head man was jabbering still, and Haynes, who was inclined to ignore him, suddenly started.

"What?" he yelled. "What's that, you black ape?"

He added other words—in the native tongue, and the head man pointed excitedly to the group of schoolboys.

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"Just a minute!" exclaimed Haynes ominously. "See here, kids! This man says that three of you is missing." He ran his eyes over the captives. "By thunder! He's right, too! There's only nine here!"

Nipper looked round in surprise. Until that moment he had not known that any members of his party were missing.

"It's Handforth!" muttered Watson breathlessly. "Handy, Church, and McClure. They're not here!"

"But they were here when we burst out upon the beach!" said Nipper. "I saw Church and McClure—" He turned to Haynes, his eyes burning. "Look here, you brute! If these blacks of yours have done any harm to our friends—"

"Hold it!" commanded Haynes grimly. "I've had enough of your lip! Here, Red! You, too, Shorty! Take these kids to the empty store-hut, and lock 'em in!"

"Just as you say, Doc," replied Red, moving forward, gun in hand. "Now then, you young whelps! Look slippy!"

There was no help for it. The boys were compelled to march—for not only the white men were forcing them on, but a number of the blacks, too. They were taken straight to one of the strong, substantial log huts which stood on the sands. A heavy door was thrust open, and the boys were hustled into the darkness of the hut. Then the door was shut upon them, and they heard heavy bolts being shot into their sockets. This hut was no native erection; it was built after the style of the old pioneer shacks in Western America—massive logs placed one upon the other, and dovetailed at the corners. It was every bit as strong as a solid brick building. There was no window, and the roof was composed of solid logs, too.

"Sorry, you chaps!" came Nipper's voice out of the darkness.

"It wasn't your fault, dear old fellow," said Vivian Travers. "You are no more to blame than the rest of us. Nobody's to blame, if it comes to that."

"If you ask me, it was dashed well worth it!" said Archie Glenholme stoutly. "I mean to say, we may be prisoners in the hands of this blighting buccaneer, but at least we're in civilised territory, so to speak."

"Yes, there's that," came Buster Boots' voice. "This is a white man's hut—not a filthy native hovel. Better for us to be in Haynes' camp than in that Tao-Tao village."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. Nipper smiled faintly. It pleased him to hear his companions making the best of a bad job so pluckily. But he was just a bit disheartened.

"I can't help wondering about Handy," said the Remove captain, at length. "He and Church and McClure were with us. Where the dickens did they get to?"

"There's no telling what Handy will do, old boy," said Trogell-West. "Perhaps he an' his chums slipped away, or somethin', when the savages burst out of the jungle. There was quite a spot of confusion at the time—there was, really. Don't you remember?"

"If he slipped away—good luck to him," said Nipper. "I hope that is the explanation."

At that moment voices sounded outside, and the bolts of the door were shot back. Haynes walked in, flashing his powerful electric torch; and in the reflected light his bronzed, fleshy face was set in dangerous lines. He had lost all his former agreeableness.

"You kids had better tell the truth," he said bluntly. "What became of them three youngsters what was with you?"

"We don't know," replied Nipper. "Better come clean!" snarled Haynes. "I've questioned the blacks, and I'm satisfied they know nothing. Them three boys have just vanished. Do any of you kids know what became of 'em? I'm advising you, for your own good, to tell the truth."

"We didn't know they were not with us until you pointed it out," said Nipper.

Haynes flashed his light upon their streaked, perspiring faces, and he examined each countenance in turn.

"Hub!" he grunted at length. "Mebbe you're lying, and mebbe you ain't! But if you are lying you'll regret it!"

"Threats, my unhandsome friend, leave us cold," said Travers coolly. "You daren't harm us, and you know it. On the other side of the island there's a mighty big party of

determined men, and the only way you can prevent them attacking you is by keeping us safe. If our pals have got away, good luck to 'em!"

"Hear, hear!" chorused the others defiantly.

Doc Haynes glowered—and then laughed.

"Plenty of spirit in you, ain't there?" he asked pleasantly. "Mebbe hard work will knock it out of you. Have you ever tried digging for hours on end under a tropic sun? I guess not. Well, to-morrow you'll have a taste of it!"

Haynes laughed again noisily, and then turned on his heel, strode out, and the door was rebolted.

Haynes went striding across the moonlit beach back towards the shadowy jungle and where the isolated rocks rose jaggedly.

"It's no good, Doc," said the man called Red, as he met his chief. "The blacks have been along the path, but they can't see no sign of the kids."

"Looks like they've dived into the thick of the jungle, the young fools!" said Haynes darkly. "If that's the case, they'll have been bitten by snakes by now, like as not. But they've got to be found—dead or alive. Round them blacks up—and get 'em here on the beach! I'm going to give orders. Them kids have got to be found!"

"Why bother?" asked Red. "We've got the other nine, ain't we? Let the young swabs rip! Even if they get back to the other shore it won't matter."

"You're a fool, Red Harker—allus was and allus will be!" retorted Haynes contemptuously. "Sure it'll be all right if the kids get back to that party with the airship. But what if the kids don't get back? What if they're grabbed and held by these devil-hearted blackmoors?"

"Ain't that what you planned in the first place?" asked Red, staring.

"No, you misshapen ape!" retorted Haynes. "While I knew where the kids was the blacks wouldn't do nothing drastic. But if they've took the three kids into a part of the jungle which we don't know of—well, there's likely to be a cannibal feast. That's the last thing we want, Red. I've kept the blacks in check by giving 'em presents one day and showin' 'em the iron hand the next day. But if they start any of their cannibal tricks they might get out of hand. I ain't thinking of the kids—I'm thinking of ourselves!"

"Cripes!" muttered Red Harker uneasily. "I always thought that you was top dog on Tao-Tao, Doc!"

"So I am—and I mean to keep top dog!" retorted the other. "That's why we must find them kids. Curse 'em! Giving me all this trouble! I'll make 'em suffer when I do get hold of 'em! Praps you don't realise that us white men have only penetrated a fraction of this island's territory? There's things in these jungles which would turn you as clammy as a fish if you saw 'em! Remember that, Red—and let it sink in!"

He strode away, determined to continue the hunt with relentless determination. And Red Harker, for the first time, realised that Doc Haynes was not the real master of Tao-Tao Island, in spite of his braggart manner and dictatorial air. The savages were the real masters—and the island itself was a place of black mystery.

The Danger Unknown:

NELSON LEE'S calm acceptance of the situation was a source of irritation to the action-loving Lord Dorrimore during the early hours of that eventful evening.

Darkness had descended upon the shallow northern beach. The moon was shining now, and, under normal conditions, the line of jungle at the back of the shore would have been a black strip of mystery.

But the Sky Wanderer, at her moorings, had her searchlight directed slantwise along the beach, and the line of jungle was brilliantly flood-lit. Any movement would be instantly seen; any attempt on the part of the blacks to make a rush would be detected in the first second.

The airship herself was well clear of the jungle, resting rigidly and proudly on her grapple supports. The ladders had been drawn up, and on her entrance deck, and all along her starboard promenade deck, amidsthips, men were stationed with rifles. They had machine-guns, too—mounted securely on the chromium rails. If there should be an attack there could be only one result. The Sky Wanderer was safe; her occupants were as secure as though they were in the heart of peaceful England.

Everything, in fact, was proceeding with the usual routine. The airship schoolboys did their prep, just as they would have done it at St. Frank's itself; they had their meals at the usual time, and they went to bed at the exact hour.

"There's no reason why we should relax the customary discipline, gentlemen," Nelson Lee had said when talking to the masters. "Carry on as usual, please. The twelve boys who are missing are beyond our reach—but I believe them to be safe. For the moment we can do nothing."

**St.
Frank's
STAMP
WHO'S
WHO**



E. Lawrence. C. Owen. J. Ferman.
(Three more portraits next week.)



With the cannibals in pursuit the St. Frank's boys raced from the jungle on to the sands—to run right into Doc Haynes and several of his men! Blazing brands were held aloft as the boys approached. "Darn me!" exclaimed Haynes, handling an automatic. "Stop just where you are, kids!"

So the evening had passed, and the disgusted boys had been obliged to go to bed. They had been expecting exciting things to happen, and they were disappointed.

"I know very well, Dorrie, that you are on tenterhooks to get something done," said Nelson Lee, smiling. "But this situation is a peculiar one, and we should do more harm than good by rushing things."

"You know best, Lee—you generally do," admitted Dorrie gruffly. "Perhaps it's a good thing that I'm not in charge of the youngsters; for I would have armed them all and led them into the jungle on a rescue hunt."

It was fairly late now, and the men were in the commander's state-room. It was an informal council of war. In addition to Lord Dorrmore and Nelson Lee, the men present were Sir Hobart Manners, Truscott, the first officer, Beverton, Captain Bridges, Hollins, and Stanton. The latter four were greatly perturbed—for it was because of their troubles that the airship party was in this unexpected fix.

"There's no denying that this man Haynes is a unique sort of rogue," said Lee quietly. "You found that out long since, Beverton."

"I did, indeed," agreed the explorer, with feeling. "Haynes is common enough, but he is a man of strategy, of cunning. The way in which he handles these bloodthirsty savages is amazing. He combines tact and kindness with harsh ruthlessness—changing his mood instantly according to the demands of the moment. As I told you before, he's centuries out of his time, for at heart he is a sea-roving pirate."

"His exploit in coolly forcing his way into the wireless-room and wrecking the mechanism gave us a clear insight into his character," said Lee. "Haynes is dangerous—and he holds the whip hand. Gentlemen, it would be foolish to ignore that fact."

"Does that mean we can do nothin'?" demanded Dorrie almost aggressively.

"It means this," replied Lee. "It means that we cannot take the Sky Wanderer into the air—it means that we cannot penetrate the jungle. There's not the slightest shadow of doubt that many of the Tao-Tao savages are in hiding in the jungle—watching the airship."

"Why couldn't we get round to the other side of the island by sea?" asked Truscott keenly. "We've got boats aboard, Mr. Lee—pneumatic boats, which we carry in case of emergency."

"I have thought of that," replied Lee. "But there is bright moonlight—"

"The moon will set within an hour or two."

"Even so, there will still be starlight—and the blacks have keen eyes," said Lee. "Even supposing we extinguished

the searchlight we could not launch a boat on this phosphorescent sea without our movements being seen. Word would be sent across the island to Haynes, and that would ensure us a warm welcome when we arrived at the southern shore."

"I'm afraid that Mr. Lee is right, Truscott," said Sir Hobart, shaking his head.

"Therefore, gentlemen, since we can do nothing we had better go to bed," said Nelson Lee calmly. "We shall, of course, arrange definite watches throughout the night."

They dispersed, and Lord Dorrmore found the faithful Umlosi waiting on the promenade deck, leaning against the rail, staring moodily down upon the phosphorescent surf.

"No luck, Umlosi," said Dorrie, with a shrug. "There'll be no work for us to-night."

"Wau! I am impatient, even as thou art, N'Kose," rumbled Umlosi. "But let it not be forgotten that Umtagali is a great general, and if it is his will that we should remain idle, then it is better for us to be idle."

But later, just after the moon had set behind the rocky heights, inland, something unexpected happened which caused Nelson Lee to make a quick change in his plans.

The great detective was desperately anxious to do something for the boys who had been spirited away, but he was not rash enough to take action which would do more harm than good. The very instant he saw a real chance, however, he seized it without a second's hesitation.

He changed his mind because the weather changed. Almost without warning a tropic storm came sweeping over the sea from the south-west. The clouds came up rapidly in black masses, proving that a strong wind raged overhead, for the atmosphere on the sea level remained perfectly still. There was no lightning, no thunder—nothing but sudden inky darkness and torrential rain.

Within the space of a few minutes the conditions had undergone an absolute change. The starlight was blotted out, and the rain, hissing down upon the sea, instantly deprived the surf of its phosphorescent glow.

"Dorrie," said Lee quickly, "this looks like a good opportunity. We're going to make a raid on the enemy!"

"Now you're talkin'," said Lord Dorrmore, with great heartiness.

"Four of us will be sufficient—you, Beverton, Umlosi, and myself," continued Nelson Lee crisply. "See that you have a couple of guns and plenty of ammunition. Have a good electric torch in your pocket, too, and at least four of those miniature gas bombs."

"It sounds better and better," said Dorrie, his eyes burning. "What's the programme?"

"Some of the men are blowing up one of the pneumatic

boats, and we're going to take her round the coast," replied Lee. "We can chance it now, for the darkness is so intense that our movements will not be seen by the watchful blacks."

"What about the searchlight?"

"Within a few minutes it is going to flicker and then go out," replied Lee calmly. "That's in case there's a white man watching, too. He'll think that the rain has caused a short circuit, or something. Later, when we are well clear of the beach, the searchlight will come on again. In that way the watchers will not know that we have left."

"When it comes to artfulness you're all there, old man," said Dorrie admiringly.

The first part of the programme was carried out without a hitch. The pneumatic boat was blown up on the entrance deck. It was a thing of excessive lightness, but remarkably strong. When fully inflated it took the shape of a squat canoe, capable of carrying half a dozen men. Light wooden paddles were provided for propelling it.

"I leave you in charge, Manners," said Nelson Lee, as he shook Sir Hobart's hand. "I do not anticipate any trouble, and hope to be back by dawn."

"What do you intend doing?" asked Sir Hobart.

"Well, I have a certain plan in mind, and if it works out successfully you will know soon enough what has happened," replied Lee. "You can give the signal to the searchlight man now. We must be off the instant the light is out. Switch on again within five minutes, and keep a keen look-out during that blank, black period. It might be a good idea to flash torchlights from the deck—they will show up any figures just below, but the beams will not be sufficient to reveal the sea."

A moment later the great searchlight wavered, flickered, came on full again, and then went completely out. The rain was hissing down with great force, and the darkness now was impenetrable.

Willing hands carried the boat down the entrance ladder, and it was rushed to the breaking surf. Nelson Lee, Dorrie, Mr. Mitchell Beverton, and Umloki took their places, paddles ready. Truscott, Vickers, Hollins, and several others plunged out, launching the boat cleanly. Their movements were completely masked by the darkness and the rain.

By paddling hard the rescue party successfully got the pneumatic boat well out. Soon she was riding comfortably, far from the beach, and the course taken was parallel with the shore, towards the western headland.

"We had only sufficient time, Dorrie," commented Lee, breaking the silence.

The rain had stopped as abruptly as it had started, the dense clouds were passing over, and already stars were twinkling again in the purple sky. With the rainstorm over a certain amount of wind had now come, and it was cool and refreshing.

Suddenly, after flickering, the airship's great searchlight sprang into life again. During that brief period of "black-out" Lee and his companions had got away. It had been smartly done. Now they were well out from the shore, invisible.

"You always were an opportunist, Lee," said Lord Dorrie more admiringly. "By glory! I'm enjoying this! Let's hope there'll be a lot of excitement. What's that plan you have in mind? Or are you going to be secretive, as usual, until the last moment?"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"There's no necessity for secrecy, Dorrie," he replied. "I am merely thinking of playing Haynes' own game, that's all. It's the one type of game he will understand—and appreciate. By an act of piracy—no less—he seized Mr. Beverton's yacht. I propose to do very much the same sort of thing."

"Great heavens! You—you mean—get the yacht back by force?" asked the explorer, trembling with excitement.

"By force, if necessary—but it may not be necessary," replied Lee calmly. "We know that the yacht is lying at anchor in the lagoon, and we also know that Haynes' camp is pitched on the beach."

"Which means," said Dorrie happily, "that it's ten to one against the yacht havin' anybody aboard!"

"I do not think that she will be entirely deserted," replied Lee. "But it's likely enough that no more than two men will have been left on guard. We can deal with them easily enough. We four, armed as we are, can hold the yacht with ease—and we can dictate terms to the swollen-headed Haynes."

"Mr. Lee, you've hit on a great scheme!" exclaimed Mitchell Beverton.

"Yes, but putting it into effect will not be so easy as it seems," said Lee. "We know nothing of this island—and we may not even reach the southern shore."

Lee's words were only dictated by his innate sense of caution; but how justified they were was proved less than an hour later.

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The air-filled boat rode well, and she was paddled fairly easily. They kept comparatively near to the shore, following the forbidding coastline, where the rocks rose sheer from the restless sea. All the time they kept a constant look-out for possible reefs.

But it was evident that the water was deep, that there were no treacherous reefs jutting out from the mainland. It was equally certain that no watchers were on this part of the coast, for the rocks rose to a great height, and were jagged and unclimbable.

So at length they approached the western headland, where the frowning rocks jutted out more menacingly than ever. The paddlers had been noticing, for some time, that the currents were tricky. Unless they were very watchful, the boat would be drawn towards the shore.

"Perhaps we had better get a little farther out to sea," suggested Lee, a note of anxiety in his voice. "The current here is particularly strong. Can't you feel it, Beverton?"

"I can indeed," said the explorer, struggling with his paddle. "It seems to have caught us in its grip during the last minute. Gad! That reminds me of something!"

"Something that affects us?" asked Lee.

"It might," said the other. "We have noticed, when Haynes' motor-boat has come round with the fresh weekly supplies, that it has taken a course far out to sea. We always wondered why—"

"Then you need wonder no longer," said Lee grimly. "Haynes knew of the currents about this headland—and he avoided them. It's a pity you did not mention this before, Beverton."

"I'm terribly sorry—for this is the second time I have neglected to tell you something which you should have known," said the explorer, in distress. "But, really, Mr. Lee, it never occurred to me. I never dreamed that there could be any danger— Upon my word! This current is getting beyond us!"

The party were wielding the paddles with all their strength now: for they could feel the fierce current tugging at the frail rubber boat—pulling it inexorably nearer and nearer to the cruel rocks which rose so frowningly on their starboard side.

Nelson Lee made no comment. He did not blame Beverton in the slightest degree—for it was quite true that the explorer could have had no suspicion of danger. But Nelson Lee's warning words were remembered by Dorrie. The island of Tao-Tao was a strange place—and there was no knowing what secrets it held.

Here, at this gaunt headland, there was a danger unknown. The strong current now seemed to have a circular motion, almost like that of a whirlpool, and it came into Dorrie's mind that the boat was being carried irresistibly towards a deadly, unseen vortex!

The Pool of Mystery!

WHEN the Tao-Tao blacks came charging out of the jungle, Handforth had acted on impulse as usual. By nature he was a blundering sort of fellow, and he now blundered headlong into an extraordinary adventure.

During those first few moments, when Doc Haynes and his men had been advancing with the flaring firebrands, Handforth had seen, just on his right, a rocky opening through the towering crags which rose from the beach, mingling almost with the trees of the forest.

Handforth had seen something else, too. Just beyond the cleft in the rocks, and at a lower level, he had seen the glint of moonshine on water. This told him—almost subconsciously—that there was a pool half-hidden by the rocks. None of the others had seen it. But when the blacks came charging out of the jungle, yelling and screeching, Handforth acted. With a sudden, yanking movement, he grabbed Church and McClure, and flung them headlong to the ground—sideways.

"What the—?" began Church, gasping.

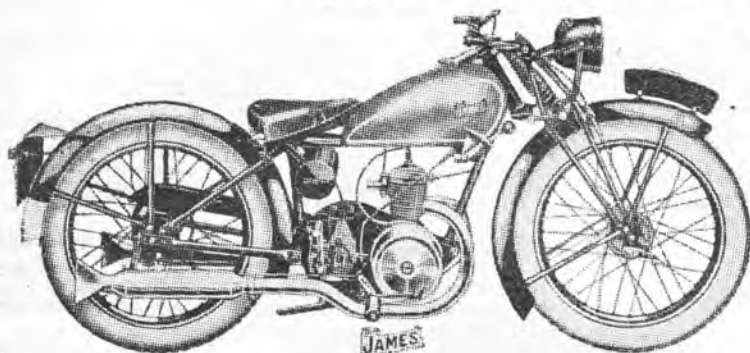
Then the blacks had swept past and confusion reigned. The three fallen juniors were hidden by the bulk of the natives.

"This way—quick!" panted Edward Oswald. "Dive!"

Church and McClure had no inkling of what he meant. They were bewildered by everything that was happening about them; they were deafened by the yells of the blacks, confused by the rocks which rose close against them. But they saw Handforth crawl forward on hands and knees—merely a black shape in the gloom. He suddenly vanished. They fancied they heard a splash.

"He's mad!" gurgled McClure.

But he and Church were ever faithful to their burly leader. Without a second's hesitation they followed. They found themselves on the brink of a rocky pit, at the bottom of which lay a pool of water, almost circular in shape,



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with steep, rock sides. Its surface was rippled. They fell over the edge, rather than dived.

No sooner had they gone than Doc Haynes had got control of the situation, and he had had the rest of the schoolboys surrounded. During those first moments the absence of Handforth & Co. was not noticed. The trio had vanished in a flash; the splashes as they struck the water were not heard above the yelling of the blacks. Handforth, the first to dive, was still in mid-air when he realised that he had probably done something foolhardy.

There wasn't one chance in ten that he and his chums would escape—and it was likely enough, on the other hand, that this evil-looking pool contained crocodiles, or some other deadly reptiles. But it was too late now. Handforth struck the water cleanly, as it happened, and he dived straight down, far beneath the surface.

He found himself shooting swiftly through the water, for his dive had carried him far forward, some feet below the surface.

He came up buoyantly, expecting, at every moment, to break surface.

Crash!

His head rammed hard against a solid obstruction immediately overhead. So severe was the shock that Handforth gulped in a big mouthful of water and nearly choked. His lungs now felt as though they would burst. He groped over his head frantically, desperately.

What had happened? He had not come up as one might have supposed he would come up; his head had not broken surface. He was trapped in some unseen crevice of the rocks, on this farther side of the pool.

More desperately than ever he clutched at the rocks, shifting himself forward. He went bodily; and, then, suddenly, like a cork, he rose. His head came out of the water, and he gulped in a long breath of life-giving air. His relief was enormous as he trod water, feeling about him at the same time.

"Great pip!" he gurgled. "I thought it was all up with me!"

He shook the water from his eyes and stared about him blankly—for he wanted to find out what had happened to his chums. But he could see nothing. The darkness was like that of a tomb. Then it came to him—slowly at first—that he was not actually in the pool, as he had supposed. He had come up in a hidden cave, the roof of which, some distance in, rose higher than the water's surface. Thus he was able to breathe.

It was an uncomfortable experience, and many another fellow would have been in a panic. But Handforth kept his head well. He knew that he could not remain here for long—he would have to get out.

Meanwhile, Church and McClure, falling into the water, rather than diving, made a big splash, and hardly went beneath the surface. Their first thought, as they commenced swimming about, was for the enemy above. They expected Haynes and his men—or the blacks—to dive down after them. But nothing happened. There was a great noise going on, but no search was made.

"Where's Handy?" gurgled Church suddenly.

"Eh? I don't know what's happened yet—"

"Mac! Handy isn't here!" panted Church. "He dived in—we saw him! Great Scott! The poor chap must have banged his head against the rock, or something! He's gone under!"

McClure looked about him wildly. He was just beginning to realise things. The moonlight was shining fully upon the pool, and all round, towering above the two swimmers, were barren rocks. The rocks rose sheer from its edge, and if Handforth had been on the surface, he would have been seen at once. But he was not there. No ripple or disturbance came from any part of the water.

Again and again Church and McClure dived, feeling

about them, groping, hoping to catch Handforth's clothing. But in the end they rose to the surface, nearly exhausted, compelled to admit that their search was in vain. In any case, it was too late now. Handforth had been under so long that there was no possible chance that he could still be alive.

Minutes had elapsed—tense, agonising minutes. From above came the raucous voice of Doc Haynes, now shouting his orders. And still there was no sign of a search being made. Church and McClure knew that they had not yet been missed. But Haynes or his men had only to look over the edge of the pool and the boys would be seen.

"What does it matter, anyway?" muttered Church dully. "We'd better shout, hadn't we, Mac? Perhaps these niggers can dive more deeply."

"No good now," said McClure. "Handforth's been under all this time, and he can't be alive. Oh, my goodness! His usual luck has deserted him. He is dead!"

"We'll be dead before long, too," said the other junior. "We can't keep on swimming like this for ever, and there's nothing to hold on to. We can't climb up these sheer rocks. We'd better shout to the others."

"You silly asses!" came a hissing voice. "If you shout you'll ruin everything!"

Church and McClure swirled round, their jaws gaping, their eyes flooded with sudden relief and joy.

"Handy!" they gasped, in one voice.

"Who did you think it was—Mickey Mouse?" retorted Handforth. "You haven't been spotted yet, then? Good! There's a chance for us!"

"But how—I mean, why—you're alive!" said Church blankly.

"It takes more than a silly pool to kill me," said Handforth. "Come on—follow me! Dive just as I do, and then feel your way forward. I'll help."

Without another word he turned and dived cleanly, apparently intent upon banging his head against the rock wall of the pool under the surface. But his chums followed without hesitation.

Handforth had discovered that the space between the outer water and the hidden cave was only a matter of a few feet. Now that he made the return journey it was easy enough. He had marked the spot exactly. He dived under, felt his way forward, and in a few moments he was above the surface again, now in total darkness, in that tiny inner cavern. A moment later Church came groping through the water, and Handy grabbed him and pulled him up. Then came McClure.

"Pouf! Where are we?" splattered Church. "It's as black as your hat in here! What's happened?"

"Nothing much. There's a sort of hidden cave here, that's all," replied Handforth. "Easy, you chaps! Give me your left hand, Churchey. I'll show you where you can grab hold of the rocks and support yourself. You, too, Mac. Don't you see what this means? Even if they search the pool now, they won't find us. They won't even know that we dived into it."

"My goodness!" said McClure breathlessly.

"Handy, old man, we thought you were dead!" muttered Church, his voice husky with emotion. "You rotter! Giving us a fright like that! We dived and dived until we gave up hope."

"Sorry if I gave you a scare, you chaps," said Handforth coolly. "But, as a matter of fact, I didn't know how the dickens to get out of the place first. But it's all right now. With any luck we can give Haynes the slip. Then we can go to the rescue of the other chaps."

"My only sainted aunt!" muttered Church. "What an optimist you are, Handy! Have you realised where we are? We can't stay in this giddy place long, and the only way out is through the pool. We can't even get out of the pool without help, and where can help come from except Haynes and his men?"

"I don't see why you should make difficulties before they arise," retorted Handforth, not to be put out.

While talking, he was feeling about him with his hands—as far above his head as he could reach. And suddenly he uttered an ejaculation of satisfaction.

"Can you chaps give me a hoist up?" he asked. "There's a ledge up here which feels a bit wider, and I don't know how high the roof is. If only we can pull ourselves up! That's it!—Just a bit farther! Good!"

He had clutched at a firm hold, and now he pulled himself well clear of the water, getting his foot against a niche. To his astonishment and joy he found, above there in the darkness, a rock ledge which was quite dry, and fully eighteen inches in depth. He felt to his left and right, and the ledge extended for some distance. Never in his life, however, had he known such utter and absolute darkness.

"I say, you chaps, this is ripping!" he exclaimed excitedly. "I'm right out of the water, and the air is as

pure as anything. I fancy I can feel a bit of a draught, too, which means that there might be another outlet somewhere. Come on, one of you reach his hand up, and I'll pull."

Three minutes later Church and McClure were sitting on that ledge beside their leader.

"Let 'em search now!" grinned Handforth. "They'll never find us here. It's a safe retreat for us, you chaps. Nipper and the others may be in the hands of the enemy, but we're free." His eyes glowed unseen in the darkness. "We're free. Do you understand? That means that we can do things."

But even Edward Oswald Handforth, optimist as he was, did not realise that he had hit upon one of the most important secrets of Tao-Tao Island.

(Don't miss the further exciting events in this grand serial. Order your copy early.)

THE FAG'S SECRET!

(Continued from page 22.)

Form-room grate. The fellow who did that, did it to get Joe into trouble."

"Yes; and—pretended that he saw Joe near the Form-room at the time, too," said Tom Merry quietly. "We now know that Joe couldn't have been there, as he was out of the school dealing with that scoundrel."

"You mean Mellish never saw him?"

"He couldn't have. And he had only one motive possible for lying—he was the chap who mucked up the detention papers," said Tom Merry. "It's clear enough now. The cad did it out of spite, and to bring Joe into trouble."

"I'm going to ask Mellish about it," said Blake quietly. "You'll explain to Kildare, Tom Merry."

Quite a number of juniors went with Blake to ask Mellish about it. The cad of the Fourth started to fence at first; but he lost courage, and stammered out the truth. It was, indeed, of little use for him to do otherwise now. He had not counted upon Joe's being able to prove an alibi, after all. And when Blake & Co. had done with Mellish, the cad of St. Jim's had had a stern lesson to impress upon his mind the fact that the way of the transgressor is hard.

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Printed and published every Wednesday by the Proprietors, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Advertisement office: The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Registered for transmission by Canadian Magazine Post. Subscription rates: Inland and Abroad, 12s. per annum, 5s. 6d. for six months. Sole Agents for Australia and New Zealand: Messrs. Gordon & Gilch, Ltd., and for South Africa: Central News Agency, Ltd. Saturday, February 17th, 1934.

As the crowd of juniors in the quad broke up, Wally slipped his arm through Joe's. The wail of St. Jim's gave him a peculiar look.

"It's all serene now," said Wally coolly. "Of course, you ought to have explained to me from the first; and you jolly well deserve another licking, but I'm going to let you off. Look here! I'll let bygones be bygones, and we'll go on the same as before."

Joe could not help grinning. As Wally had not been the injured party, it was not clear what he had to let Joe off for; but Joe was not disposed to be critical.

"You—you know about my father now, Master Wally."

"Oh, blow your governor!" said Wally. "After all, my governor is a bit of a trouble at times, so is my major—we all have our troubles. Never mind your governor, so long as he doesn't come burbling in the Third Form dorm. Let's get to the tuckshop. Come on, Gussy, old son! You deserve a ginger-pop for standing up for Joe."

"I'm vewy pleased to see you good friends again—"

"Yes, come on; don't jaw!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Here we are! Three ginger, Mrs. Taggles!"

And the ginger-pops were consumed with great cordiality by Wally and Joe, and Joe's champion.

THE END.

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