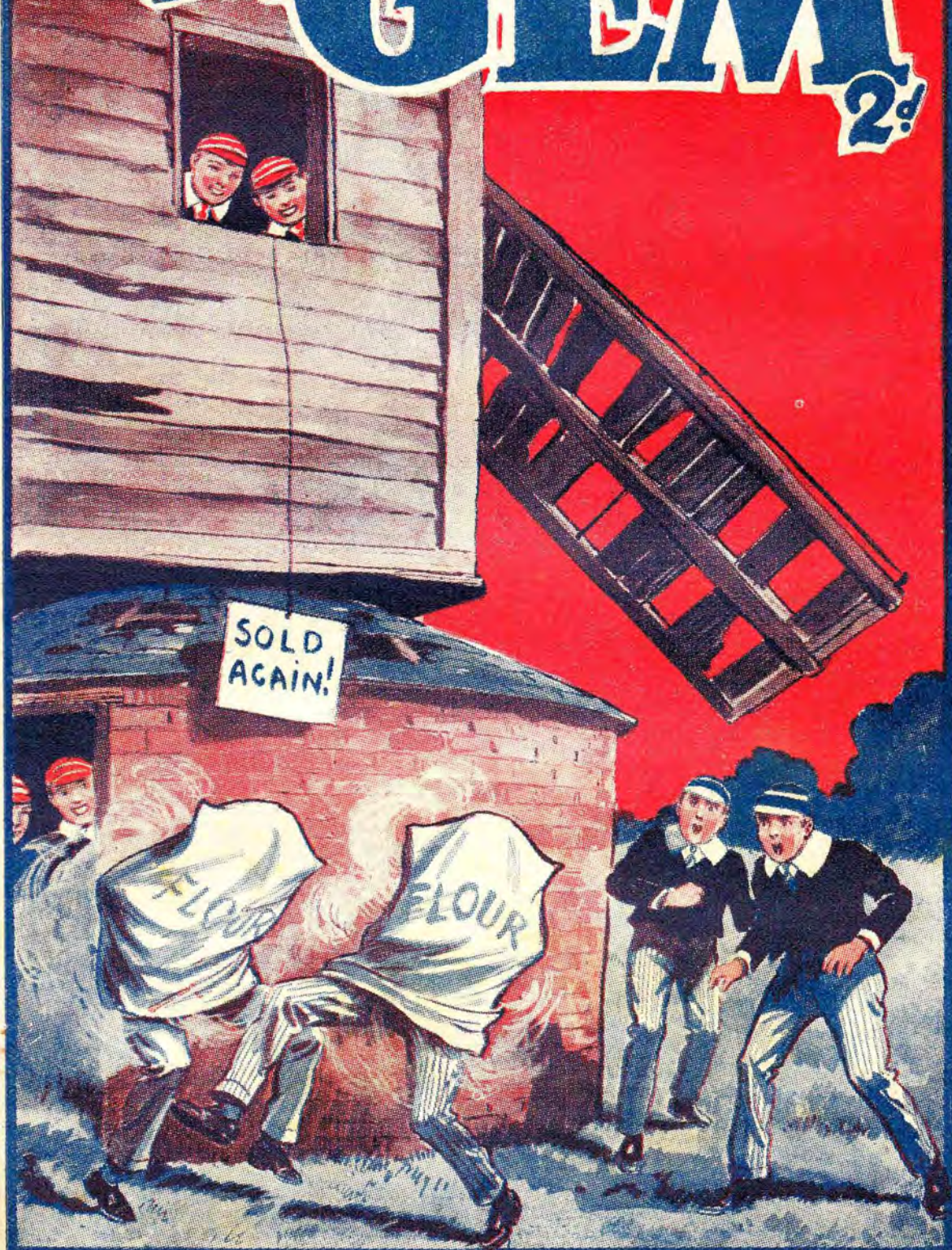


"THE MYSTERY OF THE MILL!" —GREAT YARN OF THE CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S— INSIDE!

The GEM

2d



2
FUN, FROLIC, MYSTERY AND ADVENTURE ARE THE STAR—

The MYSTERY of



"Who's afraid of a big white ghost?" sings Arthur Augustus D'Arcy when he takes shelter from the rain in a haunted windmill. But Gussy promptly changes his tune when the ghost starts to walk!

CHAPTER 1. Horrid for Gussy

"HOWWID!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, made that remark with a great deal of emphasis.

It was not often that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was annoyed—or, at all events, showed his annoyance—only, indeed, upon exceptional occasions.

This occasion was one of the exceptions.

D'Arcy was dressed to kill, as his chums in the Lower School would have said—he was clad in his very best. And if there was anything that exceeded the daintiness of his boots and the elegant crease of his trousers, it was the glossiness of his silk hat, or else the glimmer of his eyeglass.

And Arthur Augustus, thus clad in shining raiment, found himself in the middle of Mill Lane, near Rylcombe village, on his return to St. Jim's from the vicarage, and yet half a mile from the school, and it began to rain.

The afternoon had been exceptionally fine, and D'Arcy, who never did like carrying an umbrella, had none with him now. There was no shelter at hand, either—only the old deserted mill looming in the growing dusk of evening over the trees. And the rain began to fall.

Whereupon D'Arcy pronounced that it was horrid—and he was right.

The swell of St. Jim's stopped in the lane and looked about him. Shelter, save for a few meagre-looking trees near the mill, there was none. He looked up at the lowering heavens, round at the empty fields, and over towards the distant tower of St. Jim's, and said emphatically:

"Howwid! Disgustin'!"

Ting-ting-ting!

It was the sharp ringing of a bicycle bell in the lane

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behind him. The lane was narrow, and the road was not marked off from the footpath. At the sudden ring behind him, Arthur Augustus jumped, and squeezed up close to the towering hedge.

"Hallo!" cried a familiar voice.

D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye—it had been displaced by his jump—and looked at the cyclist, who had halted. He was a sunny-faced, curly-haired lad, very little older than himself—no other, in fact, than Tom Merry, the leader of the Shell Form and the School House at St. Jim's.

"Bai Jove! Tom Mewwy!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Gussy!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing here? And it's beginning to rain! How did Blake come to let you out?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"I always advised him to keep you on a chain," Tom Merry pursued gravely. "Suppose you were to meet the Grammarians—I saw Frank Monk and Gordon Gay not an hour ago."

"My deah fellow—"

"Suppose they laid sacrilegious hands upon that beautiful topper—"

"I wegard that wemark as mere wot, Tom Mewwy. I am in a wathah distwessed state of mind at pwsent. It is beginnin' to wain, and I have no umbwella!"

"Horrid!"

"That's just what I was wemarkin', deah boy. It's howwid. I have my best toppah on, too—and this is the first time I've worn this waistcoat. Was there evah such an unfortunate state of things?"

"Never," said Tom Merry. "There have been some great misfortunes in history, but they're not in the same street with us."

"I wish you would be sewious, Tom Mewwy. The question is, what is to be done? How am I to get to St. Jim's without gettin' wet?"

—FEATURES OF THIS GRAND YARN OF TOM MERRY & CO.

the MILL!

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD

Tom Merry shook his head.
"I give that one up, Gussy."
"You uttah ass! I am not askin' conundwums," said D'Arcy peevishly. "I shall get my clothes wuined."
"Jump up behind me," said Tom Merry. "You can put your tootsies on the footrests and hold on to my shoulders and we'll be at St. Jim's in five minutes."
"Imposs, deah boy. I am not dwessed for cyclin'," said D'Arcy, with dignity. "I should look widiculous stickin' on your bike behind you. Besides, it is wainin' now, and in five minutes I shall be quite wet."

"Horrid!" said Tom Merry.
"Look here, suppose I wun acwoss to the mill——"
"Good! Cut for it!"
"But it may wain for hours——"
"Looks like setting in for the night," agreed Tom Merry, with a glance at the threatening sky.

"I can't wemain in the mill all night. Pway tell Blake to come for me with a macintosh and an umbwellah."

Tom Merry grinned.
"I'll tell him, certainly."
"Pway tell him also to bwing my leathah hat-box and a cap for me to weah goin' home. Then I shall be able to save my toppah."

"Happy thought."
"Tell him to bwing my goloshes also."
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see nothin' whatevah to cackle at, Tom Mewwy."
"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "I think I can see Blake tramping through the rain with an umbrella, a hat-box, and goloshes and a macintosh. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"
"But Blake won't come."
"Pway tell him that I wely on him as a fwiend."

"But——"
"I cannot stand here in the wain talkin', Tom Mewwy. My toppah is quite wet already. I'm goin' to cut for the mill."

"Hold on, Gussy. You know the mill's haunted, I suppose?"
"Wats!"

"Everybody says so, and that's why it's deserted," said Tom Merry, with a face of solemn seriousness.

"Wot! It's deserted because it's in Chancewy, and it's fallen out of wepair," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"But the ghosts——"
"I don't believe in ghosts."
"You will when it's quite dark, though," said Tom Merry.

"Wats!"
"Better jump on my bike."
"I decline to do so."

"Oh, all right. No good my stopping here and getting wet, either. So-long!"

"Pway don't forget my message to Blake."
"Ha, ha, ha! All right."

Tom Merry put a leg over his bicycle and pedalled off at a rapid pace.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned from the lane and began to run across the field towards the deserted mill. The rain was steadily falling now, and there was every promise of a good downpour as the darkness thickened.

Tom Merry put his head down over his handlebars, and scorching on for all he was worth and sped up to St. Jim's at top speed.

CHAPTER 2.

The Haunted Mill!

"**B**AI JOVE! Howwid! Weally, vewy howwid!"
The rain had been falling in light drops, but as D'Arcy crossed the field at a run towards the windmill, it thickened.

Heavy drops came splashing upon the silk hat and elegant jacket of the swell of St. Jim's, and he quickened his pace.

He reached the windmill with the rain lashing round him. The lower door was open, and D'Arcy ran in, and a damp, cold atmosphere struck him, and he found himself in deep gloom.

The window was encrusted with cobwebs, where it was not broken, and the apartment was very gloomy and shadowy.

The mill was hardly ever used, and there was a story of

its being haunted, which made people willing to avoid it after dark. D'Arcy was not thinking of that now. He was only thinking of getting shelter from the rain.

It splashed on the stone pavement before the door, and dashed in in little showers at the broken window.

"Bai Jove! I'm well out of that!" murmured D'Arcy. "I have had a feahfully nawwow escape of wuinin' my best toppah, bai Jove! I was wathah weckless to go to the vicah's without an umbwellah, bai Jove! This is a wotten climate—you can nevah go out of doors without weally some wisk to your toppah!"

Arthur Augustus looked round his new retreat. How long it would be before Blake arrived with the umbrella, the macintosh, the goloshes, and a hat-box, he did not know, but it was certain to be some little time.

D'Arcy looked round for a seat. He found a wooden bench and sat down. It was cold in the mill and gloomy.

"Bai Jove, I wish I had a light and a book!" murmured D'Arcy. "A book would be a great comfort."

He started and listened. From the interior of the mill had come a faint sound, exactly what he could not define. He looked into the gloom about him.

Tom Merry's words came back to his mind. "Bai Jove! They say the place is haunted."

D'Arcy was not superstitious. He was too healthy-minded for that. But a fellow who laughs at ghost stories is liable to feel a little tremulous in a lonely place after dark, on a spot reputed to be haunted.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "I wondah what that was? Ah, there it is again!"

It was a rumbling sound above his head. The swell of St. Jim's shivered a little.

He recalled the story of the haunted mill, as he had heard it during his first term at St. Jim's. The miller had been murdered, and his body dragged from the upper chamber, where the fell deed had been done, and buried on the moor. According to the country folk, after dark it was still possible to hear the sound of heavy dragging in the upper chamber of the mill.

"Gweat Scott!" murmured D'Arcy. He listened intently.

Dragging, dragging!
There was undoubtedly someone in the mill besides himself, and a heavy weight was being dragged over the floor above his head.

D'Arcy stepped towards the wooden stair that led to the upper chamber. The swell of St. Jim's had plenty of pluck.

"Who's there?" he called out.

There was no reply.

The dragging sound ceased, and all was silent in the mill, save for the lashing of the wind and rain without.

A creepy feeling came over D'Arcy. He stood there in the thickening gloom, looking upwards uneasily. If there was someone in the upper chamber, why did he not reply?

"Look here! I know you're there!" called out Arthur Augustus. "You can't fwihten me in the least, you wottah. Why don't you show yourself?"

There came a reply to this. It was a deep groan. The sound echoed through the mill, and caused a shudder to run through the veins of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated involuntarily. He stepped back towards the door of the mill.

There, at least, it was not quite so dark, and there D'Arcy stood, unconscious for the moment of the fact that the rain was beating upon him.

He felt very much shaken. The sound of dragging on the planks above recommenced. D'Arcy recovered his nerve in a very few moments. His face set grimly.

"Bai Jove! It's some wottah playin' a joke!" he murmured. "Pewpaws somebody who's come in here out of the wain, just as I have."

He stepped back towards the narrow, wooden stair. The dragging above continued.

"You wottah!" called out D'Arcy. "I know you're there!"
Groan!

D'Arcy set his lips, and placed his silk hat on the bench, took a silver match-box from his pocket, and began to ascend the stairs.

The sound above ceased.

D'Arcy went on intrepidly to the top steps, and then he paused and struck a match.

The light flickered feebly out into the thick gloom.

Wavering shadows danced round the junior.

The place was enough to shake the nerve of anyone, and Arthur Augustus wished for the moment that he had not ascended the ladder. But he would not retreat now. He held the match up to show a light round him.

It suddenly went out.

D'Arcy had not seen anyone, but he was sure that the match was blown out by a puff of breath.

"You wottah!" he shouted. "You uttah wottah!"

Groan!

Scratch!

Another match flared up.

It was instantly extinguished.

Breathing wrath, Arthur Augustus stepped into the upper room, and struck a third match.

He watched carefully for anyone to attempt to blow it out.

Groan!

The sound was close behind him, and he jumped and turned round. As he did so the match was extinguished.

Groan!

It was too much for D'Arcy's nerves. The horrid feeling that he was in the dark, with unknown dangers round him, took possession of him. He made a dive for the ladder, and went slithering down a deal faster than he had come up.

He landed on the ground very much fluttered.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured, feeling for his matches. But he had dropped the box in his hurried descent, and it was useless for him to seek them in the darkness.

He made towards the open doorway.

Groan!

To D'Arcy's horror, the sound was now on the ground floor, and close to him. There was a sound of heavy dragging, too, and it was approaching him.

D'Arcy whirled round, and, as the deep and resounding groan was repeated, darted out of the mill.

The rain lashed down upon him.

But the swell of St. Jim's did not heed that now. In a couple of minutes he was soaked, and then he paused. But it was no worse to go on than to go back now, and he glanced back at the mill with a shudder, and tramped on through the rain towards St. Jim's.

"Bai Jove," he murmured. "I won't go to that howlid place again! I shall meet Blake on the road, so that will be all right. It was—was somebody playin' a twick, of course, but—upon the whole I won't take the twouble to go there again."

And he didn't.

CHAPTER 3.

Toast for Three!

"KETTLE'S boiling!" said Jack Blake.

Study No 6 in the Fourth Form passage in the School House at St. Jim's was looking very cosy.

Outside, the rain was dashing against the window, and it was very gloomy in the quadrangle, and the elm-trees were groaning in the wind. But the blind was drawn, and a cheerful fire burned in the grate, and the table was laid for tea. There was an unusual supply of provisions on the table, and a pile of buttered toast was rising higher and higher on a dish at the fender. Digby, with a face of crimson, was making the toast, and Herries, with shiny fingers, was buttering it—not with his fingers, of course, but in the process of buttering a considerable amount was transferred to his digits, and glistened there in the light.

The kettle had been singing on the hob for some time. Now Jack Blake announced that it was boiling, and he poured a little water from it into the teapot, to heat that utensil ready for making the tea.

"Toast's ready!" said Herries.

"I think I've made enough," said Digby. "I was going to make it till Gussy came, but I think I'd better stop now."

"Gussy doesn't seem to be coming."

"Where the dickens can he have got to?" exclaimed Blake.

"The young boulder! He was to have been home long ago."

"Oh, it's the vicarage tea-party that's keeping him, of course," said Digby. "I told him not to go."

"But it's been raining for some time now, and if Gussy isn't in, he'll come in jolly wet," said Blake.

There was a bang at the door of Study No. 6, so sudden that it made Blake almost drop the teapot, and he growled.

"There's Gussy!"

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The study door opened, and a cheerful face, spotted with rain, looked in.

"Hallo, Tom Merry!" grunted Blake. "I thought it was Gussy. Has that young duffer come in yet, do you know?"

"No, he hasn't."

"The ass! He'll get wet."

"He's rather damp already, I think," grinned Tom Merry. "He's gone into the old mill to take shelter from the rain. I passed him in Mill Lane."

Blake grunted.

"The ass! Why, the rain will last hours, most likely. He won't be able to get through it in time for calling-over."

"You're to go to him—"

"What?"

"And take an umbrella—"

"Eh?"

"And a macintosh—"

"Oh!"

"And goloshes—"

"Eh?"

"And a hat-box."

"A what?"

"A hat-box," said Tom Merry serenely, "and a cap. Gussy is going to wear the cap home, and put his topper in the hat-box."

"Look here, Tom Merry, if you want to be funny, you can spring it on Manners and Lowther," said Blake crossly.

"They're bound to stand it. But—"

"I'm not joking," said Tom Merry, laughing. "That's Gussy's message, and I said I would give it to you. I expressed my doubts at the time about its being any good."

"The ass!"

"That's what I said. Well, I must go and get my things off," said Tom Merry. "I'm pretty wet."

"Hold on a minute!" said Blake anxiously. "Gussy's really in the old mill?"

"Yes. I warned him that it was haunted, and it didn't make a bit of difference. I couldn't do more."

Blake looked round at the cosy study, and at the singing kettle, and the pile of buttered toast, and sighed.

It was a wrench. But Jack Blake was a true chum, and he would have taken any amount of trouble for Gussy, or Herries or Digby, for that matter.

"I suppose I must go," he said.

"Don't forget the hat-box."

"Oh, rats! I shan't take the hat-box, as a lesson to Gussy. If his topper isn't ruined by the rain, I shall make it a point to tread on it," said Blake crossly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm going, you chaps," said Blake. "You'd better wire in—"

"Oh, stuff!" said Digby, not without a longing glance at the toast, too. "I'm coming with you."

Herries looked at the fire, and grunted.

"So am I," he said.

"Oh, rot!" said Blake. "No need for all three to go!"

"We're coming!"

"Better take them, Blake," advised Tom Merry. "You see, Dig can take the umbrella, and Herries can negotiate the macintosh, while you're carrying the hat-box."

"Oh, chuck it! Why didn't you yank Gussy home with you?" demanded Blake. "Put the toast by the fire to keep warm, Dig. Look here, Tom Merry, none of your raiding while we're out, you know."

Tom Merry laughed.

"We won't come into the study—honour bright," he said.

"All right, then."

Tom Merry went on his way, to take off his wet things, and Blake and Digby and Herries prepared to go out to the rescue of the weatherbound Gussy. They were not pleased with their errand, but they set about it as cheerfully as they could.

They wrapped themselves up in macintoshes, pulled their caps about their ears, turned their trousers up, and provided with umbrellas, and one extra for Arthur Augustus, they left the School House.

It was raining hard.

"Ugh!" grunted Blake. "Ugh! Rotten weather!"

The three juniors tramped through the rain to the gates. Three youths were chatting to Taggles, the porter, in the doorway of his lodge, and they watched the School House fellows go.

Blake did not notice Figgins & Co.; he was thinking about the rain, and mentally rehearsing some things he was going to say to D'Arcy when they met.

Figgins grinned at Kerr and Wynn.

"What on earth are those kids going out for in this weather?" he remarked.



Taking up the pat of butter, Blake approached the sleeping Gussy, and held it out ready to dab on that junior's face. "Case of sleeping beauty being awakened—but not with a giddy kiss!" grinned Blake. "Now, look out for the fireworks!"

"Master D'Arcy hasn't come in yet," remarked Taggles. "They may be going to look for him."

"My word!" said Fatty Wynn. "Why, only twenty minutes ago Blake was in the tuckshop, laying in grub for tea! They can't have had tea yet."

Figgins chuckled softly.

"Let's go and see," he remarked. "Lend us an umbrella, Taggles. We looked in to see if you were quite well."

"You looked in to borrow an umbrella, Master Figgins—"

"Well, hand it out, then!"

Taggles grunted, and handed out the umbrella. Figgins & Co. had taken refuge in his lodge when the rain came on, and had been toasting their toes at his fire, and chipping the old porter ever since.

Figgins took the big umbrella Taggles handed him, and the three chums of the New House crossed the quad.

They did not go to their own House, but to the School House, and, as he expected, Figgins did not find the School House fellows hanging about. On that cold and rainy evening most of them were in the Common-room, or in their cosy studies.

Figgins led the way quickly upstairs.

He looked into Study No. 6. The light was extinguished, but the fire gave a ruddy light over the study and the tea-table.

Figgins gave a soft whistle.

"My hat! Toast for three, and no mistake! Come in—quick, before the bouncers see us! This is gorgeous luck!"

Figgins & Co. stepped quickly into the study, and Figgys closed the door. Kerr stirred the fire, and a bright light flashed out over the room. They did not trouble to switch on the light.

"This is all right," said Figgins. "Blake's gone to look for Gussy. Good! It would be a shame to let the toast spoil by drying up near the fire. It's a duty we really owe to the chap who made it to do it full justice."

"What-ho!" said Fatty Wynn, eyeing the toast lovingly.

"Then wire in, my sons!"

Figgins made the tea. The teapot was ready, the kettle singing. By the cheery light of the bright fire Figgins & Co. sat down to tea—Blake's tea—and they enjoyed it exceedingly.

Digby had not made that mountain of toast in vain!

CHAPTER 4.

Gone!

"G ROOOUGH!"

"What's the matter?"

"Rain, ass!"

"Oh!"

"I've just got a gust of it in my chivvy, and it's running down my neck," said Blake. "Groogh! Hang Gussy!"

"He always was a trouble in the family!" grunted Herries. "I hope his silk topper's spoiled."

"So do I," said Digby.

"If it isn't, I shall jolly well spoil it!" said Blake. "I'm not coming out in this weather for nothing!"

"No fear!"

"Keep your umbrella out of my neck, Dig!"

"Oh, rats!"

"Look here—"

"Buck up, and don't jaw, old chap!"

"I'll jolly well—"

"Piffle!"

By which it will be seen that the good humour which had reigned in Study No. 6 in the School House at St. Jim's had not accompanied the juniors very far on the road.

The feet of the juniors ploughed through thick mud. The lane was never in the best of condition, but in rainy weather it was a slough of despond, which might have excused even the famous Pilgrim for halting in his progress.

No wonder the juniors growled.

Friendship had called them out into the rainy gloom, but it did not prevent them from grumbling heartily.

Blake stopped suddenly.

"Hark!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, come on!" said Digby. "This isn't a place to stand and jaw, old chap!"

"Hark, you ass! I can hear footsteps!"

"Stuff!"

"Listen, fathead!"

The juniors stopped and listened. There was no doubt about the footsteps. They came splashing and ploughing through the mud.

"Look out!" said Blake. "It's somebody running."

"Oh, it must be Gussy!"

"I suppose so."

"Sounds like more than one," said Herries.

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"Well, we— Oh!"

"Yah! Oh!"

A bunch of running figures suddenly bolted out of the gloom, and ran fairly into the three halted juniors.

The School House chums went flying.

There was a howl from Blake as he sat in a deep, deep puddle, sending up a shower of muddy water round him. Digby roared as he squelched in deep mud, and Herries staggered against a tree with a gasp.

The runners who had collided with them did not escape scot-free.

Two of them rolled in the muddy lane, and three more stopped, staggering, and gasping. There were five of them in all.

"Oh!" exclaimed a voice. "Yah! Who's that?"

"What ass was blocking up the way?" demanded another voice.

Blake uttered an exclamation.

"Grammar School rotters!"

"Blake!"

"Gordon Gay!"

"Yes, rather!" Gordon Gay, the leader of the juniors of the Grammar School, the old rival of St. Jim's, chuckled as he staggered up from the mud. "So it's you St. Jim's bouncers! What do you mean by racing along a dark lane?"

"We weren't, you ass! We were standing still."

"Then, what do you mean by standing still?" demanded Gordon Gay.

"Yes, that's it," said Frank Monk. "What do you mean by it, you duffers?"

Blake grunted.

"Oh, go and eat coke! You frabjous asses, to bolt along like that! Nice state our maces will be in!"

"And ours," said Carboy, of the Grammar School. "We were trying to get in out of the rain. We've been under shelter for a long time, but the blessed rain doesn't seem to be going to leave off to-night, and we made a bolt for it."

"Well, you'd better get on, you Grammarian asses!" said Blake. "If I weren't so wet I'd give you a licking for rushing about like that! Scat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?"

"I was thinking that we are not too wet to give you a licking," said Gordon Gay, laughing. "Come on, chaps!"

"Here, hold on!"

"Bump them!"

"Hurrah!"

The Grammarians came on at once. Blake, Herries, and Digby hit out manfully, but in a moment or two they were lying in the puddles, and the Grammarians were speeding on their way, laughing.

Blake sat up.

"Ow! Yow! It's c-cold!"

"Did you expect to find rain puddles warm?" growled Herries.

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"I think you're an ass for getting up a row with the Grammar cads when they were five to three!"

"Rats! They'd have bumped us, anyway!"

"It's all Gussy's fault," said Digby. "We'll give him a jolly good bumping when we find him!"

"Yes; that's one comfort!"

And the chums of the Fourth, very wet and muddy, started on towards the old mill again. They had been near it when they met the Grammarian juniors, and they had not much farther to go.

They turned off across the field, and the dark mass of the mill loomed up before them in the shadowy sky.

"There's the mill!" said Blake.

"Buck up!"

They hurried through the rain.

Glad enough were they to get into the dark, damp opening of the mill, out of the lashing rain and wind. The mill was not inviting, but it was better than nothing.

Blake gasped, and shook the rain drops from him.

"Groogh! This is better! Groogh! Yah!"

"Yes. You sound pleased."

"Rats! Now where's Gussy? Gussy!"

The hollow chambers of the old mill echoed back "Gussy!" But there came no other reply to Blake's calling.

"Gussy! Gussy!"

The three juniors shouted together.

But there was no reply.

"My word!" said Digby. "He's not here!"

"He can't be. But Tom Merry said—"

"I suppose Tom Merry couldn't have been rotting?" said Digby dubiously.

Blake shook his head decidedly.

"He wouldn't tell a lie for a joke," he said. "It's all

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right as far as Tom Merry is concerned. Gussy's gone without waiting for us."

"The horrid bouncer!"

"I can't understand it. It's not like him. Let's have a good look round," said Blake abruptly. "Something may have happened to him."

"I wish we had an electric torch. Got any matches?"

"Yes; a box of vestas."

Blake struck match after match, and they searched the lower part of the building. Digby uttered a sudden exclamation as something glimmering upon the floor caught his eye.

He picked it up. It was D'Arcy's silver match-box, with his monogram on it.

"That's Gussy's," said Blake, looking at it. "It shows he's been here."

"Oh, he's been here, right enough! But where is he now?"

"Let's look upstairs."

They ascended the wooden stairs.

"The young bouncer!" said Blake wrathfully. "He got tired of waiting for us, I suppose, and chanced it."

"It was rotten."

"But he ought to have passed us going to the school," said Herries.

"Perhaps he did. We might have passed a dozen people without seeing them in the dark, or hearing them in the beastly, howling wind," said Blake. "We only saw the Grammarians because there were a lot of them, and they ran into us. I shouldn't wonder if Gussy was at the school by the time we got here."

"The—the—"

"Or," said Blake, in a lower voice, "something may have happened to him."

"I hope not, but—"

"Let's get back to the school."

The chums of the Fourth left the mill hurriedly. All of them had a fear that something might have happened to D'Arcy. On the other hand, if nothing had happened to him, and he had let them in for this through sheer carelessness, they were prepared to be extremely wrathful.

CHAPTER 5.

"Butter" Joke!

KANGAROO—Harry Noble of the Shell—was looking out into the rainy quadrangle of St. Jim's when Blake & Co. arrived. The Cornstalk junior gave a whistle at the sight of them—three muddy and forlorn and dragged figures.

"My only hat!" said Noble. "Where have you been—dredging?"

"Oh, don't rot!" grunted Blake. "We've been out!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Out of your minds, I should say!" grinned Kangaroo.

"We've been looking for Gussy. Has he come in?"

"I haven't seen him."

The three juniors went into the House, and squelched up the stairs. The Cornstalk grinned after them, and so did a good many other fellows.

The chums of the Fourth, however, walked on, removing their wet caps and macintoshes to lessen their discomfort.

They had to go up to the dormitory to change, for their trousers were well soaked. But they looked into Study No. 6 in passing. A light streamed from under the door, so they knew that the study was occupied.

Blake opened the door and looked in.

A fire glowed in the grate, and before it, in the armchair, was extended the elegant form of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

He was alone in the study.

The swell of St. Jim's was clad in a dressing-gown of flowery design, the ample folds of which were gathered round him as he reclined in the chair. His eyes were closed, and he was asleep.

Blake looked round the table.

The mountain of toast was gone, and the tea had evidently been made and disposed of. The rest of the provisions were conspicuous by their absence.

The three chums looked at one another.

Of Figgins & Co.'s raid upon the study they, of course, knew nothing. The sight of D'Arcy placidly asleep in the armchair, anyway, was enough to raise their ire after their long tramp through the rain and mud in search of him.

"My only hat!" murmured Blake. "This looks like taking it easy, doesn't it?"

"The bouncer!"

"Fast asleep!"

"And he's bolted all the grub!"

"He's had a party in here to tea with him, I should think," said Blake. "He couldn't have bolted all that grub alone—and there are three teacups, too!"

The chums simply glowered at the unconscious swell of St. Jim's.

The thought of D'Arcy having friends in to tea in the

study, and then going placidly to sleep, while they were braving wind and rain in search of him, was the last straw.

"Shall I wake him up before we start to slaughter him?" asked Herries.

"Hold on! He's left nothing but a pat of butter on the table, and he may as well have that," said Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Quiet! He'll wake!"

"Oh, he's sound asleep!"

That certainly was the case. D'Arcy was tired out with his walking and with the exertion of rubbing himself dry and exchanging his clothes when he came in. His breathing was deep and regular.

Blake took up the butter pat and approached the sleeping junior.

"Case of sleeping beauty being awakened—not with a giddy kiss, though!" grinned Blake. "Now, look out for the fireworks!"

"Let's get out of the study as soon as you dab him," grinned Digby. "He won't know where it came from."

"Good egg!"

Digby and Herries retreated to the open door. Blake leaned over D'Arcy, and suddenly dabbed the butter full upon his face.

The swell of St. Jim's awoke.

"Gwoogh! O-o-o-oh!"

Blake stepped quickly out of the study after his chums. The three, bursting with suppressed laughter, hurried up the stairs to the Fourth Form dormitory, and there, as they changed their drenched trousers, they yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In Study No. 6 the sleeping beauty started to his feet, and dabbed at his face with his hands, and gasped with horror again as his fingers were thick with butter.

"Ow!" groaned D'Arcy. "What is this? I am in a howwid state! Bai Jove, it is buttah! I uttally fail to compwehend this!"

He rubbed the masses of butter from his eyes, and blinked round the study. The door was open, and the swell of St. Jim's realised that someone must have slipped in and dabbed the butter on his face while he was asleep.

D'Arcy crimsoned with indignation—under the butter.

"The uttah wottahs!" he exclaimed. "The howwid boundahs! I wondah who it was? It is very singulah that I did not see the perpetwatah of this feahful outwage! But, of course, it was some of those Shell boundahs!"

And Arthur Augustus, mopping his face with his handkerchief, hurriedly left the study, and dashed off towards Tom Merry's quarters.

The swell of St. Jim's burst into the study without the formality of knocking.

D'Arcy was usually very careful in his attire, and it was but seldom that he failed to appear in an extremely neat and spick-and-span condition. To see him navigating the junior passages in a sweeping dressing-gown, and with his face covered with butter, was a novelty.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry.

"You uttah wottahs!"

"What!"

"You wascals!"

"Eh?"

"You feahful boundahs!"

"Oh?"

"I weward you with uttah despision—I mean, contempt! I despise you feahfully!" said D'Arcy, trying to jam his monocle into his eye, but failing, for the rim would persist in slipping out on the butter.

The Terrible Three exchanged glances.

"Poor old chap!" said Monty Lowther quite sympathetically. "It must be the rain—the wicked, wet rain—that's done it. Softening of the brain, of course—fatty degeneration of the head!"

"Weally, Lowthab—"

"I don't like the style of decoration," said Tom Merry, shaking his head. "What do you call it, Gussy—florid Byzantine, or what?"

"Tom Mewwy—"

"But the gown is a treat," said Manners. "I like Gussy in a dressing-gown. The colour scheme is splendid, and I—"

"You uttah ass—"

"But wherefore this thussness?" asked Lowther. "Why does the great Gussy descend upon his humble admirers thus gorgeously attired, with butter-pale complexion?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I weward you as a set of howwid wuffians, and I have come here to thwash you!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly.

"Eh?"

"Put up your hands, Tom Mewwy!"

"Where?"

"I mean, I'm goin' to begin with you! Put up your hands!"

And D'Arcy rushed at the hero of the Shell.

Unfortunately he had calculated without the dressing-gown. The long folds of it caught in his feet, and he rolled over without a chance of saving himself. He reached Tom Merry in a horizontal attitude and reclined at his feet. Tom Merry looked down at him in surprise.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Do that again!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"It's all right, you fellows; Gussy has learned some new acrobatic tricks, and he has come to show them to us."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy sat up, rather dazed and bewildered. One leg stuck out of the gown, with a slipper half on the foot.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah wottahs—"

"Go it, Gussy! Do it again!"

Arthur Augustus caught at the table to help himself up. Unfortunately his grasp fastened on the table-cover, and instead of dragging himself up he dragged the cover over, with a shower of books and papers and an inkstand.

The Terrible Three gave a simultaneous shout.

"You ass! Leggo!"

"Ow! Yawwoogh! Bai Jove!"

A splash of ink added to the aristocratic effect of the smeared butter on D'Arcy's aristocratic countenance.

SKY FISHING!



Pilot: "What on earth are you doing with a fishing-rod up here?"

Passenger: "Huh! Haven't you ever heard of fly-fish?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Wood, 5, Burnley Lane, Chadderton, near Oldham, Lancs.

He scrambled to his feet.

"Oh, you chump!" said Manners. "That's the third time that ink's been upset to-day!"

"You feahful boundahs—"

"Oh, go home!"

"Buzz off!"

Instead of buzzing off, D'Arcy rushed at Manners and closed with him. The Shell fellow wrestled with him, and they waltzed round the table, Manners getting a great deal of the butter off D'Arcy's face upon his own.

"Here, keep your chivvy away!" he roared. "Keep it off!"

"You uttah ass—"

"Don't butter me, you chump!"

"I weward you—"

"Help!" howled Manners. "He's greasing me all over!"

Tom Merry and Lowther rushed to the rescue. They grasped Arthur Augustus and hauled him off by main force, the swell of St. Jim's struggling all the time.

"Welease me!" he roared. "I'm goin' to give you all a feahful thwashin'! I insist upon bein' weleased at once!"

"No takers!" said Lowther, as he pushed D'Arcy upon the floor and planted a foot on his chest. "Now keep still!"

"You wuffians—"

"What's the matter with you?" asked Tom Merry, adding a foot to Lowther's and keeping the swell of St. Jim's pinned to the floor. "What are you on the warpath about?"

"I have been tweated with gwoss disrespeck!"

"Go hon!"

"I have been smothahed with buttah while I 'was takin' a nap in my own study!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"'Twas butter joke!"

"Yaas, wathah, you wottahs, and I am goin' to give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"But what for?"

"For playin' that wotten jape on me."

"Ha, ha, ha! But we didn't!"

"Eh?"

"We didn't do it," said Tom Merry. "You ass, you've been a little too previous!"

"Oh! If you give me your word that you didn't do it, of course, I shall take it!" said D'Arcy. "I'm sowwy!"

"I should think you are! You've upset the study, and made Manners' nose nearly twice its usual size!"

"I'm sowwy! Why didn't you chaps explain?"

"How were we to explain when we didn't know what you were after?"

"Bai Jove, you know, I nevah thought of that! You see—"

"Never mind, it was worth it to see Gussy's cheerful chivvy in this state," said Monty Lowther. "Will you stay another minute while I take a shapshot of you, Gussy?"

D'Arcy rose to his feet.

"I decline to do anythin' of the kind!" he exclaimed, with dignity. "I will wetiah now, and I wepeat that I am sowwy. I will go and look out for the weal perpetwatahs of that howwid outwage!"

"Deal gently with them, Gussy," said Monty Lowther imploringly. "You know what a feahful chap you are when you are roused, and—"

But D'Arcy did not wait for any more. He left the study and closed the door with unnecessary force.

CHAPTER 6.

The Outsider Overhears!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY rustled up to the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House to wash the butter from his face—a step he might as well have taken earlier, instead of paying that hasty visit to Tom Merry's study. But, as D'Arcy would have explained, he never thought of that.

Blake, Herries, and Digby had nearly finished changing. They looked at the swell of St. Jim's as he came in.

"My hat!" said Jack Blake, with an appearance of great surprise. "What have you been doing with your face, Gussy?"

"He's been wasting the butter," said Digby, with a shake of the head. "Is it a new dodge for the complexion, Gussy? If it is, I really think you might use margarine and not our best fresh!"

"Weally, Dig—"

"It reminds me of Shakespeare," said Blake thoughtfully. "What is it he says about the schoolboy with his shining morning face?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Only it's a shining evening face."

"I wufuse to listen to these wotten wemarks!" said D'Arcy, going to his washstand. "I have been tweated with uttah wudeness. Some wotten boundah slammed his buttah on my face while I was asleep."

"Not really!" exclaimed Blake, in astonishment.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Have you slain him?"

"No; I want you fellows to help me find the chap, as I am wolved to give him a feahful thwashin'!" said D'Arcy, scrubbing away at his face and speaking in jerks. "I did not know you fellows had come back."

"We didn't know you had come back, you chump, when we left to look for you," said Blake. "Tom Merry told us you were in the haunted mill."

"So I was, deah boy."

"And wanted us to come with umbrellas and things."

"So I did."

"Then why didn't you wait for us?" exclaimed Blake. "When we got to the mill there was nobody there."

D'Arcy began to towel his face.

"Is all that buttah off?" he asked.

"Blow the butter!"

"Yaas; but is it all off?"

"Look here, Gussy, if you've got an explanation to give, you'd better give it," said Blake, as he fastened his collar. "You gave us a long tramp through the rain, and coolly left the place we were to meet you. You bolted all the grub before we came back, and had a blessed tea-party in the study!"

"Weally, deah boy—"

"What do you mean by it? I may as well tell you that you are booked for the biggest bumping you ever had in your natural!"

"I should uttahn wufuse to be bumped! I have not had tea yet, and have not had a tea-party in the study!"

"What! There were three teacups, and the grub's all gone!"

"I thought you chaps had had it before you went," said D'Arcy. "I wepeat that I haven't had any tea yet, deah boy!"

"My hat!" said Blake. "Somebody must have raided the study while we were out, then. Figgins & Co. most likely, though how could they know? It wasn't Tom Merry; he gave us his word. Well, never mind the tea; as you didn't do it we'll excuse you for that!"

"Freely," said Digby generously.

"But what do you mean by buzzing off and leaving us to go to the haunted mill for nothing?" demanded Blake.

"I am sowwy—"

"You'll be sorrier shortly!"

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"It was unavoidable, deah boys, undah the cires. I thought I should pass you comin' to the school, you know—"

"I suppose you did pass us, ass!"

"I mean, I thought I should see you. I suppose I must have passed you. I—I mean, that you must have passed me in the dark!" said D'Arcy. "It was wathah careless of you! However, I am pwepared to ovahlook it!"

"You—you are prepared to overlook it, are you?" gasped Blake.

"Yaas, wathah, undah the cires, as there's no harm done," said D'Arcy. "As for why I left the mill, that is vewy cuwious. You have heard the fellows say that the mill is haunted, I suppose?"

"Yes, ass!"

"Well, while I was there I heard the most mystewious noises—"

"You don't mean to say that you were scared out of the mill by the noises of the wind in the loft?" demanded Digby.

D'Arcy turned pink.

"Weally, Digby—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors in chorus.

"It was not the noise of the wind!" exclaimed D'Arcy indignantly. "There was a feahful noise of dwaggin' bodies about and howwid gwoans!"

"Rats!"

"I ascended the stairs, you know, to see if there was somethin' there, but my matches went out. I think some wottah was there blowin' them out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' whatevah to laugh at! Eithah there was a wottah there playin' twicks, or—"

"Or a ghost!"

"Well, of course, there wasn't a ghost," said D'Arcy uneasily. "But—but it was vewy howwid, all alone in the dark, and—and—"

"And you bolted!" said Blake, laughing. "Well, I suppose we'd have done the same. So would anybody. I—"

"Bolted from a ghost! Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a disagreeable laugh. The chums of the Fourth swung round. Jerrold Lumley-Lumley, the fellow who was always called the Outsider at St. Jim's, had come into the dormitory.

D'Arcy became crimson.

"Did you address me, Lumley?" he exclaimed.

The Outsider laughed again.

"So you bolted!" he exclaimed.

"That is no bisney of yours!"

"Not at all. But I guess it's funny!" said Lumley-Lumley. "Bolted from a ghost! Ha, ha, ha!"

"You wottah!"

"I guess I'll tell the fellows!"

"Oh, hold your tongue!" said Blake crossly. "Gussy only did what any chap would have done in his place. It was a case of nerves."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lumley—"

"So you believe in ghosts, D'Arcy?" Jerrold Lumley remarked.

"Certainly not!"

"Then you're afraid of what you don't believe in? Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy stepped towards the Outsider.

"Did you wemark that I was afwaid?" he said, with ominous calmness.

"I guess so."

"I will show you, at all events, that I am not afwaid of an ill-mannahd boundah!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Kindly put up your fists, you cad!"

Lumley retreated to the door.

"I guess I'll let the fellows know!" he said.

D'Arcy ran towards him. The Outsider of St. Jim's dodged out of the dormitory, and his footsteps could be heard scuttling away down the passage.

Arthur Augustus turned back to his chums with a dismayed look.

"Bai Jove! It will be all ovah the School House now!" he exclaimed.

Blake wagged a finger at him reprovingly.

"You see now what comes of staying out late for tea, and visiting vicarage garden parties to show off a new waistcoat."

"You uttahn ass! I—"

"Never mind, don't do it any more!" said Blake majesterially, as he turned towards the door.

"I wufuse—"

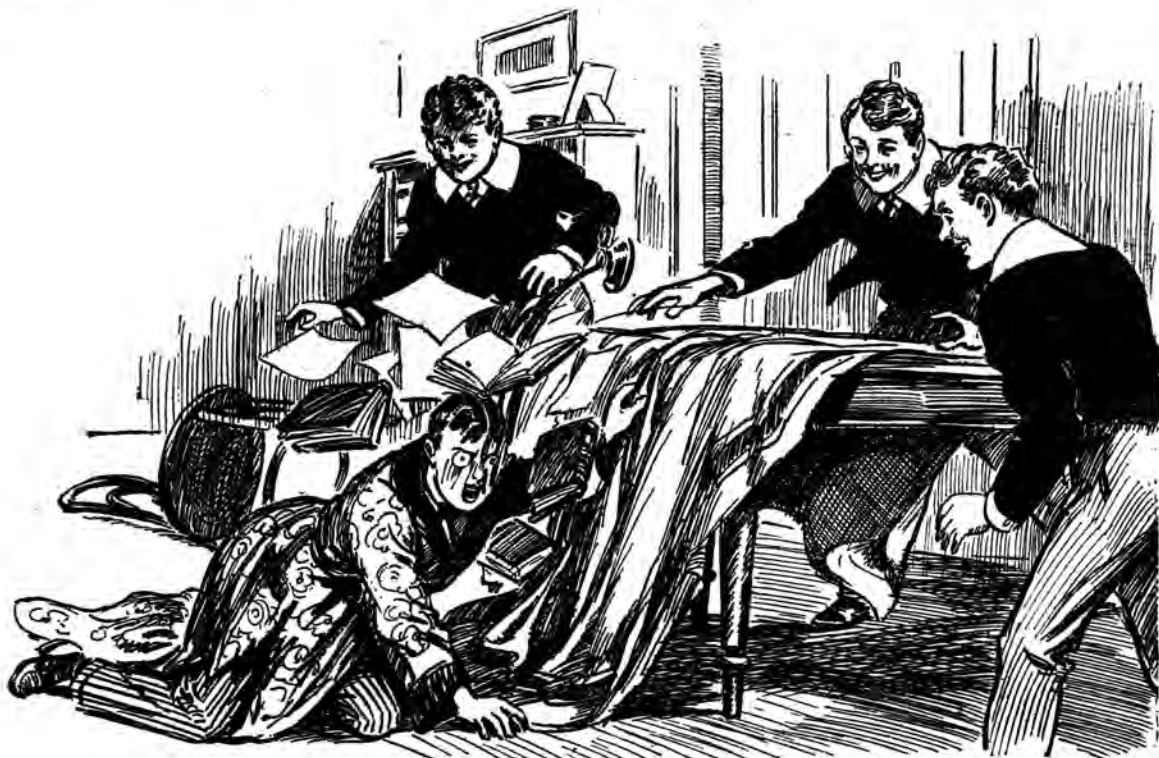
"We'd better go and scout for some tea," said Herries.

"Yes, rather!"

"I have not yet discovahed the wottah who shovd that beaslily buttah on my face," said D'Arcy. "I want you fellows to help me find him."

"Oh rats!"
 "I am wesoived—"
 "Let it drop."
 "I wefuse to let it dwop! I—"
 "Come and have tea!"
 "I cannot, consistently with my personal dig, have tea till that mattah is settled," said D'Arcy firmly. "Are you aware who it was, Blake?"
 "Yes," faltered Blake.
 "Then pway give me his name."
 "I—I'm afraid to—"
 "Weally, Blake, I will pwotect you. I will see that you are not hurt in the least," said Arthur Augustus magnanimously. "You can rely on me!"
 "Noble youth!" exclaimed Blake, throwing his arms round D'Arcy's neck and hugging him. "Noble Gussy! Come to my arms!"
 "Ow!"
 "Let the outpourings of my gratitude flood thy necktie, and—"

"My—my pwomise?"
 "Yes. You're going to protect me, you know."
 "Ha, ha, ha!" Herries and Digby roared again.
 D'Arcy's face was a study.
 "I wegard you as a wottah, Blake!" he remarked. "I was twicked into makin' that pwomise!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I wegard you as a boundah and a wottah," said Arthur Augustus, with some heat. "Undah the circs, I will let you off, but I wegard you as a beast! I am westwained by my pwomise fwom givin' you a feahful thwashin', but you will kindly take the will for the deed. Pway considah yourself as soundly thwashed!"
 "Good!" said Blake, with a nod. "And if you began. I should take you by the neck and wipe up the dormitory with you, so pray consider yourself used as a floor-wiper!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I wefuse to considah anythin' of the sort! I—"
 "My dear chap, one good turn deserves another," urged Blake.



As Arthur Augustus tried to help himself up from the floor, his grasp fastened on the table-cover. Instead of dragging himself up, he pulled the cover over, and a shower of books and papers and an inkstand descended on his head. "Ow! Yawwoogh!" yelled Gussy, as ink splashed on his face. "Bai Jove!"

"Weally, Blake—"
 "And then let's go and have tea!" said Blake, calming down suddenly after his transports. "I'm jolly hungry!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Digby and Herries.
 "You have not told me the name of the culpwit, Blake," said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity.
 "Oh, his name!"
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "John Blake!"
 "Eh?"
 "John Blake, familiarly known as Jack!"
 "Do I undahstand that it was you, Blake, who played that wotten twick on me?" demanded D'Arcy majestically.
 Blake looked puzzled.
 "I don't know," he said. "How should I know what you understand, Gussy? It depends on the state of your understander, you know."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "You uttah ass! You swamped that wotten buttah on my face!"
 "It wasn't rotten butter; it was best fresh!"
 "You did it?"
 "Alone I did it!" assented Blake.
 "Then I shall have no wesoource but to give you a feahful thwashin'!"
 "After your promise, Gussy? You shock me!"

"Pway don't be an ass, Blake!" said D'Arcy. "Let's go and have tea. I wefuse to talk wot any more!"
 "Going to start in life as a dumb man?" asked Blake pleasantly.
 To which polite query D'Arcy vouchsafed no response.

CHAPTER 7. Tom Merry's Idea!

"THE ass!"
 "The fathead!"
 "He ought to be kept on a chain!"
 Such were the remarks the Terrible Three made after Gussy had quitted the study, and they set about picking up the things he had scattered in dragging off the table-cover.
 But all the things that had been scattered were not easily collected.
 The ink, for example, was irrecoverable, and as most of it had been spilt over the papers, the loss was not in the ink alone.
 A nice imposition of fifty lines which Manners had written out for the German master was smothered with ink, and would have to be done over again. Tom Merry's new

Latin grammar—a present from his kind old guardian, Miss Priscilla Fawcett—was swimming in ink. It was surprising that so much ink could have come out of one inkpot. "The cheerful chump!" said Tom Merry emphatically. "Look at my blessed grammar!"

"Look at my impot!"

"Rotten!" said Lowther. "The grammar doesn't matter so much—but the impot will have to be done over again. It's rotten!"

"I rather think it's time Gussy was put through it," said Manners. "He's too fresh!"

"Yes, rather!"

"What is he going about for in a blessed dressing-gown?" demanded Lowther. "What's the wheeze, anyway?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"He's been out in the rain."

"Well, I don't see why he can't change his clothes like anybody else, and not swank about in a dressing-gown?" exclaimed Lowther.

"Yes, it is a bit thick!" agreed Tom Merry.

"It's too thick altogether!" said Lowther.

Tom Merry's eyes sparkled.

"I've got an idea," he remarked.

"For getting at the giddy dressing-gown?"

"No. Gussy's so fond of the gown that I think he ought to be made to live in it for a time," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"How do you mean?"

"What price removing his duds?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hold on, though," said Manners. "That's not a light job. Gussy has trunks and trunks of 'em!"

"I know he has—and it would be ripping fun to cart 'em all away," said Tom Merry, with a grin. "I know where his props are. He keeps a trunk in the box-room, and hand-boxes galore in the Fourth Form dormitory, in the wardrobe there, as well as a couple of smaller trunks."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If we quietly lifted them—"

"Good egg!"

"It would be a joke to see Gussy hunting for his togs—and if the other chaps wouldn't lend him any, he'd have to turn up to calling-over in his gown."

The Terrible Three yelled at the idea.

"Let's get at 'em, then," said Lowther.

They left the study.

Kangaroo was coming along the passage towards the end study, which he shared with Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn. He stopped as he caught sight of the grinning faces of the Terrible Three.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "Any jokes on?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry, laughing. "It's up against Gussy, and you can lend a hand if you like."

"I'm on!" said the Cornstalk at once. And Tom Merry explained, to an accompaniment of cachinnations from Lowther and Manners.

"Good!" grinned Harry Noble. "Blake and the rest are having tea now. I just saw Dig take the kettle in. Somebody has wolfed their grub while they were out, and they've been borrowing from half the studies in the passage. The coast is clear for the dorm."

"Come on, then!"

The four Shell fellows hurried up to the Fourth Form dormitory.

There was a faint sound in the gloom on the upper staircase, and a scuttling of retreating feet.

Tom Merry paused.

"My hat! Those Fourth Form bounders are there!" he exclaimed.

"Not Blake," said Kangaroo.

"Who was it, then?"

"Whoever it is can help us, and keep his mouth shut," said the Cornstalk. "Hallo, who are you, there?"

There was no reply.

The Shell fellows hurried up the stairs, and looked along the dormitory passage. The passage was in complete darkness, the light having been extinguished.

"Hallo!" said Kangaroo. "That means some jape, I suppose. Look out! Switch on the light!"

"Right-ho!"

Kangaroo switched on the light, but the passage was deserted save for themselves.

Tom Merry looked perplexed.

"I know jolly well there was somebody here!" he exclaimed.

"I can't see 'em."

"They've gone," said Lowther. "Never mind, let's get to bisney."

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The chums of the Shell entered the Fourth Form dormitory, and switched on the light there.

There was a sound of suppressed gasps.

Tom Merry looked round quickly.

"Who was that?" he exclaimed. "I heard somebody."

"Can't see anybody here except ourselves," said Kangaroo.

"There is somebody, though. Look under the beds!"

"Oh, all right!"

"You needn't trouble," said a voice rather breathlessly.

"We'll come out. It's all through your blessed grunting, Fatty!"

"Look here, Figgins—"

"Oh, get out!"

Three figures crawled from under the beds.

They were Figgins & Co. of the New House. They looked dusty and fluffy, and somewhat red and breathless, and they stared sheepishly at the Shell fellows.

Tom Merry eyed them grimly.

"Oh, it's you!" he remarked.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" said Figgins genially.

"What the dickens are you doing here?"

"We nipped into this room when we heard your voices."

We felt certain you were going to your own dorm."

Tom Merry laughed.

"As it happened we weren't. How did you chaps get here? And what did you come for? A House jape, I suppose?"

Figgins grinned ruefully.

"The jape's over," he said. "We've been here a long time looking for a chance to get away. We had tea in Blake's study—"

Kangaroo uttered an exclamation.

"Oh, it was you!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes; we were going afterwards, but the coast wasn't clear. Then Gussy came in, and we saw him coming up to the study, and we nipped in here. We've been looking for a chance to escape ever since."

"No rest for the wicked," commented Monty Lowther.

"The feed wasn't worth it," said Fatty Wynn pathetically. "It was pretty good, I admit. But it wasn't worth this, you know; and I'm hungry already."

"Is it pax?" asked Figgins. "Otherwise, we're going to rush you and get out. Ready, my sons?"

"Yes, rather!" said Kerr.

"Oh, I'm ready!" said Fatty Wynn. "I'll rush anybody, if there's a chance of getting in to supper."

The School House chums laughed.

"I think we'd better bump them for their blessed cheek in coming into a respectable House," said Monty Lowther.

"Hear, hear!"

"Go it!"

"Buck up, New House!" sang out Figgins.

In a moment more the parties were closing in conflict. Figgins had Monty Lowther's head in chancery at the very first onset, and then suddenly an idea flashed into Monty Lowther's mind. Whether his head being in chancery had anything to do with it, cannot be said.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed. "Pax!"

"That's all very well—"

"Pax, you ass! I've got an idea!"

"Oh, all right!" said Figgins. "Pax, you fellows!"

"Oh, rats!" said Kangaroo. "I say—"

"Pax!" said Tom Merry. "But what's the row, Lowther?"

"I've got an idea," said Lowther, rubbing his nose. "Figgins can help us in the little wheeze we came up for. We shall have enough to do to get Gussy's things out."

"Good egg!"

"What's that?" asked Figgins.

Tom Merry explained, and the New House juniors chuckled.

"Good!" said Figgins. "Ripping!"

And Kerr and Wynn gave a willing assent, it being understood that as soon as the jape was over the New House juniors were to quit the School House in peace.

Then Tom Merry & Co. set to work.

CHAPTER 8.

A Removal!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS was the most elegant junior at St. Jim's. There were dandies in the Fifth and the Sixth, but even seniors could not vie with Arthur Augustus.

It was admitted by all, excepting, of course, the dandies aforesaid, that D'Arcy was the best-dressed fellow in the school.

His luxurious supply of apparel was kept wherever room

could be found for it. D'Arcy had an enormous trunk in the box-room, and he kept dressing-cases and necktie-boxes and collar-boxes, and so forth in the study. But it was in the roomy old wardrobe at the end of the Fourth Form dormitory that the major part was stowed. There were D'Arcy's hat-boxes and band-boxes, and trunks and shirt-boxes in an imposing array.

It was really no light task to think of moving them all. The seven juniors gazed at the pile—the venerable pile, Monty Lowther called it—and grinned.

"My only hat!" said Tom Merry. "It's about time Gussy had a lesson on this subject."

"What-ho!"

"Blake and the others are always jawing him about it."

"So they are."

"I hear that Mr. Lathom told him something would have to be done."

"Very likely," said Figgins. "My word! If we had a chap in the New House with a supply of clothes like this, we'd—we'd scrag him!"

"I'll take the band-boxes," said Tom Merry. "You fellows pile into the others. Better get it all done in one journey, in case any of those Fourth Form bounders come upstairs. Gussy mustn't get a hint of what's become of his wardrobe."

"Not a whisper."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors started operations. In turn they loaded themselves up with D'Arcy's possessions.

Tom Merry negotiated a pile of band-boxes. Kangaroo, who was strong and sturdy, and the biggest of the party, shouldered the largest box. Lowther and Manners took a large trunk between them on their backs. Figgins & Co. shouldered hat-boxes, and band-boxes, and shirt-cases galore.

"That's the lot!" gasped Fatty Wynn.

"Right-ho!" grinned Tom Merry. "March!"

Kangaroo led the way. Tom Merry was second, with the pile of band-boxes in his arms, rocking a little dangerously as he moved.

"Take care of the doorway," said Figgins. "You'll catch it with the top box if you're not careful."

"All right. I'm on that."

Tom Merry stooped low as he passed the doorway, and the topmost box of the pile narrowly escaped collision. He followed Kangaroo up the passage, and the others followed him, grunting under their burdens.

Kangaroo was grunting the most forcibly. Strong and sturdy as he was he had taken on a burden a little too heavy for him, and he was staggering under it now.

"Careful there!" said Tom Merry, as Kangaroo gave a lurch against the wall. "You'll have the blessed box down in a minute!"

"I jolly well thought it was down then!" grunted Kangaroo.

"Careful!"

"Oh, it's all right now!"

Bump!

The heavy box lurched against the wall again.

"My hat!" said Monty Lowther. "Somebody will hear that row if Kangy goes on doing the war-dance with that box."

"Ass!"

"Well, I was only suggesting——"

"Fathead!"

"Suppose we lend you a hand, Kangy?"

"Bosh!"

And Kangaroo, having rested the box against the wall for a space, shouldered it again manfully, and staggered on.

The chums followed him with doubtful looks.

Kangaroo had no doubts about his ability to negotiate that heavy box alone, but the extreme uncertainty of his stride gave Tom Merry & Co. very big doubts.

However, it was clearly useless to say anything, and they tramped on, and hoped for the best.

Another lurch, and another bump on the wall.

"Look out!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

Crash!

The box was on the floor, and the lid burst open, and the contents poured out over the linoleum.

"My hat!" gasped Kangaroo, sprawling over the fallen box. "Who'd have thought it?"

"You ass!"

"It was Lowther's fault."

"What?"

"If he hadn't called out to me——"

"Well, I like that!" exclaimed Lowther indignantly.

"I——"

(Continued on next page.)



Do you know a good joke? If so, send it to "THE GEM JESTER," 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.). Half-a-crown is awarded to the sender of every joke that appears in this column.

COMPLIMENTARY!

Jones: "Well, did they like your speech after the dinner?"
Brown: "Rather! When I sat down everybody said it was the best thing I'd ever done!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Bellamy, 21, May Street, Beverley Road, Hull.

NON-STOP!

Timkins: "How is your new wireless set going?"
Tomkins: "Oh, like an express train."
Timkins: "How's that?"
Tomkins: "It whistles at every station!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. Boothman, 2, Bushey Road, Liverpool 4.

JOKELESS.

Mother: "Do you like the picture gallery, Eric?"
Eric: "Oh, I like the pictures all right, but the trouble is there aren't any jokes under them!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to D. Stallard, 1, Mill Road, Ilford.

NO EVIDENCE.

Magistrate: "You still say you're innocent though six witnesses saw you steal the hen?"

Prisoner: "Your worship, I could produce sixty who didn't see me!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to F. Richard, Counihan, River View, Ennis, Co. Clare, I.F.S.

A PROBLEM.

Doctor: "The secret of good health is eating onions."
Patient: "Yes, doctor; but how do you keep onion-eating a secret?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Newman, 4, St. Hilda's Grove, Cross Green Lane, Leeds 9.

JARRING!

"Look at this beautiful jar," said the enthusiastic collector. "It cost me only thirty shillings."

"Really!" said the bored listener. "I suppose the price included the jam?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss M. Beverley, 112, Boultham Park Road, Lincoln.

PROOF ENOUGH.

Angler: "Is this a good place for fish?"

Local: "Yes; I've never seen any leave it!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to V. Vinogradoff, Custom House, Shanghai, China.

A BABY BREAKDOWN.

Motorist: "Send out the breakdown lorry to my baby car. It's broken down."

Garage-keeper (to mate): "Hi, Bill, go and get the brush and crumb tray!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to C. Macdonald, 6, Claremont Road, Heaton Moor, near Stockport.

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"I was getting on all right——"

"Rats!"

"Oh, pick the things up!" said Manners. "I suppose you're not going to spend the rest of the evening sprawling on that box, are you, Kangy?"

"Look here——"

"Buck up, fathead!" muttered Tom Merry. "Gussy'll come along."

Kangaroo grunted, but he bucked up. The contents of the box were crammed back into it, with less order than before. D'Arcy was very neat in his many boxes and trunks; and everything in them was always in apple-pie order, but Kangaroo had a heavy hand in packing.

He crammed the things into the box, while the procession of juniors passed him on their way to the upper stairs and the box-room.

The Cornstalk did buck up. By the time the other fellows had passed him, he had the box packed again, and was throwing his weight on the lid to keep it shut.

Figgins, having got rid of his burden, came back to help him, and between them they dragged the heavy box to the upper staircase.

Tom Merry had led the way up with his pile of hand-boxes, performing a really wonderful balancing trick in getting them up the stairs without a tumble.

They passed the box-room that was usually used by the juniors, and went on up the narrow creaking stairs, to a disused room under the roof, where old boxes and broken chairs and other lumber reposed undisturbed term after term.

There the cargo was planked down.

The juniors returned to help Kangaroo up the stairs with the large box. This was no easy task, as on the narrow stairs it jammed on the banisters, and for a long time it would not move.

By twisting out several of the banisters, however, room was made for it to pass, and the box was carried into its hiding place at last.

Then the juniors, dusty and tired, descended the stairs.

"Better have a pick-me-up in our study," said Tom Merry hospitably. "We're entitled to a drink after a removal job, I suppose, and Manners can make coffee."

"What-ho!" said Fatty Wynn. "Did I see you in the tuckshop this evening, getting some pork pies, Manners?"

"No, you didn't," said Manners.

"Then it was you, Lowther."

"No, it wasn't."

"You then, Tom Merry."

Tom Merry laughed.

"No, you didn't see me, Fatty, and there aren't any pork pies in the study; but we've got a big cake, and you're welcome."

Fatty Wynn grinned serenely.

"Nothing I like so much as cake and coffee," he said, "unless perhaps it's saveloys, or ham-and-beef, or poached eggs on toast, or gammon rashers, or——"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Figgins. "Cut the catalogue!"

"I was only saying——"

"Here's the cake," said Lowther.

And Fatty Wynn said no more. He was too busy with the cake.

When the cake and the coffee were finished the New House fellows and the School House chums parted on the best of terms, and Figgins & Co. returned in peace to their own House, chuckling as they discussed how Gussy would look when he found out that his extensive wardrobe had made such a startling disappearance.

CHAPTER 9:

Gussy in a Fix!

"COME on, D'Arcy," said Jack Blake. "It's time for call-over, and you haven't changed!"

D'Arcy looked down at the dressing-gown, which, indeed, was considerably rumpled already, and then looked at Blake.

"I will be with you in a minute, deah boy," he said.

And D'Arcy ran upstairs, while his chums strolled in a more leisurely way down to the hall for calling-over.

D'Arcy reached the Fourth Form dormitory by the time his friends were in the Hall below. Tom Merry & Co. were there, and they looked at Blake as he came in.

"Hallo! Where's Gussy?" asked Tom Merry.

"Gone to change."

"Ha, ha, ha! He'll miss call-over."

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"Oh, they haven't started yet, and they begin with the Sixth."

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, was calling the names. The fellows answered one after another. The chums of the Fourth looked a little anxious. It was a serious matter to miss call-over. And D'Arcy had not reappeared yet. What was delaying him?

True, the swell of St. Jim's was accustomed to taking plenty of time to dress, but on an occasion like this even he might be expected to buck up. Besides, he had had plenty of time to change.

Mr. Railton had come to the Fourth Form now, and was beginning.

Blake slipped out of the Hall quietly—he was very near the door—and gave a piercing whistle—a signal well-known among the chums of Study No. 6.

He stepped back into his place, to find Mr. Railton's grim eye on him.

"Blake!"

"Ye-es, sir?" said Blake.

"Take twenty lines for leaving your place."

"Ye-es, sir."

There was a rustle at the door. D'Arcy came in, looking very flurried. But he had not changed his clothes. He was still clad in the sweeping folds of that gorgeous dressing-gown.

"My hat!" murmured Blake.

Mr. Railton stared, as well he might. A gust of laughter swept through the Hall.

"D'Arcy!" rapped out Mr. Railton.

"Yaas, wathah—I—I mean, adsum, sir."

"D'Arcy, how dare you come here in this ridiculous attire?"

"Excuse me, sir. My——"

"I cannot excuse such a nonsensical action! Take——"

"My clothes——"

"Take fifty lines!"

"My clothes have been——"

"Silence!"

"Yaas, sir, but——"

"A word more, and you will be caned."

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy.

He did not speak again.

Mr. Railton went on calling the names. He came to D'Arcy's name, but the swell of St. Jim's did not answer.

"D'Arcy!"

No answer.

"D'Arcy!"

Silence.

"Answer, you ass!" whispered Blake, nudging his chum.

D'Arcy shook his head.

"D'Arcy!" thundered Mr. Railton.

He could not very well mark down D'Arcy as absent when there was the boy standing under his gaze.

Still the swell of St. Jim's did not answer.

"D'Arcy, why do you not answer?" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "Have you taken leave of your senses, boy?"

"Answer to your name!"

"Certainly, sir. But you told me not to speak."

"What?"

"You said I should be caned if I spoke another word, sir," said D'Arcy innocently.

Mr. Railton seemed about to choke.

"Answer to your name, D'Arcy!" he said at last, as a chuckle swept through the Hall. "D'Arcy!"

And the swell of St. Jim's cheerfully replied:

"Adsum!"

The boys crowded out after call-over, and in the passage Jack Blake took a firm grip on the back of his elegant chum's neck and shook him.

Arthur Augustus struggled in the iron grip of his friend.

"Weally, Blake, you ass——"

"Chump!"

"Leggo!"

"Fathead!"

"I insist——"

Blake shook the swell of St. Jim's.

"What do you mean by coming down in that rig?" he roared. "What do you want to set the whole school cackling at us for, you dummy?"

"Weally Blake——"

"Let's bump the duffer!" said Herries.

"Hear, hear!" said Digby.

"I uttably wufuse to be bumped!" said D'Arcy, wriggling. "And if you do not immediately welease me, Blake, I shall stwike you! I have been tweated wottenly! Some ass has taken all my clothes away!"

"What?"

(Continued on page 14.)



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

HALLO, CHUMS! There's another grand long yarn of fun and frolic and adventure at St. Jim's in next Wednesday's tip-top number. This story is the first of a pair of yarns, the theme of which is cricket, which I think will gladden the hearts of most readers. The title of the first story is

"GUSSY'S CRICKET PARTY!"

Gussy gets permission from his father, Lord Eastwood, to bring a friend or two down to Eastwood House for the cricket week there. Naturally, everybody wants to go with Gussy, and the "friend or two" eventually becomes ten! Read all about it in the best full-of-fun school yarn for next week. You'll enjoy it no end.

"GHOST RIVER RANCH!"

So you will the next gripping chapters from our popular serial of Wild West adventure. In this nerve-tingling instalment Nelson Lee and five companions make a daring ride into the enemy's hide-out to rescue Nipper and Willy. What happens then will keep you thrilled as you've never been thrilled before.

All our shorter features will be full of fun and interest as usual. "Tom Merry's Weekly" is well up to form again, another batch of prize-winning jokes will give you the best laughs of the week, and Mr. Brooks and myself will have more interesting things to talk about.

THE FIRST TEST MATCH.

In two days' time England and Australia once again "get to grips" on the cricket field. On Friday, at Trent Bridge, Nottingham, the first Test match starts, and cricket enthusiasts all over the world will be watching keenly the

progress of the great game over the four days it is due to last.

It is interesting to note the form of previous Australian teams in Tests at Trent Bridge since the first match was played there in 1899. In this Test the Australians had a firm grip on the game, but England, with seven wickets down and still wanting 135 runs to beat the "Aussies," managed to force a draw. The next Test match to be played on this ground was in 1905, and England was successful, winning by 213 runs. In 1921 the Australians reversed the result and gave England a trouncing. Our total for two innings was only 259, and with the Australians scoring 332 in their first "knock," they only wanted 28 runs to win, which they scored without the loss of a wicket.

In 1926 the Test match at Trent Bridge was washed out by rain, only 32 runs being scored by England without loss. In 1930, however, the last Test played on this ground produced a definite result in England's favour, and we won by 93 runs. So the summary of Tests played at Trent Bridge reads: England two victories, Australia one victory, with two matches left drawn.

Let's hope that the match which starts on Friday will be brimful of exciting cricket, and that a victory one way or the other can be arrived at in the four days—weather permitting!

MUCH ADO ABOUT A CAT!

The Woking Fire Brigade were recently given quite a lot of bother, which lasted for two days, and the cause of it all was not a fire, but a cat! The animal had somehow climbed the cooling tower of the local electric light works, and apparently couldn't get down. Someone informed the fire brigade and they got busy. The tower is seventy feet high and a long escape was reared up to it. But the cat took fright

and scuttled across to the other side of the tower, where it then leaped to a ledge and could not be reached. But the firemen continued with the rescue attempt, and when darkness came floodlights were used. Eventually, however, the task had to be abandoned. The next day the cat was still on the tower and firemen got to work again. To shift the cat from the ledge two hoses were played upon it. That did the trick, but not as expected! The stranded creature leaped for safety—to the ground! By a series of amazing leaps, one of which was thirty feet, it jumped from the tower down on to the roofs of works buildings, and so to the ground. Then the cat, after giving all that bother, "beat" it for home, and the last that was seen of it was as it leaped a six-foot fence!

A LUCKY DIP.

A valuable find was made by a builder's labourer the other day when he drew out a bucket of water from the Regent's Canal, London. In the bucket was also a brown paper parcel, and when the man opened it he was astonished to see that it contained Bank of England notes and postal orders. His find was reported to the police, and the Post Office eventually took possession of the parcel, the contents of which was to the value of one thousand pounds! The finder is to be commended for his honesty, and no doubt a just reward has been his due.

A FIFTEEN YEARS' FAST!

The fasting record has been knocked sky-high if the claim of a Spanish girl is true. The girl, a young peasant named Amalia Baranda, lives at Montecille, Burgos. She declares that she hasn't eaten any food or taken anything to drink for fifteen years! Phew! That'll take some beating! Her digestive organs, which have been examined by doctors, are normal, but slightly withered.

THE WORLD'S OLDEST MAN.

Zaro Agha, the Turk who, at 156, claims to be the oldest man in the world, and his two Afghan challengers, Ramzan Khan, who is 170, and Haju Gul, who is 180, are not in it for age, according to the information I have received from a reader, G. Morrell, of Otley. He tells me that the world's oldest man is Li Ching Yun, who is 256 years of age. He was born in 1677, in the reign of Kamy Hsi. He has lived to survive twenty-three wives, and is now with his twenty-fourth, who is over sixty years of age. His eyes and voice are quite clear, and his appetite is excellent, and he can remember events which occurred over a hundred years ago!

THE EDITOR.

R. J. Hevey, 28, Denison Street, South Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, wants a pen pal in Leeward Isles, S. America, China, or U.S.A., interested in stamps, match brands, and postcards; age 15-17.

Miss Sonia Susser, 335, Burger Street, Krugersdorp, Transvaal, South Africa, wants girl correspondents; age 16-18.

Tommy Edmondson, 80, Copland Terrace, Shieldfield, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, wants correspondents in Australia, Canada, and South Africa; age 13-15.

Miss Lilyan McSweeney, 495, Plaisant Street, Three Rivers, Quebec, Canada, wants girl correspondents; age 17-20.

David Browning, 38, Vicarage Lane, Humberstone, Leicester, wants pen pals overseas, including South America; age 12-14.

Ronald Harrison, 65, Pirrie Road, Stopgate Lane, Liverpool 9, wants correspondents in France and China to exchange views; age 14-20.

Miss Fay Davis, 49, Showell Green Lane, Sparkhill, Birmingham, wants girl correspondents—not Birmingham; age 17-20.

John Frederick Graseman, 71, Chestnut Grove, Prittlewell, Southend-on-Sea, Essex, wants a pen pal in Australia interested in sports and boomerangs; age 9-12.

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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.

Miss Marie Eccleton, P.O. Riverton, Southland, New Zealand, wants girl correspondents; age 16-18; stamp collecting and photography; France, Alaska, Scotland, Malay States, Natal, Arizona.

Peter Bates, Walkersville, Pendarves Street, New Plymouth, New Zealand, wants correspondents in Canada, Africa, and England; age 13-14; Rugger, boxing, engineering.

A. R. Ashby, 4, Pine Cottages, South Ascot, Berkshire, wants a correspondent in the British Isles, or China, or Australia.

Miss Anne Coulter, Morningside Sanatorium, Georgetown, Seattle, Washington, U.S.A., wants girl correspondents who are stamp collectors.

The Mystery of the Mill!

(Continued from page 12.)

"All my boxes are gone—"
"Impossible! Why, it would take a person weeks to clear all your boxes!"

"Weally, Blake—"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"You've been dreaming," said Blake.
"It's the bloater-paste you had for tea. You've been seeing things."

"I tell you—"
"Rats! You've been dreaming! Wake up!"

And Blake gave the swell of St. Jim's another hearty shake as if for the purpose of awakening him.

D'Arcy jerked himself away.

"Look here, you ass—"
"Bosh! You've been drinking ginger-beer and it's got into your head! I tell you that Hercules would have funk'd moving all your blessed trunks if they had given it to him for a thirteenth job."

"But they are gone," said the swell of St. Jim's.

"Where?"
"I don't know. I suppose they have been moved for a wotten twick," said D'Arcy, his eye gleaming wrath through his monocle. "Somebody knew I was in this dwessin'-gown, and wanted to make me come down in it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"There is nothin' whatevah to laugh at! I—"

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

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Well, let's go and see if the boxes are really gone," said Blake.

The chums of the Fourth ascended to the dormitory. There they had proof that Arthur Augustus had not been mistaken. The boxes certainly were gone—trunks and hat-boxes and band-boxes and every kind of box. All had disappeared.

"This is a practical joke, I suppose," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Same chap who wolfed our tea, I dare say," said Digby. "My word!"

"Bai Jove! I'll give him a fearful thwashin'!" said Arthur Augustus. "I suppose it was some of the New House wottahs all the time! Bai Jove!"

"Well, it's too late to call on Figgins to-night," said Blake. "The House is closed after calling-over. To-morrow—"

"But I haven't any clothes to wear!"

"Horrid!"

"What am I to do, deah boys?"

"Well, that gown's becoming," said Digby.

"Weally, Dig—"

"Yes, it's very becoming," said Blake.

"Look here, Blake—"

"About Gussy—I suppose he'll have to stick to the dressing-gown," said Blake. "Luckily we saved him from rumpling and damaging it when he was very obstreperous this evening."

"Weally, Blake—"

"After all, it will make a bit of a sensation in the Form-room—"

"You uttah ass—"

"Well, I'm only trying to make useful suggestions—"

"You know perfectly well that it will be impos for me to appear in the Form-room in this thing!" said D'Arcy warmly.

"But you can't do without it, dear boy, if you haven't any clothes," remonstrated Blake. "I'm not a particular chap as a rule, but I think the line ought to be drawn somewhere—I do, really!"

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No. 17. Vol. 1 (New Series).

FIRST TEST MATCH

SAINTS v. AUSTRALIAN TEAM

FIGHTING FINISH TO GAME OF THRILLS

Wally D'Arcy at the Microphone.

What-ho, boys! Merry and Blake are batting against the team of Australians got together by Harry Noble of the Shell to do battle with St. Jim's in a series of Test Matches. Under a blazing sun, they are hitting out hard and often at the bowling. There goes the first fifty—a brief pause while hundreds of throats let go a cheer like thunder.

But now a change. Blake edges a sizzler from Noble into Conroy's hands behind the wicket. Now there's a procession—Saints are in trouble! Keen fieldsmen snap their chances—Derwent catches D'Arcy, Wootton major disposes of Merry for a smashing 55. Saints' last wicket down at 100.

"Aussies" batting. Now what? Crash! First wicket spread-eagled; Gay hits the trail for the pavilion, with a "duck"! Derwent bats freely, unperturbed by Fatty Wynn's most cunning deliveries. Noble keeps him company. An acrobatic catch at third slip by Figgins sends back Derwent. Succeeding batsmen seem unnerved and a rot sets in. "Aussies" all out for 54.

Saints open second innings. Merry and Blake again—but this time they are soon separated! Merry fails at 4—a snap catch at slip by Gay. "Aussie" fieldsmen on tiptoe now. Ring formed close in on leg side; Noble bowling leg trap. Nothing dangerous physically in his deliveries, but Saints find difficulty in getting through ring. Lowther, Kerr, and Herries all caught for small scores. Figgins brightens the game, swinging the bat freely with long arms. Swift footwork enables him to get tremendous power behind strokes. Figgly rattles up a brilliant 20—then falls victim to a great catch on the boundary! Saints all out 42. "Aussies" set 89 to win, with ample time. Much depends on Wynn's bowling.

Flying Squad Report

SQUAD MEETS OH KAY

Chief Air Marshal Merry, going down to cricket, found letter in rack purporting to come from the Mandarin Hai Ho, asking Merry, as junior captain, to meet the mandarin's son Oh Kay at Rylcombe Station. Oh Kay to be new boy at St. Jim's. Chief Air Marshal Merry, ever polite, asked advice of chums. Should Flying Squad abandon cricket to greet new boy from Flowery Land? Kerr, examining letter, remarked on very English character of handwriting. Kerr, gifted with keen eyes, detected signs that the writer had attempted to "disguise" his hand! Suspecting jape, Flying Squad took the air for Rylcombe in battle formation. As train rolled in, Flying Squad surrounded new boy of obviously Oriental appearance. Chief Air

Noble and Gay open for "Aussies." First few overs dull. Villagers among crowd "barrack" mildly. "They'll set the pitch on fire! Get the fire-extinguisher!" "Barracking" has no effect on "Aussies," however. Having resolved to play themselves in with caution, an earthquake could not upset them. Wynn's guile exerted in vain; Noble and Gay set like cement. Sudden change follows substitution of Wynn. Noble and Gay are among the runs! Four after four flashes from their golden bats—now a "six," crashing on the pavilion roof! Up, Saints! Change of bowlers makes no difference—"Aussies" have the bit between their teeth now! Gay goes, but Jack Wootton gallantly takes his place. After Jack Wootton, "Squiff" of Greyfriars, and after him "Flip" Derwent of Highlife—all giving good account of themselves! Seventy on the board—19 to win! Ten more in one over—nine to win! A "six" from Noble's bat brings victory only three runs off! But the last man is at the other end, and he faces a refreshed Fatty Wynn. Wynn takes his short run, his arm swings over, and the batsman plays forward. Too far—a merry rattle of stumps, the last "Aussie" is out; Noble is not out 38. A last-minute win for St. Jim's in the First Test Match against Noble's Australian XI! Well played, you heroes! But wait till the next match, boys!

TEAMS.—ST. JIM'S: Merry (capt.), Blake, Figgins, D'Arcy, Digby, Lowther, Manners, Herries, Kerr, Wynn, Pratt.

AUSTRALIANS: Noble (capt.), Gay, Wootton major, Wootton minor (Rylcombe Grammar School), Field (Greyfriars), Derwent (Highlife), Conroy (Rookwood), Raymond (Claremont), Thane (Redclyffe), Champneys (Bagshot), Franklin (St. Jude's).

Marshal Merry took firm grip on his hand, and peered closely at Oh Kay's face. Behind large tinted glasses he recognised a glimmer in the eyes. Next moment Kerr, circling to rear of Chinese boy, gave chirrup: "Look at the ass's trousers!" Eyes of Squad riveted on Eton trousers visible through split flowing Chinese garments! With wild whoop, Flying Squad fell on "mandarin's son," ripping off disguise. Gordon Gay of Rylcombe Grammar School stood behind them! Gay made lightning dash to escape, but Squad headed him off, and Gay crashed with Flying Squad planes on top of him! At command of Chief Air Marshal Merry, Squad "escorted" Gay outside station to horse pond. At call of "Three!" Gay swung through air and splashed into muddy pond! Gay's face, reappearing, festooned with weeds, sent Flying Squad into hysterics! Thanks to Kerr's keenness, reception of Oh Kay turned out fresh triumph for Flying Squad!

erry's Weekly



Week Ending June 9th, 1934.

LOOK THROUGH OUR TELEVISOR

FATTY WYNN SPEAKING



Now, look you! Isn't it about time a really well-developed St. Jim's man addressed you? Although I'm Welsh born and bred, I've got out of the habit of using Welsh idioms in my speech at St. Jim's.

But I'm very glad indeed to appear in the televisor, and I hope I shall convince you that St. Jim's men aren't all skinny, even if those you've seen so far happen to be. I often try to persuade old Figgy to eat more, but he can't seem to see it. Why, I get through twice as much as Figgy and Kerr together at one meal—it's a wonder to me how they manage to get through the strenuous programme of work and sport which they do! Figgins is the finest pal a fellow ever had, but he's about the skinniest, too. I haven't despaired yet, however, of getting him to take more than a casual interest in apple dumplings and fruit pies. Apple dumplings are wonderful things—they speak for themselves, and I'm sure Figgins and Kerr can't remain deaf to their appeal for ever!

Oh dear, it makes my mouth water to talk about food! Not that I'm just a gourmand—don't run away with that idea. I suppose I get through as much violent exercise as anybody, and you don't find me slacking in the study armchair as fat people are supposed to do. I do my best to prevent opposing forwards from scoring at footer, and Figgy insists that I'm the best junior goalkeeper in the world. That's rather stretching it, I think—but you know old Figgy. Then in the summer I love nothing better than to get a new ball in my fist and whiz it down at the batsmen—fast ones, slow ones, off breaks and on breaks—they all come the same to me! Figgy again says there's no junior bowler on earth to compete with me—but Figgy is prejudiced in favour of his chums.

I mention my sporting activities merely to emphasise my first point—that a fellow needn't be a walking scarecrow in order to be fit! Somebody once said I'm as round as a tub. At least, I don't give the impression, as some fellows do, that the House dame starves us at meals. My advice, if you want it, is—be fat, but keep moving! Excuse me—Kerr has just finished the toast!

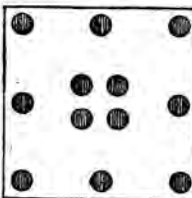
MONTY LOWTHER CALLING

Hello, everybody! Stop me if you've heard this one, said the sailor about to fire the 16-in. gun. As I have a summer cold, you mustn't mind a few hoarse chestnuts! Knox was resting with his feet up when D'Arcy minor looked in. "Too tired to move, Knox?" asked Wally. "Yes!" growled Knox. "Good. Then I may as well tell you that I borrowed your cricket bat, and I've split it!" said Wally. Knox moved! "How old do frogs live to be?" demands Wally D'Arcy. It's difficult to say, Wally—they're always "croaking"! Skimpole was compiling a new dictionary—but he got stuck. Words failed him! Mellish says he dislikes the look of the Form-room. He hates the site of work! A list of hecklers' names was taken at a Wayland political meeting. Sort of Boo's Who. At the same meeting, P.C. Crump was struck with a wireless battery. The thrower was presented with a "dry cell" in exchange! We heard of a man who made £50,000 out of cough lozenges. Hush money! Tinned foods, says our dentist, cause defective teeth. Not, however, if a tin-opener is used! Says Skimpole: "Collecting ancient coins is no easy matter!" Collecting modern ones is even more difficult! Herries bought a new kennel for his dog Towser in Wayland. "Shall I enter it, sir?" asked the assistant, who was rather fat. Herries answered: "I don't think you could get in it!" Isn't it remarkable how money melts away, in spite of our efforts to freeze on to it? Gore thinks the Shell dormitory is too small. It didn't seem too small when I lost my collar stud the other day! A reader asks: When is spring? Spring is when park-keepers are so elated that they let you walk on the grass! Old Isaacs, the pawnbroker, unused to the sea, went for a cruise at Easter. Fed up with the incessant ringing of the ship's bells, on the second day out he presented the captain with a clock! Says Gore: "My pater is a country gentleman. He goes in for riding and shooting house parties!" We hope Gore's pater doesn't finish on the scaffold! Step on it till next week!



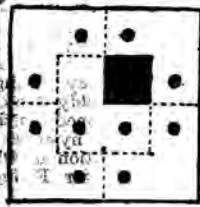
CALIBAN'S PUZZLE CORNER

Jack Blake received a large square cake, as shown, with huge marzipan sweets on top. He wanted very generously to divide it with his three chums, D'Arcy, Herries, and Digby, cutting it into four equal sections, each containing three of the marzipan sweets. Can you see how he did it?



Mr. Ratcliff observes that the modern schoolboy is an increasing problem. We imagine he must have drawn his conclusion from watching Fatty Wynn!

Solution of Last Week's Puzzle



"Ha, ha, ha!" "You uthah ass! I shall have to bowwow some clothes!" "Neither a borrower nor a lender be," said Blake. "We have that on Shakespeare's authority, and I uphold Shakespeare. Now—" "I refuse to discuss the mattah in this frivolous spiwit!"

And D'Arcy walked away with his nose high in the air, and his dressing-gown trailing and rustling. The chums of the Fourth chuckled. That night D'Arcy came up to bed in his dressing-gown, and all the Fourth Form chuckled, too. D'Arcy went to bed under a fire of remarks impartially distributed upon the subjects of ghosts and dressing-gowns.

He soothed his wrath in balmy slumber. In the morning he rose before anybody else in the dormitory, and made a selection of clothes from the boxes of Digby, Herries, and Blake. He chose Sunday clothes, and took the articles that fitted him best.

"My hat!" said Blake, sitting up in bed as the rising-bell clanged out.

"Dressed already, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You've found your clothes?"

"No; I found yours."

"Mine!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, all right!" said Blake generously.

"You can have my second-best bags till your things turn up, and—"

"I've bowwowed the Sunday bags, deah boy."

Blake jumped.

"My Sunday bags?"

"Yaas, wathah! I must say they are not a vewy good fit, and not a vewy good fit for you, eithah, I think. You should weally change your tailah, Blake."

"You—you cheeky ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Digby. "Good old Gussy! Is that Blake's waistcoat, too?"

"No, it's your waistcoat, Dig, deah boy. The best one."

"You—you boulder—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake, in his turn.

"Oh, shut up!" said Digby. "That waistcoat—"

"It's wathah out of date in cut," said D'Arcy, "and this jacket of Hewwies is not as clean as I should like it."

"My best jacket!" roared Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Three juniors jumped out of bed—three forms in pyjamas rushed towards D'Arcy.

The swell of St. Jim's stepped quickly outside the dormitory, and walked down the passage.

Three wrathful faces glared after him.

Arthur Augustus smiled softly and strolled down the passage.

CHAPTER 10.

A Jape on Skimpole.

"SEEN any more ghosts?" Several voices asked that question when Arthur Augustus came in to breakfast.

Lumley-Lumley had spread his story far and wide.

The swell of St. Jim's turned very pink, and sat down at the breakfast-table without a word.

There was a chuckle among the Fourth Formers, which was echoed from the Shell table. D'Arcy's adventures at the mill were not likely to be exhausted of interest for some time to come.

"Look here," said D'Arcy, as he left the dining-room with his chums after "brekker." "I refuse to stand this!"

"Then what on earth did you go and play the giddy ox like that for, Gussy?" said Blake.

"I decline to admit that I played the giddy ox. On reflection, I feel that there is somethin' goin' on at the mill that ought to be investigated."

"Ghostly bisney, of course?"

"No, ass! I don't believe in ghosts."

"In the daylight, you mean," grinned Digby.

"Weally, Dig—"

"I wanted to speak to you chaps," exclaimed Skimpole, coming up with a big book under his arm. "This is Dr. Spoofer's great volume—"

"Pway buzz off, Skimmay—"

"It deals with Determinism and other important problems. It completely disposes of the current idea that Determinism is mere ancient nonsense raked up and given a new name by foolish scribblers of modern times. It—"

"Buzz off!"

"It deals with—"

"Pway shut up, Skimmay! We are talkin' bisney," said Arthur Augustus. "As I was sayin', you fellows, there is somethin' goin' on at the haunted mill that needs investigation. You see, why were they twyin' to fwighten me away?"

"I don't know," grinned Blake. "I only know they jolly well succeeded, whoever 'they' were."

"I wefuse to admit anythin' of the sort. I was not fwightened away. I wretired fwom the mill—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I see no cause whatever for wibald laughtah in that circumstance. I am convinced that somethin' undah-hand is goin' on. You know that I twained myself as a pwivate detective once—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I succeeded in twainin' myself and my powahs of observation. I also studied a gweat deal of detective litewatuh at the time. I know that it is not at all an uncommon thing for a gang of coinahs—"

"A what of which?"

"A gang of coinahs," repeated D'Arcy firmly. "I know it's not an uncommon thing for a gang of coinahs to dig in some old building that's supposed to be haunted and make mystewious noises to fwighten away people who might find them out."

"Not uncommon in detective stories," Blake assented, with a nod.

"Well, even things in novels sometimes happen in weal life, and I have heard that special wewports to the news-papahs are sometimes true," said D'Arcy. "You nevah know. I think it is extremewly pwob that there is a nest of coinahs at the old mill."

"You said a gang just now," said Blake, with a grave shake of the head.

"It's the same thing, deah boy."

"My dear chap, how can a nest and a gang be the same thing? A gang is a number of persons, a nest is the place where birds live. I can show you it in the dictionary, if you like."

"I mean, a nest of coinahs may be livin' there."

"You don't mean to say that coiners live in a nest like birds?" asked Blake, in astonishment.

"Weally, Blake, I wish you would be sewious! There is eithah a nest of coinahs or a gang of footpads—"

"Or a nest of footpads or a gang of coiners?" suggested Blake.

"I wefuse to take any notice of fwivolous wemarks. I think it is our duty to wout them out."

"Good!" said Blake, with a yawn. "We'll go and rout them out this afternoon. It's a half-holiday, and looks like being fine for once."

"Good!" said Herries. "We'll take Towser, if you like, and if there's anything there he'll rout it out fast enough."

"He would give the alarm."

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Herries warmly. "You know jolly well what sort of a dog Towser is, D'Arcy!"

"I know he's a howwid beast and has no wespect whatever for a fellow's twousahs."

"Look here—"

"Oh, blow Towser!" said Blake. "We'll go and dig up the coiners. It will be a nice walk, anyway."

"I will come with you," said Skimpole.

"Oh, will you?"

"Certainly! I shall be very pleased to do so. I will bring Dr. Spoofer's new book and read some chapters of it on the way. I also have trained my intellect as an amateur detective, and I think D'Arcy is probably right. There is a great deal of reason in his view of the matter."

"Yaas, watah! Skimmay isn't such a silly ass, aftah all, you know?"

"You see," pursued Skimpole, "taking the old mill on one hand—"

"You couldn't do it," said Blake. "Why, even the strong man at Tomsonio's Circus couldn't do a thing like that."

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"I was not speaking literally," said Skimpole, who never saw a joke under any circumstances whatever. "What I mean is, take the old mill, on the one hand, and the fact, on the other, that— Pray do not walk away while I'm speaking, Blake. What I mean to point out is that the probable is scarcely ever true, and that it is the unexpected that always happens. The chances are immensely against the old mill being the haunt of coiners, and, therefore, I should say that the old mill is extremely likely to be the haunt of coiners. This is reasoning on the true Sexton Blake system."

"Bai Jove!"

"It is a fact, too, that the old mill can be seen from the school tower with a telescope," said Skimpole. "I think it would be an excellent idea to take a survey from the tower by means of a telescope. I will borrow Herr Schneider's telescope, which is the largest one at St. Jim's. Fortunately, it is quite easy to get it from his room."

"It won't be fortunate for you if Herr Schneider finds you borrowing it!" grinned Digby.

"I shall not mention the matter to him. Herr Schneider has old-fashioned ideas about property," said Skimpole.

"I consider—"

The bell ringing for classes cut short Skimpole's considerations. The juniors went into their various classrooms.

During the morning lessons an idea occurred to Blake, which made him break out into a quiet chuckle, and caused Mr. Lathom to glance towards him.

Blake coloured, and dropped his eyes upon his book. When the Fourth Form turned out after lessons Herries and Digby grasped their chum by the arm.

"What's the joke?" they demanded together.

Blake chuckled, freely this time.

"A wheeze, my sons, a wheeze!" he said. "Look for Skimmay when he gets out, and don't let him come to Schneider's study for a few minutes. I'm going to see the telescope before he borrows it."

"What on earth for?"

"To rub some black over the lens."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake dashed off. Skimpole came out of the Shell Form Room with the Terrible Three. He was talking earnestly to them.

"You can help me in the matter, if you like," he remarked. "I should like someone to carry the telescope up to the tower for me, and, besides, if I discover a gang of coiners I shall need aid to lay them by the heels. I am convinced that there is something of the sort going on at the old mill. I have not studied Sexton Blake's methods for nothing. It must be so."

"Why?" grinned Tom Merry.

"Because it is so improbable."

"Eh?"

Skimpole smiled serenely.

"Naturally, your undeveloped brain and defective intellect cannot grasp that," he said pleasantly. "It is an argument to appeal only to a master mind, such as my own. The thing is true because it is improbable."

"Then if it were impossible it would be a dead cert?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"I have not thought that out, Lowther, but perhaps— Ahem! Never mind that point now. It has nothing to do with the matter. If you will go and get the telescope for me—"

"No fear!"

"You can go if you like, Manners."

"I don't like," said Manners.

"Oh, very well, only if Herr Schneider finds me in his study he may get angry, and that would interfere with me materially. Of course, a philosophic mind enables one to bear any amount of pain, but it is disturbing to the calmness necessary for reflection. And Herr Schneider is so hasty. However, I will go."

Skimpole went. He found Digby and Herries in the path.

"Hold on a minute, Skimmay," said Digby affably.

"I'm rather pressed for time, Digby."

"Will you explain to us about Determinism?"

That was a bait Skimpole could not possibly resist. He paused at once. Digby glanced down the passage. He meant to endure Determinism manfully until Blake reappeared after his visit to the German master's study.

The Terrible Three, somewhat puzzled—for they could not imagine anybody willing to endure listening to Determinism—stopped and looked on. Skimpole blinked at the juniors very benevolently through his spectacles.

"Upon which point do you specially desire to be enlightened?" he asked.

"Well," said Digby rather hazily, "suppose you—suppose you explain the—the difference between—between Determinism and mathematics."

Skimpole looked perplexed, as well he might. "The two subjects bear no relation to one another, Digby," he explained. "You see—"

"Well, then, the difference between Determinism and conchology," said Herries.

"Really, Herries—"

"Yes, I think I should like that," assented Digby.

"But the subjects bear no relation."

"Hang it all," exclaimed Monty Lowther, joining in, "you don't mean to say that Determinism and conchology are alike?"

"Of course not, Lowther. I—"

"Then, why can't you explain the difference?"

"You see—"

Blake came along the passage and bestowed a wink upon his chums. Digby's interest in Determinism ceased as suddenly as it had arisen.

"It's all right!" he exclaimed. "You've made it quite clear, Skimmy. You can buzz off!"

"But I haven't said a word."

"Better go and get the telescope while you've got a chance," said Blake. "I saw old Schneider in the upper passage."

"Dear me! Perhaps I had better."

And Skimpole hurried off. The chums of the Fourth burst into a roar.

"What's the joke?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Oh, it's too good!" grinned Blake. "Come into the study and watch for Skimmy. He's going to the old tower with Schneider's telescope to survey the haunted mill."

"Yes, he told us so," said Tom Merry, as he went upstairs with Blake. "But what—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I know it's funny—Skimpole's always funny—but why—"

"Why this thussness?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"Only I've blacked the lens at the end, and Skimpole won't be able to see anything but darkness!" grinned Blake. The Terrible Three went off into a roar.

"He won't know what's the matter," Blake chuckled. "He's so scientific that he never thinks of looking at anything directly under his nose. Nothing short of a tremendous theory will satisfy him. I want to hear him explain why he can't see the mill through the telescope."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I hope Schneider won't catch him," said Blake feelingly. "It would spoil one of the best jokes of the term."

The juniors crammed the study window to watch for the scientific youth to pass. As Blake said, Skimpole had an airy contempt for any detail under his nose, and was never satisfied with anything less than a soaring scientific theory to account for the simplest happening. That, Skimpole thought, proved that he was going to be a very famous and prominent scientific man when he grew up. Perhaps he was right.

The juniors watched eagerly.

They were not disappointed. Herr Schneider had not caught the borrower in his study. A few minutes later Skimpole passed the window with a huge telescope under his arm.

CHAPTER 11.

A Scientific Discovery!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors sent a roar of laughter after the unconscious Skimpole.

That scientific youth did not hear it, or, if he heard it, like the famous gladiator, he heeded it not.

He marched on his way with the big telescope.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove," Arthur Augustus remarked, "I shall be really interested to hear what fearful discoveries Skimpole makes!"

The juniors strolled down into the quadrangle to look for Skimpole. But he did not appear, and, getting impatient, they entered the old tower, and ascended to the top of the spiral stair to look for him.

They found him with the telescope lodged upon a broken casement, and his eye at the end of it, and a decidedly puzzled expression upon his face.

He did not look round as they came up.

Tom Merry gave him a tap on the shoulder.

Skimpole started, and his nose knocked against the rim of the telescope, and he uttered an exclamation:

"Ow!"

"Sorry!" grinned Tom Merry. "We were getting anxious. Have you made any discoveries yet?"

"Dear me!"

"Have you seen the coiners at work?"

"Or the giddy burglars burgling?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I have made a most astounding discovery," said Skimpole, blinking at them through his spectacles—"a discovery which will, I think, cause some sensation in the scientific world!"

"Eh?"

"An amazing discovery!"

"My hat!"

"Bai Jove!"

Skimpole waved his hand towards the sky.

"Look!" he exclaimed.

The juniors looked. The sky was very clear and bright and sunny, and it had all the promise of being a very pleasant afternoon.

"Well?" said Blake. "We looked."

"What do you see?"

"See! The sky," said Blake, in astonishment. "Some clouds, some fellows, and a silly ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, Blake, that is not what I meant. I mean, you observe that the sky is bright and the sun is shining, do you not?"

"Yes," said Blake sarcastically. "And all was calm and bright."

"Well," said Skimpole, "as soon as you look through this telescope all that vanishes."

"What?"

"It is a fact. In the distance there is no daylight and no sunshine. It is amazing. Such a phenomenon has never, I believe, been known to occur before. In the distance, over the wood, it is impossible to make out a single object!"

"Amazing!"

"It is truly amazing! I have turned the telescope in various directions, but the result is the same. It is amazing—astounding. This occurrence will take its place in the list of the most astonishing of natural phenomena. I have been trying to think out the cause."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I cannot see any reason for laughter. I shall write a long account of this amazing occurrence, and send it to the editor of 'Simple Science.' I shall also send an account to Professor Mustycrust, the famous meteorologist. I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, you know—"

"Oh, come on!" said Tom Merry, almost exploding. "Get on with the letters, Skimmy. We shall like to see them in print."

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"If you like, Merry, I will write a long account also for the 'Weekly,' and you can leave out your usual editorial article to make room for it."

"Thanks awfully!"

"Not at all. I should be very pleased."

"But I shouldn't," grinned Tom Merry. "Keep it all for Professor Mustycrust—"

And the juniors departed, laughing. Skimpole could not understand their merriment. He resumed his scientific observations.

It was half an hour later that Skimpole, filled with suppressed excitement, and without a doubt of the reality of his wonderful discovery, descended from the tower with the telescope under his arm. In the interest of the amazing discovery he had forgotten all about the haunted mill and his original object in ascending the tower with the German master's telescope.

He made his way to the German master's study to return the instrument to its place.

The door was half open, and the scientific genius of the Shell blinked in without seeing that Herr Schneider was there.

He entered, and laid the telescope on the table.

"Mein Gott!"

Skimpole started. There was Herr Schneider standing on the hearthrug regarding him.

The genius of the Shell blinked at him.

"H'm! Excuse me, sir."

"It is tat you haf taken mein telescope, after!" exclaimed Herr Schneider.

"I borrowed it, sir."

"Mitout asking for te permission, ain't it?"

"You see, sir—"

"You was a young rascal, Skimpole."

The herr picked up the telescope, drew it out, and tested it at the window. He looked very puzzled.

"Mein gootness! I can see nottings."

"I've made a most interesting discovery, sir," said Skimpole. "Owing to exhalations from the woods—"

"You haf damaged tat telescope."

"Not at all, sir. I—"

"Mein gootness! It is inked ofer to glass!"

Skimpole jumped.

"What, sir?"

"Te glass is blacked ofer," said Herr Schneider, examining the telescope, which the truly scientific Skimpole had never thought of doing. "Mein gootness!"

"Oh!"

"No vunder tat I see nottings. Skimpole, you will take fifty lines in German, and if you borrows tat telescope again I canes you."

"But, sir—"

"You may go."

And Skimpole went.

He met Tom Merry in the quad, with his friends, just going over to the New House to call for Figgins & Co. He gave them a reproachful look.

"Made any more amazing discoveries?" asked Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, you fellows—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was a trick," said Skimpole. "Herr Schneider has discovered it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you going to write to Professor Mustycrust about it?" asked Monty Lowther; and the juniors gave a fresh yell.

Skimpole blinked at them.

"Certainly not! I shall take my volume of Dr. Spoofem's wonderful work and spend the afternoon in study," he said.

"Hope you'll enjoy it," said Blake, with a shudder.

"Good-bye!"

And the laughing juniors went on to the New House.

CHAPTER 12.

An Unexpected Capture!

FIGGINS & Co. were perfectly willing to join in the expedition to the old mill. There was no possibility of cricket that afternoon, the ground being in too bad a state, and the expedition would nicely fill up the time, Figgins said.

Figgins inquired with apparent solicitude whether Gussy had seen any more ghosts—a question that very nearly led to war.

D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and surveyed the New House leader disdainfully.

"I wegard that wemark as wotten," he said. "Pway let the subject drop, deah boy. I should be sowwy to in-

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tewwupt the harmony of the aftahnoon by administahing a feahful thwashin' to any gentleman pwesent, but—"

"This way!" said Blake.

"You are intewwuptin' me, Blake."

"I know that, Gussy."

"I decline to be intewwupted. I am pointin' out to Figgins—"

"Rats!"

"If you say wats to me, Blake—"

"Well, I do, and many of 'em."

"Oh, come on," said Tom Merry. "Don't you Fourth Form kids begin to quarrel, you know."

"Fourth Form what?"

"Kids. Ahem, I mean cads," said Tom Merry gracefully.

"Come on!"

And they came on.

"Upon the whole," Arthur Augustus remarked, in a thoughtful way, as they went out of the gates, "upon the whole, I will not thwash Figgins this aftahnoon."

"Thanks!" said Figgins.

"It bein' undahstood, howevah, that he is only let off for the sake of general harmony," said D'Arcy.

"I am sure Figgins feels very much relieved," said Tom Merry. "There is no time for him to go down on his knees now, but—"

"Pway don't wot, deah boy. I am in a vewy wuffed state of tempah. These twousahs do not fit me."

"Go hon!"

"And the waistcoat is wathah tight."

"Horrid!"

"I believe you are wottin'. you wottah, but as a mattah of fact it is vewy howwid. It is uncomfy. My clothes have not turned up yet."

"Clothes!" said Kerr.

"Yaas, wathah! My clothes were abstwacted last night by some feahful wottah, and I have not found them yet. I am weawin' bowwowed clothes."

"Beastly!" said Figgins. "Have you any idea who collared the duds?"

D'Arcy looked at him through his eyeglass.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Blake, I suppose?" said Figgins innocently.

"Certainly not."

"Dear me! Whom could it have been?"

"I wathah think you know, Figgy."

"H'm! Perhaps you walked in your sleep and did it yourself. You did walk in your sleep once, you know."

"Pray don't be an ass. All the boxes and things were taken away, and it happened before I went to bed."

Figgins shook his head.

"Then it's a giddy mystery."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Grammar School cads!"

The subject of the missing clothes was dropped at once.

Gordon Gay, Frank Monk, Lane, and Carboy had just appeared from an adjoining lane. They halted at the sight of the St. Jim's juniors.

Blake's eye glimmered.

"Come on!" he said. "They bumped us last night, and one good turn deserves another."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The St. Jim's juniors advanced.

The Grammarians promptly retreated. There were eleven of the Saints, and Gordon Gay & Co. had no wish to tackle such odds.

"Stop!" shouted Blake.

Gay laughed.

"Some other afternoon," he called back.

"Buck up, deah boys!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "Wun like anythin'!"

"Hold on!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Hold on, I say!" repeated Tom Merry. "We came out here to explore the old mill, not for a row with the Grammarians. Let 'em go!"

"But, weally—"

Gordon Gay & Co. were already going at a good speed. But they did not go far. They stopped in a clump of trees to watch.

Gordon Gay winked knowingly at his comrades.

"Why don't they follow us?" he said.

Frank Monk shook his head.

"Blessed if I know!" he said.

"Well, I know!" said Gay impressively.

"What is it?"

"There's something on—and we're jolly well on, too!" said Gordon Gay. "There's no cricket this afternoon, and we may be able to jape them, as we did Gussy. Ha, ha, ha!"



"Look out!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, as the juniors proceeded along the passage with all Gussey's possessions. But it was too late. Kangaroo bumped into the wall with his big burden. Crash! Next moment the box was on the floor. The lid burst open and the contents poured out over the linoleum, with Kangaroo sprawling over them.

And the Grammar School youths echoed:

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co., having lost sight of the Grammarians, moved towards the mill.

Tom Merry's brow was very thoughtful.

He glanced round and up and down many times, and at last Arthur Augustus took him to task.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, you seem to be in quite a fluttah," he remarked. "What is the mattah with you?"

"I'm thinking of the Grammar School cads."

"But they're gone."

"I'm not so sure about that."

Arthur Augustus jammed his eyeglass a little more tightly into his eye and surveyed the landscape through it. Then he shook his head, and the monocle dropped out.

"I cannot see them, Tom Mewwy."

"Did you expect them to be as conspicuous as the wind-mill?" said Tom Merry sarcastically. "They've trained as Boy Scouts, as well as ourselves, and they're quite up to the game. I think very likely they're trailing us to see what we're up to."

"Weally—"

"Listen!"

There was a rustle in the thickets beside the path the juniors were following. They stopped abruptly, and exchanged glances.

"Grammar School cads!" whispered Figgins.

Tom Merry nodded.

"What-ho! Collar them! We'll give them a jolly good bumping, and they won't do any more tracking this afternoon."

"Good egg!"

And the juniors rushed into the thickets, and laid violent hands upon a fellow who was walking there, reading a large book as he walked, and dragged him out. Then there was a yell of astonishment:

"Skimpole!"

CHAPTER 13.

Skimpole Keeps Watch!

IT was Herbert Skimpole! The juniors had collared him too quickly to see who it was before they dragged him out.

Skimpole sat up in the grass, his spectacles sliding down his nose, and his book beside him, in great amazement.

"Dear me!" he spluttered.

"Skimpole!"

"The ass!"

"Really, you have startled me!" exclaimed Skimpole, rubbing his bumpy forehead. "You have interrupted me, too, in the midst of a very interesting chapter. I will read it out to you, if you like."

"That you jolly well won't!"

Skimpole adjusted his spectacles.

"Yes, I will, with pleasure. I think it will do you good. Ah, here is the place! 'The number of—' Yow!"

Blake kicked the book out of Skimpole's hands.

The genius of the Shell blinked at him.

"Really, Blake, I cannot help regarding that action as almost rude. The question of—"

"Drop it!" roared Tom Merry. "Do you think we want that rubbish on a half-holiday?"

"But it is a very serious matter, and—"

"Chuck it!"

"Oh, very well; but—"

"What do you mean by tramping about and pretending to be a Grammarian?" demanded Blake indignantly.

"Yaas, wathah! What do you mean by it, Skimmay?"

Skimpole looked bewildered.

"But I did not—"

"We took you for one, you ass!"

"Oh, I see! But that was not my fault. I was not—"

"Do you mean to say it was our fault?" demanded Kangaroo.

"Er—no! But, really—"

"Well, bury that rotten book!" cried Tom Merry. "Come on, you chaps, and let's get to the mill. We're wasting time."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Skimpole put the book under his arm.

"You are going to the old mill now?" he asked. "I will come with you. I have a great desire to elucidate the mystery of the mill, you know. I am convinced that it is the den of a gang of coiners."

"More likely a nest of coiners," said Blake, with a shake of the head.

"Really, Blake, it is quite the same thing. I will explain to you—"

"No, you won't! Shut up!"

And Skimpole blinked and shook his head, and joined the party.

Tom Merry kept a keen eye open as he came out of the wood into the field towards the mill. For a moment he thought he caught a glimpse of a Grammarian cap in the distance, but he was not sure.

"I rather think those bounders are watching us," he said. "It would be no joke to get into the mill, and have a horde

YOU'RE TELLING ME!



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Conductor (to passenger who has his arms extended):

"Fares, please!"

Passenger: "You'll find it in my right coat pocket."

Conductor: "Is there anything wrong with your arms, sir?"

Passenger: "No; this is the size of the pane of glass I'm going to buy for my window!"

of Grammarians follow us there and corner us. That would be just one of Gordon Gay's little jokes."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We'll keep watch for 'em, and flag-wag if they show up," said Figgins, who was one of the keenest of Boy Scouts at St. Jim's. "Let's make the flags up now, and we can signal from a distance."

"Good egg!"

"You know how to signal, Skimmy, of course?"

Skimpole nodded.

"Certainly, Blake. I have practised—and, indeed, I consider myself that I ought to be scoutmaster. However—"

"However, cheese it!"

"Really, Blake!"

"There are some straight sticks here that will do for the flags," said Tom Merry. "Now, then, we'll go yonder on the hill, and Skimpole can stay here and watch for the bounders. If they show up, he can signal to us on the hill, and we can pass it on to you chaps at the mill."

"Good enough!"

"You understand, Skimmy?"

"Perfectly."

"Don't go to sleep, you know."

"Really, Merry—"

"We'll light a camp-fire on the hill. That will draw the Grammar School cads off the scent, and keep them away from the mill."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The Terrible Three took up their post on the high ascent. Blake and the rest went on to the mill, leaving Skimpole to keep watch on the grassy bank by the wood.

Tom Merry swept the countryside with his eye from the top of the acclivity.

He could see nothing of the Grammarians.

But it would be quite possible for them to creep out of the wood and keep under cover on the track of Blake & Co., if they succeeded in passing Skimpole.

Lowther built a camp-fire, and lighted it, and smoke rose in a thick cloud—a sufficient signal to the Grammarians if they were near.

Tom Merry stood with the flags in his hand, ready to signal if the enemy appeared.

Blake & Co. were at the mill now.

Tom Merry waited.

He began to think that his suspicions had been ill-founded, and that Frank Monk and his comrades were really gone.

"They've given it up!" yawned Manners, who was reclining by the fire, for the wind was very sharp on the hill.

"Wait a bit."

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"They'll be exploring the mill and unearthing all the giddy ghosts without us!"

"They won't find anything," said Monty Lowther. "It was somebody playing a trick on Gussy last night, of course, but he's not there now."

"Quite so."

Tom Merry wrinkled his brow.

"I told Skimpole to signal to us in ten minutes, anyway, whether they show up or not!" he exclaimed.

"And he hasn't?"

"No."

"Then they haven't passed, and—"

"And Skimmy's forgotten all about it!" grinned Lowther.

Tom Merry frowned.

"The ass! I wonder what he's doing?"

Tom Merry would have frowned still more if he could have seen Herbert Skimpole at that moment.

The genius of the Shell had, as Lowther suggested, forgotten the rather important fact that he was on the watch, or supposed to be on the watch. He had laid down the flags, and was sitting with his book open, deeply engrossed in its pages.

When Skimpole was on his favourite subject he was blind and deaf to everything else.

Four figures came stealing out of the wood, and Skimpole never observed them. They grinned at one another, and stole quietly past, and disappeared into the belt of thickets winding round the base of the hill towards the haunted mill.

If Skimpole had looked up from his book he would not have seen them now.

But he did not look up.

He did not take his eyes from the page till about ten minutes later, when a hand grasped him by the shoulder and shook him, and an excited voice bawled in his ear:

"You frabjous ass!"

Skimpole jumped up, and his spectacles slid down his nose.

"Oh, oh! Dear me! You startled me, Merry!"

Tom Merry glanced at him wrathfully.

"You fearful ass!"

"Really, Merry—"

"Is this how you keep watch?"

"K-keep watch?" stammered Skimpole.

"Yes, ass!"

"I—I—I think I must have forgotten," said Skimpole. "I'm sorry; but I'm deeply interested in a very important question whether the human race originated in a speck of seaweed floating in a primeval sea—"

"You chump!"

"Or in a fragment of rotten fruit in the sun, on the banks of some river, probably the Nile or Euphrates—"

"Have you seen the Grammarians?" roared Tom Merry.

"Eh?"

"The Grammar School cads! Have they been this way?"

"I think not. I have not seen them. But never mind these trivial matters, Merry. Have you ever reflected upon that most important question whether the human race originated in a speck—"

Skimpole got no further.

Tom Merry seized his huge volume and smote him with it—smote him forcibly.

"Ow!" roared Skimpole. "Yah! Ow! Oh! Really, Merry—"

And he ran for his life.

Tom Merry hurled the valuable volume of Dr. Spoofem after him, and then returned to his comrades, somewhat relieved in his feelings.

CHAPTER 14.

No Coiners!

TOM MERRY and his chums reached the mill. Skimpole had taken a hurried departure, deciding upon the whole that he would not remain.

Skimpole had not found his book upon Determinism heavy before, but it had felt decidedly heavy when laid energetically across his shoulders. Skimpole carried his book off, determined to leave the gang—or nest—of coiners to themselves, and devote himself to the study of social problems.

Meanwhile, the Terrible Three reached the mill, and found Blake & Co. waiting for them.

"Well?" said Blake.

"Well?" said Tom Merry.

"Seen the Grammarians?"

"No."

"Why didn't you signal?"

"Because Skimmy didn't."

"And why didn't Skimmy?" demanded Blake.
Tom Merry laughed.
"I found him reading his rotten book. He had forgotten all about the flag-wagging. But it's all right—I haven't seen hair or hide of the Grammar School cads."
"They may be hanging about all the same."
"Well, we'll keep our eyes open," said Figgins. "We don't want to spend the whole day watching for them. We haven't been into the mill yet—waiting here for blessed signals that didn't come."
"Well, it was Skimmy's fault. Let's get in," said Tom Merry.
"Pway hold on a moment, deah boys!"
"Rats!"
"It may be dangerous," said D'Arcy. "The coinahs may have wevovahs, you know, and I believe coinahs, as a wule, are vewy desepwate chawactahs!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Weally, deah boys—"
"Gussy's right," said Monty Lowther. "Let him go in first, and his face will paralyse them, and—"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
The juniors crowded into the deserted mill.
In the daytime shafts of sunlight fell into the old, musty place, and lighted up the dust and dirt and cobwebs.
There was certainly no trace—in the lower apartments, at least—of a den of coiners. No one but Gussy, as a matter of fact, expected to find anything of the sort. The general theory was that someone had played ghost the previous evening to scare the swell of St. Jim's—in which he had certainly succeeded.
"It's all serene," said Figgins. "No coiners here."
"No escaped convicts or fugitives from justice," said Blake, in a disappointed tone. "It's really too bad of Gussy to feed us up with false hopes like this!"
"Weally, Blake—"
"There may be a murderer or two in the top room," said Monty Lowther.
"Weally, Lowthah—"
"Let's go and see."
The juniors ascended the wooden stair.
But the room above, though dustier and cobwebbier, so to speak, was just as innocent of lurking malefactors of any kind.
D'Arcy adjusted his eyeglass and looked about him, eager for clues. But the keenest amateur detective could not have discovered any clues there. There were footprints in the dust, certainly, but that did not prove anything. Although the mill was deserted, it was sometimes visited, and there was a good deal of lumber there—old boxes and sacks and ropes, and so on.
Even D'Arcy had to admit that, if the mill was the den of a gang of coiners, those gentlemen must have gone out to pay an afternoon call elsewhere.
"Of course, they may be out," he remarked diffidently.
"Gone out cycling," suggested Kangaroo; "or playing a cricket match, perhaps—Coiners v. Burglars, or something of that sort."
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Weally, you know—"
"We shall have to give up the coiners," said Kerr. "I knew all along, of course, that it was only a joke on Gussy, and I suppose you did. But—"
"Weally, Kerr—"
"What's Fatty thinking of?" demanded Blake, noticing a deep and thoughtful wrinkle upon the brow of the Falstaff of the New House. "Have you got a theory, Fatty?"
Fatty started out of a reverie.
"Eh?" he murmured.
"Have you thought it out?"
"Yes," said Fatty Wynn.
"And you've come to a clear idea on the subject—eh?"
"Yes."
"Then I'd like to hear it!" exclaimed Tom Merry.
"What do you think, Fatty?"
"I think it would be better to have it in the study."
"What?"
"In the study."
"Eh?"
"What on earth are you blabbing about, Fatty?" asked Figgins. "Wake up!"
"I was talking about tea," said Fatty Wynn, looking surprised. "Blake asked me if I had thought the matter out, didn't he?"
"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.
"I don't see the joke."
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Blessed if I see where the laugh comes in! By the way, I'm getting hungry now. I do get hungry this time of the year, somehow. I suppose you haven't any milk chocolate about you, Figgy?"

Figgins grinned, and passed his chum a bar of milk chocolate. He often carried little supplies like that for Fatty.
"About the coiners, burglars, convicts, and murderers—I suppose we shall have to give them up," said Tom Merry. "And as for the practical joker who played ghost last evening, I don't see how we're to spot him. I—"
"Hullo!"
"What is it?"
"Look here!" said Kangaroo.
The Cornstalk was looking out of the window. The juniors crowded there with him, but only a few of them could find room to look out. But they saw the four figures that had come into view.
"Grammar School cads!"
"Phew!"
"They're here, then!"
"Gay, Monk, Lane, and Carboy," said Tom Merry. "Collar them if they come in, that's all. I've got a wheeze."
"Good!"
Three or four of the juniors rushed down the wooden stairs, and Tom Merry turned to the little window again, with a glimmer of fun in his eyes.
Gordon Gay and Frank Monk had gone slowly round the mill. They could see nothing of the St. Jim's juniors, but they believed they were there. They meant to scout very carefully before they ventured into the building. Carboy and Lane stood where Kangaroo had first sighted them, looking towards the mill, and gradually approaching it. They were now directly under the window.
Tom Merry drew back quickly to escape observation.
"The sacks!" he said.
There was a pile of old sacks in a corner.
"Give me the sack, Gussy!"
"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"
"Buck up, ass!"
"I refuse to be called an ass, Tom Mewwy. As for givin' you the sack, I will do that willingly, and if the chaps care to elect me as leadah in your place, I will do my vewy best to—"
"You utter ass—"
"Weally, you know—"
"The sacks! Flour sacks, you chump!"
"Oh, I see!"
"Time you did! Buck up!"
The sacks were handed to Tom Merry at the window.
He opened one of them out, and leaned from the window with it in his hand. Figgins grinned, and, taking a sheet of paper, scrawled on it in big letters, and attached it to a spring. The two Grammarians below did not look up. They were waiting for their leader to return, and watching the door of the mill.
"Go it!" murmured Blake.
"Quiet!"
"Go it, before they look up!"
And Tom Merry grinned and "went it."

CHAPTER 15. Light at Last!

THE Grammarians were standing close together, chatting, while they waited for Gordon Gay to reappear. They had not the slightest uneasiness as to danger from above, and did not look up.
Suddenly there was a whiz in the air.
"Hullo!"
"What's that?"
"Ow!"

(Continued on the next page.)



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Lane staggered back. The sack had fallen fairly upon his head, and it enveloped him.

The daylight was suddenly shut out, and for the moment Lane did not realise what had happened as he staggered and struggled in the sack.

"My hat!" gasped Carboy.

He made a backward movement, but a second sack was swooping down, and it caught him fairly over the head.

The next moment he was rolling on the ground, entangled in the sack.

"Ow!"

"Oh!"

"Groo!"

"Yaroo!"

Such were the mysterious noises proceeding from the interior of the dusty and floury sacks, that greeted the ears of Monk and Gay as they came running round the mill. From the window swung the string, with Figgins' message floating on it:

"Sold Again!"

Tom Merry gave a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha! Sold again, my sons! Ha, ha, ha!"

And from the door of the mill where Manners and Lowther were looking out came another burst of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My hat!" ejaculated Frank Monk. "What the—how the— Ha, ha, ha!"

He laughed, too; he couldn't help it. Carboy extracted a red and angry face, and a very dusty and floury head from the sack, and glared at Monk and Gordon Gay.

"Groo-hoo! You chumps!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm nearly suffocated! Groogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Carboy dragged the sack off. Lane was still struggling with his, and Gordon Gay went to his assistance, laughing till the tears ran down his cheeks.

There was a sudden rush of juniors from the doorway of the mill.

Tom Merry & Co. surrounded the Grammarians just as Lane succeeded in extracting himself from the dusty sack. The juniors yelled with laughter.

"Pax!" exclaimed Frank Monk. "You've done us this time, and enough's as good as a feast. What the dickens are you doing here? Is it a feed?"

"A feed—no!"

"Then what's the little game?" asked Gordon Gay. "We've been tracking you down because we thought there was something on. I thought you had come to the mill, but I couldn't see you. What—"

"We're looking for coiners," explained Tom Merry.

"For what?"

"Coiners."

"You see, Gussy had a fancy that there was a nest of coiners in the mill," explained Blake. "So we came to rout them out. Somebody played ghost when he was here yesterday, and—and—and— My only hat! I jolly well know who it was!"

The Grammarians fairly shrieked.

"Coiners!" gasped Gordon Gay. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Gay—"

"I know who it was, by Jove!"

"Weally, Blake, if you know who it was, I twust you will acquaint me, so that I can give him a feahful thwashin'," said D'Arcy, in his most stately way.

"We met these bounders as we came to the mill in the rain," said Blake. "Of course, they had been taking shelter there."

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

"And then, when Gussy came in, they japed him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy's face was a study.

Gordon Gay leaned against the mill and laughed till the tears streamed down his face.

"Oh, my hat!" he gasped. "And he thought it was coiners. Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy put up his eyeglass and surveyed Gordon Gay through it.

"Gay, I wegard you as a wottah! Of course, it did not

occur to me that there might be Gwammah School cads in the mill. I nevah thought of that."

"We got into the mill out of the rain," said Gordon Gay, in a weak and gasping voice. "We saw Gussy coming, and we got upstairs to jape him. He's such a splendid subject for japing. We dragged a bench about, and groaned on our top notes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And scared him out of the mill!"

"I was not scared out of the mill. I wetiahed fwm the place."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We thought he would guess afterwards that it wasn't a real ghost," gasped Gordon Gay. "But coiners— Ha, ha, ha! Coiners! My hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Grammarians went off into a fresh paroxysm. Arthur Augustus surveyed them with chilling dignity, while his comrades roared.

"Weally, you Gwammah School wottahs, I wegard you as wotten beasts, you know. Will you have the kindness to hold my jacket, Blake, while I give Gay a feahful thwashin'?"

"Not much."

"Will you hold my jacket, Tom Mewwy?"

"I'll hold your hands," smiled Tom Merry. "We've made it pax, my sons!"

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that! I will thwash you upon some othah occasion, Gordon Gay."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The four Grammarians walked away slowly, stopping every minute or two to give vent to a fresh yell of laughter.

Arthur Augustus turned with an air of great dignity to his grinning companions. If their lives had depended upon it, they could not have helped laughing at this ridiculous explanation of the mystery of the mill.

"I think we may as well get back to St. Jim's, deah boys. It is gettin' neah tea-time!" said Arthur Augustus stiffly.

"What-ho!" said Fatty Wynn, with great cordiality.

And the juniors walked back to the school.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy held his nose very high in the air. The mystery of the mill had been cleared up, but not in a way quite to his satisfaction.

Fatty Wynn was very silent, too. He was thinking something out. As they entered the gates of the school the fat Fourth Former tapped Arthur Augustus upon the arm.

"I've got a good idea, D'Arcy," he remarked.

"Weally, Wynn—"

"You haven't found your boxes yet?"

"No."

"And you're short of clothes?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's rotten, isn't it?"

"Feahfully wotten, deah boy."

"Well, do you know," said Fatty Wynn, with a mysterious look, "I really think I could help you find those boxes."

D'Arcy looked at him.

"My belief is that somebody has hidden them just for a joke," went on Fatty Wynn.

"Yaas, wathah! I think so myself," said D'Arcy meaningly. "Pwobably some New House wottah!"

Fatty Wynn did not appear to hear that remark.

"Suppose I help you find them," he said. "It's awful to think of you going about without any clothes—I mean, in somebody else's clothes, of course!"

"I should be vewy glad of your assistance, Wynn."

"Then I'll help you after tea."

"Thank you vewy much!"

"I don't know when we shall get tea, though," Fatty remarked thoughtfully. "You see, we're down on the rocks, and—"

D'Arcy grinned.

He discerned Fatty Wynn's drift at last.

He paused. They were passing the school tuckshop.

"Come in, deah boy," he said.

Never had Fatty Wynn accepted an invitation with such alacrity as he showed in accepting that one. An hour later Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was in possession of his missing wardrobe once more, and was easy upon that score. But it was some time before he was allowed to forget the nest of coiners and the mystery of the mill.

THE END.

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When Justin B. Farman, of St. Frank's, learns that strange things are happening on the ranch he has inherited, he goes out to Arizona to investigate, taking with him Nipper, Handforth & Co., Willy, and Archie Glen-thorne. He discovers that a band of mysterious horse-men known as the Black Riders are terrorising Ghost River Valley, in which his ranch lies. After several adventures against the Riders, Nipper and Willy are captured. The five remaining schoolboys then visit Mesa Matt, an eccentric old gold prospector, who has information to impart. They are held up by Black Riders, but Mesa Matt comes to their rescue. "Stick up your hands!" he orders—and his voice is the voice of Nelson Lee!

Nelson Lee Takes a Hand!

NELSON LEE!
The St. Frank's boys were too well acquainted with the great detective's voice to have made any mistake. But they had no time to express their joy and amazement. The six Black Riders, although the "drop" was on them, were still highly dangerous. "Get back, you seum!" rapped out the supposed Mesa Matt. "Back against that wall!"

"Plug the old fool!" yelled the man whose guns had been taken.

One of his companions made a move; his gun seemed to leap into his hand by magic. But—crack! It was one of Mesa Matt's guns which spoke. There was a clatter, and the Black Rider's pistol whirled across the floor. The man himself screamed with agony.

"Anybody else feel like making trouble?" came a curt inquiry. "Next time I'll aim for the man—not the gun!"

With one accord the Black Riders—now thoroughly convinced that they were up against death if they played any tricks—shot their hands towards the shack's rafters.

"That's better," said the calm, cultured voice of Nelson Lee. "Get back against that wall! Boys, grab their guns, and be careful!"

"You said a mouthful!" gurgled Justin B. Farman. "My only sainted aunt," shouted Handforth. "Are we really awake?"

They took no chances. Diving low, so that their bodies should not intervene between Lee's guns and the enemy, they took the wicked pistols from the holsters at the men's hips. At Lee's orders the weapons were cast into a far corner, well out of reach. The disarmed men now stood

in a line back to the wall—a strange-looking sextet in their black garb and black hoods.

The bandits were staggered, for this was the first time that any man had dared to oppose them. They were bewildered, too, for they could not understand the extraordinary change in the old man whom they had regarded as harmless.

"Just take it easy, and you won't be hurt," continued Mesa Matt, in that voice which was so out of keeping with his appearance. "Better understand that if you make any sudden move I'll shoot. Boys, take them one by one and rope them up!"

"What-ho! Absolutely!" chortled Archie Glen-thorne. "It's as good as done, old thing!"

The crooks knew that they were helpless, and they were obliged to suffer the indignity. There was plenty of rope handy, and man after man was rendered helpless. His arms were bound tightly to his sides. Not until the last black-garbed figure had been so treated did Mesa Matt lower his guns.

"Shall we take their hoods off?" asked Handforth eagerly.

"Not yet; there's no hurry!" said Nelson Lee. "Don't be afraid to address me by name if you want to. The secret is out now and our captives will never have the chance of taking the information back to their leader."

"Hurrah!" yelled Handforth. "By George! We never dreamed it was you, Mr. Lee!"

"Lee!" snarled the leader of the Black Riders. "Jumpin' lizards! Did ye get that, boys? It's Nelson Lee, the English tee!"

"You flatter me," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "I had no idea that my name would occasion such consternation."

"Gosh, sir, it's almost beyond belief!" said Farman, staring. "Even now, while I'm looking at you, I can't credit that you're not Mesa Matt! It's the most wonderful get-up I've ever seen!"

"On the contrary, Farman, the impersonation was quite easy," said the great detective. "Old Matt's distinctive characteristics made it easy for me to adopt the disguise."

"But what does it all mean, sir?" asked Church. "Why are you here—masquerading as that old prospector?"

"I'll tell you later, my boy," replied Lee. "I did not expect this dramatic turn; but perhaps it is just as well, for we have captured six of the enemy. And that's not bad, is it? I asked you to come here because I wanted to talk to you privately. As things have turned out we

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had better go to the ranch where, no doubt, we can find comfortable accommodation for our friends. You see, they thought they had an eccentric old man to deal with, and that is where I had a big advantage."

"Kinder fancy yourself, smart guy, don't you?" snarled one of the prisoners. "Mebbe you'll quit braggin' when Diamond Eye gets the low-down on this business."

"Unfortunately for you, my friends, I fancy that Diamond Eye will never get that dope," said Nelson Lee. "For from to-night you and your companions will mysteriously disappear—just as many of your victims have disappeared. We shall leave Diamond Eye guessing, and we will see how he likes his own medicine."

"Gosh! You ain't gonna put us on the spot?" gasped one of the others.

"Not quite," replied Lee. "I'm merely going to send you into retirement."

"Best watch your step, mister!" gritted the leader, "Diamond Eye knows everything what goes on."

"But he doesn't know of this little incident," replied Lee calmly. "You six men came out here on your own initiative, and you meant to give your chief a pleasant surprise when you arrived with your schoolboy prisoners. I'm afraid I've spoilt your plans. However, I'm taking no chances."

He handed a gun to Farman.

"Keep the men covered!" he said. "If they make any move, shoot!"

"O.K., sir!" said the American boy.

Lee went out into the open. The sun had gone, and dusk was descending. Lee now pottered about in his character of Mesa Matt. Down in the canyon, behind a mass of rocks, he found the Black Riders' horses. He was soon satisfied that there were no other bandits in the vicinity. Deeming their work easy, they had rushed the shack, leaving nobody on the watch.

"All right, boys, bring them out!" called Lee, as he returned to the shack. "We're going to move fast now."

The prisoners in single file were marched down the grassy slope from the shack. They were so helpless that they had to be helped on to their horses. In order to make assurance doubly sure, their feet were bound to their stirrups. The boys mounted their own horses, and Lee brought a fine steed out from a rocky crevice of the canyon.

"To the ranch!" he said briefly.

Big Jim Farman was desperate.

"Best ride right into town, Square-Deal, and get help," he said hoarsely.

"Just what I was thinkin', boss," said the foreman.

"Kyle's Vigilantes won't be out here for another hour or two," continued the big ranchman. "This is getting to be an absolute nightmare. Ed and Sam gone—and now my own son and the rest of the kids."

"Beats me," said Square-Deal, scratching his head.

"They was here not so long ago; but I guess they must have ridden off while I was talkin' with you indoors."

"But why did they go?" demanded Mr. Farman. "Here it is, nearly dark, and there's no sign of them. After all my warnings, too! There's a curse on this doggone ranch—"

He broke off as two cowboys came rushing round the ranch-house. One was sort and stumpy and bald-headed; the other was raw-boned and lanky. In short, Loco Jack and Two-Gun Milligan.

"Say, boss, ther's a bunch of horsemen comin' right in!" yelled Loco Boss.

"Black Riders!" shouted the other cowboy.

Square-Deal Reeve and Big Jim grabbed for their guns. They ran round the ranch building, so that they could see across the countryside.

In the gathering darkness they saw a considerable number of riders approaching; and Mr. Farman's heart gave a leap when he recognised his son riding in advance. Handforth, too, and the other boys—

"Say! What's this, anyway?" demanded Mr. Farman, in amazement. "Some of them are Black Riders, sure enough, and—"

"Looks like the kids hev made a capture, boss," said Square-Deal. "Durn my hide! Them Black Riders is roped!"

A minute later the party came right up, and all doubts were set at rest. The five schoolboys were flushed with excitement, and with them was old Mesa Matt, of Whispering Canyon. The six other horsemen were Black Riders—and every man was helplessly bound.

"Gee-whiz! Seems like things is beginnin' to git a move on!" said Ace-High Peter, one of the other cowboys.

"What's happened?" asked Mr. Farman, his eyes blazing. "How did you get hold of these men?"

"Easy does it, pardner," said Nelson Lee, in an exact

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reproduction of Mesa Matt's wheezy voice. "Guess we've been kinder busy. Say, who's around?"

"Only the 'boys.' Why?"

"Thinkin', mebbe, ther' might be strangers from town."

"No; there's nobody at the ranch except the men you can see—we're all out here," replied Big Jim.

"Waal, I guess you can all be trusted, which makes it jake with me," said Nelson Lee. "Sorry to fool you, Mr. Farman, but I can't take any chances," he added, in a changed voice. "The sooner we get these men hidden away, the better."

Big Jim Farman stood staring with his mouth agape.

"Bu—but I don't get it!" he ejaculated.

"Dad, don't you understand?" panted Justin. "This isn't Mesa Matt. It's Mr. Lee himself."

"What?" yelled his father.

"Sure thing," grinned Justin. "What do you know about that, boys?" he added, turning excited eyes on Ace-High Peter and the others. "We're not waiting any two weeks for Mr. Lee to get around. He's right here—and from this moment things are going to hum!"

"I'll allow they're hummin' some right now!" said Two-Gun Milligan.

"But this is wonderful!" cried Big Jim, grabbing at Lee's hand and staring incredulously into the grizzled face. "I can't believe it! Yet we've met before, Mr. Lee, and I know your voice. Have a heart and explain!"

"Just as soon as we get the prisoners under cover," promised Lee. "There are many outbuildings here—"

"We'll take no risks with the skunks!" grunted Big Jim. "Six of 'em, eh? Good work! There's a mighty fine cellar under the house. Boys, bring 'em right in."

The Black Riders were marched indoors; then they were led through a narrow doorway, and down a flight of steps. The cellar was small, but it was the very place for the purpose, for it was situated under the middle of the building; there were no windows, no gratings, and the only exit was protected by an enormously stout door.

Nelson Lee gave his orders, and the cowboys enthusiastically obeyed. One by one the Black Riders were dealt with. The first man was unroped, his black garb was stripped from him, and he was then roped up again. At last all six were exposed—six villainous-looking ruffians. Four of them were powerful men, and the other two squat and skinny.

"Waal, look who's here!" said Square-Deal Reeve. "Howdy, Jake Liskard! It don't surprise me none to see you!"

"You know the man, then?" asked Mr. Farman.

"Sure, boss," said the foreman. "Jake Liskard lit out of town six months back, after a shootin' in the saloon. A reg'lar bad man. One o' Diamond Eye's gang, huh?"

Jake Liskard cursed.

"Yeah, and when Diamond Eye knows what's happened, he'll sure get busy with you guys!" he threatened.

"Who is Diamond Eye?" demanded Mr. Farman.

"Guess you'd give a whole heap to know!" sneered the prisoner. "Waal, you can search me! Ther's not one of us boys know who Diamond Eye is—and that's straight shootin'. Our chief is too clever to make himself known to his men."

The Black Riders were badly scared. Desperate ruffians all, they knew that their supremacy was smashed at last. In spite of their helpless fury, they had a wholesome respect for this brilliant British detective who had started turning the tables so unexpectedly.

"Well, Big Jim, I have been compelled to reveal myself sooner than I intended," said Nelson Lee, when he and the others were all in the big living-room. "But perhaps it is all for the best."

The schoolboys and the cowboys stood round, eager-faced. They were hopeful—expectant.

"But it's amazing that you should have taken the place of Mesa Matt," said Mr. Farman. "How long have you been in Whispering Canyon, Mr. Lee?"

"Only for a few days," replied the detective. "You see, my case in New York unexpectedly collapsed, and, finding myself free, I decided to come out here unknown to any of you. I knew something of the facts, and I thought it would be as well, perhaps, for me to have a preliminary look round."

"Smart!" commented Big Jim. "Almighty smart!"

"I drifted about Fortune City, posing as the representative of a company which markets patent washing machines," said Lee coolly. "I was a real one-hundred-per-cent go-getting American salesman—and during my visit I was enabled to pick up quite a surprising amount of information."

"I kept my eyes well open, too. Then, after I had returned to Crag Junction, and had taken an east-bound train, I doubled back. This time I came into the valley by night—in secret. I had already met Mesa Matt, and



Crack-crack-crack! Crack-crack-crack! As the White Riders galloped by, a deadly fusillade of bullets swept upon them from both sides of Main Street. But not a horse or rider fell! They appeared to be invulnerable. On they rode triumphantly, bearing their banner with its grim warning to the leader of the Black Riders.

had learned all there was to know about him. I made my arrangements with him—for a reasonable figure—and took his place."

"And where's the old buzzard now?" asked Big Jim. "Back in Lizard Centre," replied Lee. "He's lying low—until I can give him the word to come back. Mesa Matt's all right—honest and straight. I had some difficulty in persuading him, but he was reasonable in the end. You see, I decided that Whispering Canyon was a good location; posing as Matt, I could keep my eyes open and see many things—yet the Black Riders would not be suspicious. They are all used to Mesa Matt, and take no notice of him."

"We saw a stranger to-day, sir," remarked Handforth suddenly. "He was on horseback, and we caught a glimpse of him at the top of a ridge. Any idea who he was?"

"No," replied Lee. "Probably one of Diamond Eye's look-outs. Our unknown friend has his men in all parts, in every kind of guise. That is why we must go carefully. But war is now declared, and we're going to start the game in earnest."

"Guess we'll begin by riding into town right away," said Mr. Farman, getting to his feet. "Elmer Kyle will sure be pleased to meet you, Mr. Lee. We'll take the prisoners to the lock-up—"

"No," interrupted Lee quietly.

"But, say—"

"This war is ours," continued the detective. "What will happen if we make it openly known that we have taken six of the Black Riders? Diamond Eye and the rest of his gang will know just where they are—and much of our advantage will be wasted. Far better to leave Diamond Eye in the dark. We'll leave everybody in the dark. It gives us the whip-hand, Big Jim."

"Say, that's right, too," said Mr. Farman, opening his eyes wide. "Gee! You've got swell notions, Mr. Lee!"

"What about the Vigilantes, boss?" asked Square-Deal. "They'll be gettin' around soon."

"Yes, that's true," said Mr. Farman. "The mayor arranged to have some of his men out here every night—to guard us."

"Then you'll have to make an excuse, and send them back," said Lee promptly.

"But the Vigilantes are all right!" protested the rancher. "Why, Elmer Kyle has more reason to hate the Black Riders than any man in the valley."

"But can he trust every one of his men?" asked Lee shrewdly. "That's just the trouble, Jim. Even Kyle cannot tell where a traitor might lurk. Among these very Vigilantes there might be one of Diamond Eye's spies. No, we can do without them."

"Maybe you're right at that," nodded Mr. Farman. "Say, it looks like you mean to be real busy, and I'm sure set on lending a hand."

"We shall all be needed," said Lee, looking round. "Every cowboy here—yes, and you youngsters, too. This is our secret, and we know there are no spies amongst us. From this hour we go into action, and I can promise you that Ghost River Valley will receive a few surprises."

For Nelson Lee had several irons in the fire, and one or two of them were getting red-hot.

The White Riders!

DIAMOND EYE swung round in his office chair. The diamond-shaped section of chromium-plated gauze in his headgear turned upon the man who had just entered.

"Spill it!" said Diamond Eye briefly.

The man advanced towards the desk. There was a scared look on his face. This "office" was nothing but a small cave in the rocks, yet there was an expensive carpet on the floor, and the desk, the chair, and the other furniture was of the finest quality. Diamond Eye was no ordinary bandit; he believed in his comfort. On a big side table stood gold-weighting scales. Overhead hung a powerful electric lamp, which shed a brilliant light straight down upon the desk, leaving the rest of the "room" in gloom. Diamond Eye himself sat just beyond the edge of the light—and his chromium "eye" shimmered eerily.

"Guess there's nothing to spill, chief," said the man shakily. "Some of the boys have just come in, and they haven't found a thing."

A growl came from behind the black mask.

"Jake Liskard and five men went out yesterday, and nobody has seen them since!" said Diamond Eye harshly.

"Now it's morning. What's become of them mutts?" "It's a mystery, chief," said the man. "Tain't like Jake to fail to report. Maybe they found trouble some place."

"You're a swell help!" sneered Diamond Eye. "Scram, Useless!"

The man "scrammed" precipitately. He passed through a rock door, and Diamond Eye sat back in his chair, drumming his black-covered hands upon the polished mahogany arms.

He was rattled. Six of his men had vanished—and this was the first thing that had happened to disturb his sense of mastery.

A moment later another of his men entered. He was breathing hard, and the sweat was pouring from him in streams. To all appearances he was a respectable cowboy. At sight of him, Diamond Eye half-rose in his chair.

"Blazin' rattlesnakes!" he snarled. "What are you doing out here, Howson? You know I don't figure on lettin' my town men ride out into the hills!"

"I wasn't trailed, chief—and it was Al Hoskins who sent me out. Say, there's a heap of excitement in town. Most folks are nigh crazy with the things that hev happened in the night!"

"Don't yap!" snarled Diamond Eye. "What's doing in town, anyway?"

"Why, chief, folks awoke this morning to find chalked messages all over the town," said the perspiring messenger. "Gosh! I seen 'em myself—'Fear not the Black Riders! The White Riders will clean up this valley!' That's how, chief."

Diamond Eye sat absolutely motionless, giving no indication of how this news had staggered him.

"The White Riders!" he muttered at length. "What is it—some fool stunt?"

"The folks figger that it's a challenge," said the other. "Looks like the goin' won't be so easy, chief. Some of the people in town figger they saw a white horseman driving through the streets around two o'clock."

"A white horseman?"

"So they say. And he didn't make no sound," replied Howson. "A reg'lar ghost rider. Anyways, that's a heap of excitement brewin', chief."

"All right," said Diamond Eye. "Scram!"

He sat for some time, thinking hard. The news had hit him like a blow between the eyes. He could not doubt that the mysterious challenger was in earnest. At last Ghost River Valley was waking up—and it was ready to fight back.

Diamond Eye could not forget that six of his own men had gone out yesterday, and had not returned. It was a disturbing thought. Jake Liskard and five men had gone. Were the newly founded White Riders responsible? Cer-

tainly there was every appearance that this was a simple matter of two and two making four.

Coming to a sudden decision, the mystery leader of the Black Riders touched a bell-push on his desk. The summons was answered immediately.

"Bring the two kids," said Diamond Eye briefly.

Within five minutes Nipper and Willy Handforth, with thin chains on their legs, were marched in. It was early morning yet, and they had been dragged away from their rough breakfast—a breakfast consisting of tough, badly cooked beef.

"You kids know anything of the White Riders?" asked Diamond Eye abruptly.

From behind his gauze he watched the faces of the young prisoners. But both Nipper and Willy expressed nothing but puzzled surprise.

"Never heard of them," said Nipper.

"Think again!" snapped the Unknown. "Mebbe it's some fool practical joke. But if it isn't, and you kids know anything, then you'd best spill it. Last night chalked messages appeared all over Fortune City—'The White Riders are coming,' and suchlike junk."

"Great Scott!" gasped Nipper. "Perhaps my guv'nor has—"

He broke off, and his eyes were blazing with excitement.

"Waal?" came from Diamond Eye. "Go on!"

"It's nothing," said Nipper.

"Thunder! Your guv'nor, you said?" exclaimed the man in black. "Why, sure! You're the young sap who works with Lee, the detective, ain't you? So you do know something—huh?"

"I only know that Mr. Lee will come out here sooner or later—and when he does, he'll get you!" replied Nipper boldly.

"Oh, yeah?" grated Diamond Eye. "But I happen to know that Lee ain't comin' West for another two weeks—"

He broke off, catching his breath in.

"Say, mebbe it was a trick, at that!" he went on, rising to his feet. "Mebbe Lee is right here all the time! Waal, you kids know something—and I guess you're going to talk!"

He came round the desk, limping, his broad, ungainly figure looking monstrous in its black garb. With one gloved hand he seized Nipper's arm, and with a quick wrench twisted it back.

"Hi! That hurts!" said Nipper angrily.

"Sure it hurts—and it'll hurt more unless you speak!" growled his tormentor. "Now, sonny, yap it out! Just what do you know?"

"I know nothing," replied Nipper, biting his lip to prevent a cry escaping him. "You dirty coward. Bullying won't help you. I tell you I know nothing!"

Willy stood by, helpless, for the other man had stepped forward, and was holding him. Diamond Eye continued to exert the pressure on Nipper's arm, and Nipper's face had gone deathly pale.

"So you won't talk?" said Diamond Eye, at length. "Waal, mebbe it's because you know nothing—mebbe it's because you're stubborn. But I'm figgerin' you know what plans was bein' made before we grabbed you. Waal, I'll say this—you ain't yellow. You can sure take it."

He stood back, and Nipper, suddenly released, staggered. He had expected to hear his arm snap at any second, and the pain in it now was excruciating.

"You've changed a bit, Diamond Eye!" he said boldly. "Anybody might think you were scared. Yesterday you were the cock of the whole roost. Something's rattled you."

"Shut your trap!" snarled Diamond Eye. "I'll give you until to-night—just to think things over. If you don't talk then—waaf, it'll be just too bad! I'll show you what I can do in the way of real torture!"

He made a motion with his hand, and Nipper and Willy were hustled out—back to the big cavern where they were to work with the other prisoners.

It was about an hour later when Dirk Dixon, the gloomy, pessimistic sheriff, rode into Fortune City. The morning was blazingly hot, and Dirk was more than usually gloomy. He had been on a lone hunt into the hills—after a man who had done some fancy shooting in town the previous evening. Dirk was coming back empty-handed, and, as yet, he knew nothing of the general excitement.

But he soon heard plenty.

He saw plenty, too. The whole town was agog. Dirk stared as his tired horse ambled along; for on many of the half-ruined buildings he saw crudely scrawled messages—in boldly chalked capitals:

"THE WHITE RIDERS ARE COMING!"

"THE WHITE RIDERS ARE THE FRIENDS OF JUSTICE!"

"WHEN THE WHITE RIDERS STRIKE, THEY WILL STRIKE FOR FREEDOM!"



The HAUNTED ISLAND

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Mr. E. S. Brooks welcomes letters from readers. Write to him c/o The Editor, The GEM, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

WHAT is the most important topic of the day? You've probably guessed, with the first Test Match due to start next Friday! Cricket it is! Woodfull and Bradman and Grimmett and all the other Australian cricket stalwarts are in our midst, and have been doing great things, and hope to do greater things still on Friday. Well, good luck to them and our own team!

Talking of cricket brings me to a subject which I want to discuss. George A. W., of Southsea, has written me a letter in which he says: "Naturally, most of the cricket giants of St. Frank's will now be getting busy on the greensward; just as naturally, that beast Forrest will be content to slack about and sneer at the greatest of all games." But that's just where

you are wrong, George, old son. Any amount of old readers could put you right on the subject.

Bernard Forrest is certainly a cad, but he has always taken a keen interest in cricket and is no mean player. If only he could be trusted to play cleanly, Nipper would give him a chance to play in the Eleven. And because he is more or less barred, Forrest nurses a permanent grudge against the popular Junior skipper. This is the main idea behind a story which I have recently written, and in which, I think, all you old readers will be greatly interested. I have mentioned it before on this page. It's a brand new yarn, a school story pure and simple, with cricket as the central theme.

I rather think it is the very yarn so many of you faithful old readers have been urging me to write, and I have no doubt that the newer readers will be interested, too. For once, Bernard Forrest gets a real chance at cricket. And does he take advantage of it? Can a duck swim! This story of mine, entitled "The Schemer of St. Frank's!" will appear in No. 435 of the "Boys' Friend 4d. Library," which will be on sale to-morrow. Don't miss it! I'm doing all in my power to give you old readers what you have been asking for, so now it is up to you to grab this brand new St. Frank's story before it's sold out. By the way, don't forget to write to me if there are any questions you want to ask. Sorry I can't reply to S. S. B and Cyril A. and Elsie G. in this chat, as space is getting short. Thanks for your letters; I will answer them in my next chat.

EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.

"Waal, what do you know about that!" muttered the sheriff, frowning.

When he rode into Main Street he found groups of people standing about, excitedly talking. As he dismounted he was greeted by a laugh from Silas Hawkes, who owned the Plaza Hotel.

"Looks like you're gonna have help around this town, Dirk," said the hotel-keeper. "I ain't saying that help ain't needed."

"What's it all about, anyway?" asked the sheriff. "Search me!" replied Hawkes, with a shrug. "There ain't a man in town as can say what it means. Seems like these doggone notices was put up by ghosts. They just come ther in the night."

"Aw, shucks!" said the sheriff. "Guess it's some fool joke."

He sought Elmer C. Kyle; but, when questioned, the mayor was as helpless as the rest of the citizens.

"No good asking me, Dirk," he said. "White Riders! Sounds like more trouble! Black or White, I guess they're all bad!"

The sheriff eyed him very hard. "You ain't gettin' up no fool stunt with your Vigilantes, by any chance, mayor?" he asked bluntly.

Kyle laughed. "Wrong, sheriff," he replied. "I don't know a thing."

The day passed somewhat hectically; for the people of Fortune City were hourly expecting something to happen. But nothing happened. And gradually the excitement died down. Yet when night came it was undeniable that there was a strange tension in this lone, desert town. Everybody had a feeling that something was going to happen; scores of men had openly declared their intention of sitting up all night—on the off-chance of catching the mysterious chalkers at work.

It was a particularly black night, after an oppressive day. There was no moon, and the stars were hidden by high clouds. Inky blackness had shut down, and most of the streets of Fortune City did not boast illumination. Only Main Street stood out garishly, with the blazing electric lights of the saloon, the hotel, and the dance hall.

Men walked about with guns on their hips—and with hands ready to grab. Yet when action came, it arrived in an unexpected quarter.

The electric power station of Fortune City was situated right on the outskirts; and suddenly the four electricians in charge of the plant were startled to see strange white figures in the power station. They came as though from nowhere—noiselessly, mysteriously. From head to foot they were clothed in white—their feet, their hands, everything. These mysterious strangers had taken a leaf out of Diamond Eye's book, for the eyepieces in their headgear were covered with white-painted gauze, rendering them practically invisible. The figures, then, looked grotesque and phantom-like—for they appeared to be eyeless.

But they acted swiftly. The electricians had no weapons handy, and they were quickly seized and hustled into a brick store-room. The heavy door was locked upon them.

"Right!" came a thick voice from the leader of the White Riders.

He hurried to the switches, and a minute later Fortune City was plunged into darkness.

The Enchanted Horsemen!

THE Blue Star Saloon was crowded.

After dark the place was usually well patronised; but to-night more men than usual had crowded in.

For there was much to talk about. Fortune City had not been so excited for years. Nobody knew what was going to happen. Some of the inhabitants were beginning to think that the whole thing was a hoax; but there were others who were confident that more surprises were to come.

"Boys, there's nothing in it," said Elmer C. Kyle, as he stood at the bar with a number of rough honest-faced men. "I guess those notices were chalked up by some guy who's aiming to qualify for the crazy house."

"Mebbe you're right, mayor," said one of the others. "But it's doggone queer, all the same!"

"It stands to reason that there can't be anything in it," continued the mayor. "Even supposing a bunch of the boys got together, and called themselves 'White Riders,' what in hades could they do? Supposed to be up against the Black Riders, aren't they? Waal, who's gonna tell 'em where the Black Riders can be found?"

"That's true," said another man. "Kind of tough, though, if the thing peters out. I was sure hopin' for some excitement."

"There'll be plenty if any of the boys ride into town in their nightshirts!" growled Dirk Dixon. "White Riders nothing! Why, right now Diamond Eye has got the town full of his men; and if there's any ridin' done—why, there'll be more shooting right here in Main Street than there was in the hull of a battle in the Great War!"

Kyle looked at him hard. "Say, Dirk, how do you know what Diamond Eye's boys are doin'?" he asked.

"Jest plain, common hoss-sense," replied the sheriff. "Trouble is, nobody knows who are Diamond Eye's boys, and who ain't. But I guess ther's plenty around. Allus has been, ain't there? Anyways, if these unknown guys start somethin', the Black Riders will sure finish it. And whatever happens, this doggone city will be the goat. I stand for law and order, and I don't hold with folks buttin' in—"

He broke off, for at that moment every light in the place flickered, and then went out. Startled shouts came from the men at the bar; other shouts arose from the gambling tables, and, in a moment, everything was confusion. "Take it easy, boys!" shouted Mr. Kyle. "It's nothing—only a fuse blown at the power station. The lights will be on again in a minute, I reckon."

"Who said so?" shouted somebody. "Say, boys, how long is it since the light failed? Guess there's something back of it! Mebbe the White Riders—"

He got no farther; there was a stampede for the doors. Men struggled in the darkness, striving to get out into the open. It was just the same in the hotel, and in most of the other establishments along Main Street. People in private houses, in other parts of the town, too, were all running out of doors.

For, with such tension in Fortune City, everybody believed that the failure of the light was the signal for some sensational happening.

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"Listen!" went up a shout, after the men had clattered out upon the side-walks.

There was an instant hush. Not a breath of wind was stirring, and, far away, on the night air, there were sounds—the steady, rhythmic, drumming sounds of horses' hoofs.

"They're coming—they're coming!" went up the shout.

"It's the White Riders!"

The excitement rose to fever pitch. Men grabbed for their guns, knowing not what to expect. In this rough, lawless township of the West, death sometimes came swiftly and unexpectedly. And just now the whole of Ghost River Valley was brooding with mystery.

"Look! They're coming!"

Those men who were capable of clear thinking—and Mr. Kyle was amongst them—knew that the light failure had not been accidental. Somebody had tampered with the power plant—and for an obvious reason. The White Riders meant to come through the town while it was in absolute darkness.

On they came, with thundering hoofs, and leaving behind them a dense cloud of dust. Straight down Main Street—the widest roadway of the town, which cut right through, from east to west.

"Gosh!" gurgled Dirk Dixon. "They ain't human!"

Indeed, there was something fantastic—something almost horrifying—in the appearance of the mysterious riders as they swept past. From head to foot they were clothed in white; they were faceless. And their horses were similarly clothed, ghostly white coverings over the animals' heads and bodies. They looked like the steeds of the crusaders of old. And at full gallop, this extraordinary party of horsemen went tearing through the centre of Fortune City.

The most singular thing of all, however, was the great banner which the leading horseman carried. It was held high, and it bore three words in letters of silver fire, which shimmered eerily in the darkness:

"DIAMOND EYE BEWARE!"

Raucous cheers went up from some of the men; others felt queer tickling sensations running down their spines. For there seemed to be something ghostly and unreal about the strange riders. Many women, who ventured to look out upon the scene, fainted.

"Heck!" said Silas Hawkes, the hotel-keeper. "Guess it's a mighty good stunt. I ain't figgerin' to know who these birds are, but it's a sure thing they're putting a scare into Diamond Eye's men—if any of the galoots happen to be in town."

"Without doubt, this was the object of the White Riders' dash through Fortune City." It was a spectacular challenge—the virtual throwing down of the gauntlet to Diamond Eye and his gang.

In the excitement, one or two stray shots had rung out, but the honest citizens were relieved to find that there had been very little shooting.

But now a cry went up that the White Riders were coming back. Instantly, word went round from mouth to mouth; men edged out of the press in Main Street, and, as though by pre-arrangement, they dashed for the empty and half-ruined buildings farther down the street.

"The fools!" grated one ruffian to another, as he raced

along. "Comin' back, are they? Gosh! Ain't it proof that they're raw amateurs?"

"You said it," muttered the other man. "We'll get 'em this time, sure."

It was difficult to know how many "bad men" there were in the town; but it was certain that there were several dozen. Not all of them, perhaps, were members of Diamond Eye's gang. Here was a chance for them to do some shooting, and they were ready enough to shoot. Such men as these were not displeased by Diamond Eye's rule of the valley, and they did not want to see it brought to an end.

"They're mad to come back!" said Kyle. "It's suicide."

On came the riders again, returning on their own tracks—galloping straight down Main Street. By now the gunmen had had time to get into position, in the upper windows of the deserted houses. They were in dozens, guns ready.

And with a thundering rush, the White Riders swept by. Crack, crack, crack! Crack, crack, crack!

A deadly fusillade of bullets swept upon the mysterious riders from both sides of Main Street. The blackness of the night was split by the lurid flashes from gun muzzles. Everybody fled for safety. They expected to see horses and riders crashing to the ground.

But the horsemen appeared to be enchanted—bewitched. Straight on they rode, the bullets apparently taking no effect. Many of the gunmen must have scored direct hits—yet not a man fell. Not a horse stumbled. On they went—until, within a few minutes, they were out of range.

"Ghosts—that's what they are!" gasped somebody.

And this cry went round—and gained support. Hundreds of people in Fortune City, that night, believed that the White Riders were supernatural. But there were others who were convinced that a trick had been played upon them.

Over a dozen of Diamond Eye's men leapt upon their horses and gave chase. At full gallop they went tearing out of town, on the trail of the mystery figures.

"We'll beat 'em, boys!" went up a yell. "Our hosses are fresh—their's is stale. We'll get 'em!"

Out on the open plains, beyond the city, the White Riders could be dimly seen, and it was a fact that the pursuers were gaining. Then, without warning, dazzling white flares leapt up from the very ground in front of the pursuers. Fire leapt skywards, and the frightened horses, shying, swung round and bolted back. The men cursed and swore, but all to no purpose.

By the time they had re-formed, the flares were out. And the White Riders had vanished, leaving no trace.

In a rocky gully of the hills, the White Riders dismounted from their steaming horses. They shed their garb—and Nelson Lee chuckled good-humouredly.

"Just as well these suits are bullet-proof, Jim," he said. "Every inch of us was protected."

"Gee whiz! It was exciting!" said Big Jim Farman, wiping the perspiration from his brow. "What now?"

"Yes, what are we going to do, sir?" asked Handforth.

"Six of us are going to don the Black Riders' costumes," replied Nelson Lee steadily, "and we're going right into the enemy's camp!"

(With Nelson Lee in charge, a fight to the finish has begun. Don't miss next Wednesday's big-thrill chapters.)

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