

"THE BESIEGED BUNCH!" AN AGE-HIGH YARN STARRING THE REBELS OF PACKSADDLE SCHOOL— INSIDE

The

GEM

2^d!



*The Ghost of
Study Ten!*

AN EXCITING INCIDENT FROM THIS WEEK'S GREAT ST. JIM'S STORY

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EVERY WEDNESDAY.

Week Ending July 20th, 1935.

"TUNE IN" BELOW TO THE ST. JIM'S ORCHESTRA—

TOM MERRY'S



Just as the opening bars of the Grand March swelled out from Tom Merry's Melody Makers, Wally & Co. joined in. A tin-whistle, bones and castanets, and a mouth-organ shrieked out together! What tune the fags were playing was not recognisable, but they made plenty of noise!

CHAPTER 1.

Unearthly!

"WHAT—"
"How—"
"Why—"

Blake, Herries, and Digby spoke all at once.

They had been seated round the table in Study No. 6 in the School House at St. Jim's, engaged in doing their preparation, and there was no sound in the study save the turning of leaves, the scratching of pens, and an occasional grunt from one of the juniors.

And then, all of a sudden, the door of the study had been flung violently open, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth had rushed in.

As Arthur Augustus D'Arcy belonged to Study No. 6, he had, of course, a right to rush in if he pleased. But there was something so remarkable in the look of D'Arcy that it was quite clear that he had not rushed in from ordinary motives, just to get on with his prep. His aristocratic face was pale as chalk, his eyes were almost starting from their sockets, and his eyeglass dangled from the end of its cord. Arthur Augustus did not speak. He simply stood and stared at his chums with wide-open eyes, gasping like a fish out of water.

Blake, Herries, and Digby stared at him.

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They had left their prep rather late that evening, and were in a hurry to get it done before bed-time; but in the circumstances they forgot all about their prep. The claims of friendship came first.

"What's the matter, Gussy?" Blake demanded in amazement. "Knox after you?"

"No!"
"New House bouncers on your track?"

"Oh! No!"

"Seen a ghost?"

"Yaas!"

"What!" roared Blake, Herries, and Digby together.

"Yaas—no—yaas!"

Jack Blake crossed to the door and

shook. The chums of Study No. 6 regarded him with great surprise and curiosity.

"What on earth is the matter with him?" said Herries in amazement. "I suppose Towser hasn't got loose and gone for you, has he?"

"Ow! No!"

"Then tell us what's the matter," said Blake. "Here we are, leaving our prep at the risk of getting lines in the morning, all ready to sympathise with you, and you won't tell us what we're to sympathise about."

D'Arcy caught his breath.

"I suppose I oughtn't to have been so startled, weally," he said breathlessly. "But it was so howwibly weird, you know."

"What was?"

"It!"

Blake snorted.

"What was 'it,' you fathead?" he demanded.

"It was simply howwible," said D'Arcy. "It threw me into quite a fluttah. It's vewy dark woud by the old chapel, you know, and I couldn't help thinkin' about the ghost of the old cwypt as I came by. Then— Bai Jove! It was awfully cweepy!"

"What was, you frabjous ass?"

"It!"

"You—you—you—"

"Do you believe in ghosts, dear boys?" asked Arthur Augustus solemnly.

"That's according," said Jack Blake

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closed it. Then he grasped his chum by the shoulders and shook him gently.

"Now, what's the trouble?" he demanded severely.

"Pway leave off shakin' me, Blake!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jerked himself away from his chum, and sank into the study armchair, gasping. The colour was beginning to come back to his cheeks now. But it was evident that the swell of St. Jim's had had a great

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MELODY MAKERS!



thoughtfully. "I believe ghosts still exist in some parts of the world—Fleet Street, for example."

"Fleet Street!" exclaimed D'Arcy, in surprise. "I should have regarded Fleet Street as a vewy pwactical and pwosaic place."

"There are ghosts there, and they are sometimes laid," said Blake, with a shake of the head. "Ghosts of authors, you know."

"Dead authors?" asked D'Arcy.

"No; live ones."

"Pway don't be an ass, Blake. How can a live author have a ghost?"

Blake chuckled.

"I've heard that they do," he said. "Chap who writes their stuff for them, you know, when they're indisposed. They call them ghosts. Sometimes they get laid—sometimes the author gets laid, too, when he's found out. I've heard of such things."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I regard you as an ass, Blake. I was not talkin' of authors' ghosts, but of weal ghosts—weal, howwid spiwits!" Arthur Augustus shivered. "It was howwid!"

"You don't mean to say that you've seen one?" demanded Digby.

D'Arcy shook his head.

"Oh, no!"

"Have you seen anything?"

"No, deah boy."

"You ass!" roared Blake. "Then what do you mean by coming into the study with a face like a Dutch cheese—"

"I am unaware that my face bears even the most distant resemblance to a Dutch cheese, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "As a mattah of

fact, I have not seen anythin'. But I heard it."

"Heard what?"

"The ghost!"

"What was he like?" demanded Blake, gazing in astonishment at his chums. There was no doubt that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was speaking in deadly earnest. His experience in the dark quadrangle, whatever it was, had certainly thrown him into a flutter.

"An awful, howwid, wailin' sound, you know," said D'Arcy, shivering.

Digby looked very thoughtful.

"Had you been doing any of your tenor solos?" he asked. "It might have been an echo."

"You' uttah ass—"

When Tom Merry forms an orchestra to play at a local function, it leads to no little discord—musical and otherwise—among the rival musicians of St. Jim's!

"Where did you hear it?" demanded Blake.

"As I was passin' the wuined chapel. I'd been for a walk wound, you know, and as I passed the chapel I heard that awful wailin'. I wemembahed the legend of the old monk who was buwied alive in the cwypt by the wobbahs, and who is supposed to cwy out on the anniwersaw of his howwid fate. And—and it was just like that! A feafuhl shwiekin' sound fwom the cwypt—"

"Somebody japing you," said Herries. "It wasn't a human voice, deah boy. It was too high and shwill to be human; it was an awful shwiekin', and it kept on."

"My hat! What did you do?"

"I was thunderstuck! I stopped and listened for a minute or so, and then came a deep, howwid gwoan, and—and I bolted," said D'Arcy frankly. "As a mattah of fact, I wan like anythin' to here."

"And interrupted our prep," growled Digby, sitting down at the table again.

"It's jolly queer," said Blake, knitting his brows thoughtfully. "It must have been some chap hiding in the ruin who japed Gussy. Though I don't see how he could have known that Gussy was going round for a walk just now; the ass thought of it all of a sudden just when we were beginning prep."

"It was not a jape, deah boy. It wasn't a human voice at all. It—it was howwid!"

And Arthur Augustus shuddered at the recollection of the dreadful sound. Jack Blake looked at his chums.

"It's jolly queer!" he repeated. "Who's game to come down to the old crypt with me and have a look for the giddy ghost?"

"What about prep?" asked Digby.

"Oh, blow prep!"

"You won't say that to Lathom in class to-morrow," grinned Digby.

"There are times, my sons, when the human heart rises superior to such base considerations as prep and Form-masters," said Jack Blake loftily. "I'm jolly certain somebody has been pulling Gussy's noble leg, and I think we ought to lam him for the honour of the study. We'll take a torch and a cricket stump apiece, and bash him for the honour of Study No. 6. Come on!"

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus, rising from the armchair. "I am quite willin' to come, deah boys, though I am certain that it was not a jape."

"Oh, rats! Come on!"

"All serene," said Digby resignedly.

And Jack Blake took his torch from the study cupboard, and the juniors selected a cricket stump each, and they left the study.

Blake halted in the passage.

"Might as well take Tom Merry with us," he said. "The more the merrier I'll call him."

"Buck up, then!"

Blake ran along the passage to Tom Merry's study in the Shell passage farther along. He came back alone a minute later.

"They're not there," he said. "I suppose they're down in the Common-room. Blow 'em! Come on, before the ghost evaporates."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Faith, and where are ye going entirely?" asked Reilly of the Fourth, looking out of his study as the chums of Study No. 6 passed.

"Ghost-hunting," said Blake solemnly. "Gussy has discovered a ghost or a banshee—he's not sure which—in the wuined chapel. Did you bring a banshee over in your box after the last vacation by mistake, Reilly?"

The Irish junior grinned.

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"Weally, Blake, this is no subject for wibald jokes!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Come along, Reilly," said Blake, taking the Belfast boy by the arm. "If it's a banshee, you can deal with it, and if it's a common or garden ghost, we'll lay it. If it's an author's ghost, we'll get Figgins to go for it, as he's an author—at least, he says he is."

"You uthah ass, Blake!"

"Walk behind Gussy, Reilly, and see that he doesn't bolt."

"Weally, you fwightful ass!"

"This way!"

And Jack Blake, with the torch in one hand and a cricket stump in the other, led the way out of the School House, with the other juniors at his heels.

CHAPTER 2.

Simply Awful!

DARK and gloomy looked the old chapel as the juniors approached it in the deep shadows cast by the trees.

Even Jack Blake's face became grave, and he was silent.

The matter seemed quite different out here in the darkness, far from the lights and the cheery voices in the School House.

The juniors felt that even ghost stories were not quite so absurd here in the gloomy shadows as they had seemed in the cosy study.

The old story of the ghost of the ruined chapel came into their minds. There was more than one ghost story in connection with St. Jim's; but the most weird of all was that of the buried monk in the chapel. He had been buried alive, so the legend ran, by robbers, who despoiled the abbey in the old days when St. Jim's was a monastic establishment, for refusing to reveal where the treasures of the abbey were hidden; and the story ran that his cries haunted the robbers for ever afterwards—and on the anniversary of his doom his weird wailings were still to be heard in the ruins. Doubtless the howling of the wind among the broken walls and shattered casements had given colour to the story.

But Blake & Co. felt an uncanny feeling creeping over them as they approached the chapel in the deep gloom. Thick branches overhead shut out the light of the stars, and the great fragments of shattered masonry loomed up before them, dim and formless.

"Here we are!" murmured Digby.

"I—I wish I'd brought Towser with us!" murmured Herries.

"Bai Jove!"

"What's the matter?"

"I—I heard something!"

"Ass!" said Blake peevishly, staring round into the gloom. "Rot! I heard nothing. Did you, Dig?"

"No. It was the wind."

"Faith, it's creepy here," said Reilly, with a shiver. "Sure, it would be better to come by daylight."

"Oh, rats!" said Blake. "Come on!"

They tramped on through the old shattered portal.

Here the light of the stars fell a little more clearly upon what remained of the ruins of the oldest portion of St. Jim's.

The juniors gazed round them uneasily, Blake flashing the light of the torch to and fro.

"Nothing here," he said, in a rather more assured voice.

D'Arcy suddenly clutched his arm. The swell of St. Jim's was suddenly pale in the torch-light.

"Listen!" he panted.

"Oh!"

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"My hat!"

The juniors stood petrified.

Apparently from the ground at their feet, from some deep recess in the ruined chapel, rose a piercing wail.

It was to the excited imagination of the startled juniors, like the shriek of a lost spirit.

It rang and echoed in the silence of the old chapel, and died away shudderingly into the night.

"Good heavens!" muttered Blake, when all was silent again. "Wh-what was that?"

"G-g-great Scott!"

"The gig-gig-ghost!"

"Oh, deah!"

Wait! Shriek!

The wild sounds, muffled in the distance, came to their ears again. Then followed a deep groaning sound.

"Let's go," muttered Digby. "I—I can't stand this. Let's clear."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake stood firm.

"I'm not going," he muttered. "I don't believe it's a ghost. Stick here."

"But I—I say—"

"Weally, Blake—"

Blake was very pale, but he was determined. He strode away towards the entrance of the crypt.

"Come on!" he said.

"Blake, deah boy—"

"I say, Blake, old man—"

"Come on, you fatheads! I tell you we're going to clear it up, whatever it is!"

And Blake stepped down the stone stairway leading into the crypt.

The other fellows hesitated, but they could not leave Blake to go alone. With creeping flesh they followed him down the stone stairs.

D'Arcy caught Blake by the arm.

"Blake, old man, it's howlid! Pway come back!"

"Rats!"

"It must be a g-g-ghost!"

"Bosh!"

"Oh, listen!" gasped Digby.

The wild wailing recommenced, and the deep groaning sound accompanied it. The sounds came to their ears much more clearly now that they were upon the stairs.

Blake knitted his brows.

"It's somebody down here," he muttered.

There was a wild, discordant shriek from the darkness below, and with a sudden gasp the juniors turned and fled, Blake with the rest. They scrambled out of the stairway, and into the ruins above.

"Wun for it!" gasped D'Arcy.

And they tore across the ruins towards the quadrangle.

Outside the limits of the old chapel Blake called a halt. The other fellows reluctantly stopped.

"Pway come on, deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"We—we haven't finished our prep, you know," said Digby feebly.

"I've got to feed Towser, too," said Herries.

"Faith, and I've got a letter to write to me grandmother!" muttered Reilly. Blake did not move.

"What did you fellows bolt for?" he demanded.

"Well, you bolted, too."

"I—I just followed to bring you back," said Blake cautiously.

"Oh, rats!"

"Yaas, wathah—wats! You wan like anythin'!"

"Well, I'm not running any farther," said Blake resolutely. "I tell you it must be a jape, and very likely the

bounders, whoever they are, are watching us all the time. Nice set of asses we shall look."

"Weally, Blake—"

"I'm going back!" said Blake determinedly.

"Blake, deah boy—"

"Remember the prep—"

"Look here—"

Jack Blake snorted, and marched back towards the crypt, the torch lighting the way.

"We—we can't desert the silly ass!" muttered Digby. "Come on!"

"Bai Jove!"

Blake descended grimly into the crypt. The rest of the juniors followed him, their ears on the stretch to listen. Again from the silence, apparently from the deep bowels of the earth, came that wild burst of wailing and groaning.

Shriek after shriek, loud and discordant, rang through the hollows of the crypt.

"Bai Jove!" muttered D'Arcy, through his chattering teeth. "This is simply fearful, you know. It's howlid!"

"Groogh! I—"

"My hat!" said Blake. "Listen!"

The shrieking and wailing had changed now, and the sounds had a regular order in them, and the juniors, to their amazement, recognised a tune. Blake gave a yell.

"Ha, ha, ha! You duffers! It's a fiddle!"

"What!"

"It's a violin!" yelled Blake. "He's been tuning up, and now he's playing like—a cat scratching at the strings with all four paws at once. I tell you it's a fiddler!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Come on!"

Blake rushed into the crypt. On the left a series of arches opened out, leading into the vaults, and there, as the juniors turned the corner, there burst upon them a ray of light.

Blake promptly extinguished his torch. "Quiet!" he whispered.

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the Fourth Formers advanced cautiously towards the light in the vaults, and, keeping in cover behind the heavy stone pillars, looked at the scene revealed by the light. Three juniors, with musical instruments in their hands, were there, and Blake uttered a suppressed exclamation as he saw them.

"Tom Merry!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Quiet!"

And the Fourth Formers looked on at the peculiar scene in silence.

CHAPTER 3.

The Melody Makers!

TOM MERRY, the captain of the Shell Form at St. Jim's, was seated upon an old box placed on the flagstones of the vault. Manners was sitting on a camp-stool, and Monty Lowther had an old chair. A lamp was hanging upon a nail driven into an interstice of one of the stone pillars close at hand. On the floor were several bottles of ginger-beer, and a tin of biscuits.

The Terrible Three were resting from their labours as Blake & Co. stood watching them, unseen, from behind the pillars. The Shell fellows evidently had not the slightest suspicion of the proximity of the Fourth Formers.

Monty Lowther idly plucked at the strings of his violin. It was evidently Lowther who was responsible for that



Keeping in cover behind the heavy stone pillar, Blake & Co. looked at the scene revealed before them. Three juniors, with musical instruments in their hands, were there. The weird wailings in the crypt were accounted for! "Tom Merry & Co.!" muttered Blake.

dreadful wailing and shrieking which had so startled the Fourth Formers.

Manners was armed with a trombone, and Tom Merry had a flute.

"Getting on all right, I think," Tom Merry remarked. "If Lowther could only manage to keep his fiddle in tune, he—"

"Eh?" ejaculated Lowther.

"And if you could make that trombone do anything but grunt, Manners, old man—"

"What—"

"Then we should be all right," concluded Tom Merry.

"What about your flute, then?" demanded Monty Lowther warmly. "Isn't it necessary for that to be played in tune?"

"I play it in tune, ass!"

"Then my ears deceive me," said Lowther. "I certainly thought it sounded like a cat on the roof. My mistake, perhaps."

"Look here, ass—"

"Well, fathead—"

"We shall have to stick to practice for a good many nights if we're going to make up an orchestra," said Tom Merry. "It's no good springing a violin like that on people. They'd throw things at you."

"Well, you silly ass—"

"I've been thinking," said Manners reflectively, "whether we mightn't ask Kerr of the New House to play the violin. He's ripping, you know!"

"What about me?" bellowed Lowther. "Well, you could play second violin," said Manners pacifically.

"Blessed if I'm going to play second fiddle to any New House bouncer!" said Monty Lowther emphatically. "Go and eat coke!"

"I think perhaps we ought to have some more instrumentalists," Tom Merry remarked. "An orchestra is an orchestra, you know. We might have Kerr in it, and perhaps Herries of the Fourth with his cornet!"

"He makes such an unearthly row

with that cornet," said Manners. "Hallo! Did you hear something?"

"No!"

"Sounded to me like some animal sniffing," said Manners, looking round into the deep darkness of the vaults. "I suppose no dog can have got in here?"

"Imagination, old chap!" said Lowther. "You'll be thinking you can hear the giddy ghost next."

"Oh, don't talk ghosts!" said Tom Merry. "You'll make us creepy here. What about having Herries and his cornet?"

"No good! My hat!" said Lowther. "I believe I heard a sniff then!"

"The wind!" said Tom Merry carelessly. "No; I suppose we couldn't have Herries with his cornet without giving the show away to the Fourth Form kids, and then D'Arcy would want to join the orchestra as vocalist and do tenor solos."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, you can laugh, but the audience wouldn't laugh if D'Arcy and tenor solos were sprung on them," said Tom Merry, shaking his head. Then he gave a start. "Did you fellows hear anything?"

"Something—it sounded like a dog sniffing or snorting."

"I suppose Towser can't have got loose, and wandered down here, can he?" said Tom Merry, in surprise.

"Call him! He'll come if he's here."

"Good! Towser—Towser!"

Tom Merry's call echoed among the stone pillars and arches of the old vaults. But there was no response, save the echo of his own voice.

"Only the wind, I suppose," said Lowther. "The wind makes all sorts of queer noises in the old crypt. That's where the ghost stories come from, I suppose. You remember the story of the monk being buried alive down here—"

"Ow! Cheese it! Wait till we get back to the School House"

"Oh, I'm not nervous!" said Monty Lowther. "I don't think we're likely to hear any wailing and shrieking. We've been coming down here to practise for three evenings now, and we haven't heard any yet."

Tom Merry laughed.

"If any chap came nosing into the ruins, he might hear some," he said. "That violin can be heard up above ground, I fancy."

"Well, nobody ever comes round here after dark," said Lowther. "and nobody else is likely to think of getting up an orchestra and practising in the crypt. Look here, we can't do better than stick to our original idea, and keep to Tom Merry's Trio. As for singing, I can do the singing, and you fellows can accompany me."

"I don't know about your doing the singing," said Manners doubtfully. "You see, if there were any casualties—"

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Lowther. "I could give them some good tunes. You fellows could try to play so as not to put me out."

"The audience might put you out, and we mightn't be able to stop them."

Monty Lowther glared.

"If Manners is going to set up as a humorist, I'll get back to the House," he said. "It's jolly near bed-time, anyway!"

And he put his violin into its case. Tom Merry yawned and rose.

"Yes, I think we've done enough for one evening," he said. "We've got more than a week ahead of us before the show comes off, and we shall be all right by that time. It was a ripping dodge to come down here to practise. I don't see how we could possibly have kept the wheeze a secret if we hadn't come down here."

"And risked the giddy ghost!" grinned Lowther.

"Oh, keep off the ghost!" grunted

Manners, packing up his trombone. "I shall begin to think that I hear him soon, with the wailing of your old fiddle in my ears."

"Look here, Manners—"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"You fellows ready?" asked Tom Merry. "I'll blow out the lamp, and you can strike a match to see your way to the stairs."

"Right-ho!"

Monty Lowther fumbled for a match-box, and Tom Merry blew out the lamp. The chums of the Shell were enveloped in darkness.

Suddenly, from the dense darkness of the vaults, there came a deep and nerve-racking groan.

The Terrible Three gasped.

"Wh-what was that?"

"Great Scott!"

Groan!

Shriek!

The fearful, unearthly sounds echoed and rang in the dim vaults. Monty Lowther struck a match with a trembling hand, and it went out. The chums of the Shell dashed madly towards the stairs, bumping into one another, and stumbling blindly in the dark. Behind them came shriek on shriek, filling the vaults with dreadful discordant sound.

"Run!" panted Manners.

"Oh, my hat!"

The Terrible Three tore up the steps. They emerged into the starlight of the old chapel, and ran for the School House. Half-way to the House they paused.

"Wh-what could it have been?" muttered Manners.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Blessed if I know. The wind, I suppose."

"More likely a jape!" growled Lowther.

"Let's go back!"

"No fear—it's nearly bed-time!"

And the Terrible Three went on into the School House, their hearts still beating at express speed.

CHAPTER 4. Blake's Idea!

"**H**A, ha, ha!"
"Bai Jove! Ha, ha, ha!"
"The giddy asses!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of Study No. 6 roared. If Tom Merry & Co. had not fled quite so quickly from the ruins, they would certainly have heard the laughter, and would have known the kind of ghosts that had scared them.

Jack Blake switched on his torch once more. The rays shone in the dark and gloomy vault. The Terrible Three had taken their musical instruments with them when they fled, but the tin of biscuits and the bottle of ginger-pop remained.

Blake sat down upon the old box and picked up one of the bottles.

"To the victor the spoils!" he remarked.

"Hear, hear!" said Digby heartily.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Pop!

And the Fourth Formers drank to the discomfiture of their rivals of the Shell in Tom Merry's own liquid refreshment.

"One good turn deserves another!" grinned Blake. "They scared us first—at least, they scared you chaps—and now we've scared them!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"I wonder if they'll come down here to practise any more," chuckled Digby.

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It won't be much use if they do," said Blake; "the secret's out now. Fancy their having the cheek to put up a band without asking us to take a hand. I call that pure, unadulterated cheek of the Shell bounders!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Not a bad idea, though," said Digby thoughtfully. "I suppose the show they are speaking of is the Rylcombe Fete. Lots of amateur musicians, turn up there; but I never heard of an orchestra from St. Jim's before!"

"Kids," said Blake seriously, "if St. Jim's is going to be represented at the fete by an orchestra, that orchestra ought to be in capable hands!"

"Yaas, wathah! I could be a vocalist—"

"Ahem! I was thinking of being vocalist myself. After that, your singing would fall a bit flat!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"What about my cornet?" demanded Herries warmly.

"Well, you see, cornets are barred!" said Blake. "You see—"

"I don't see! I—"

"And I could handle the concertina all right," remarked Digby thoughtfully. "It's not half a bad idea!"

"We're going to bag it," said Blake. "It will serve the bounders right for having started it without consulting us."

"Ha, ha, ha! Quite so!"

"And it will be one up against the Shell."

"But they may run a band as well as ours," said Herries.

Blake shook his head.

"We'll make it quite clear that they're plagiarising our ideas if they do," he said. "We'll put a notice on the board, asking for amateur talent for our orchestra."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, that's a wippin' ideah!"

"Come on, then!" said Blake.

"We've laid Gussy's ghost and drunk Tom Merry's ginger-beer, so we may as well be getting back!"

And the chums of Study No. 6 left the crypt.

They returned to the School House in a cheerful mood. Quite unexpectedly they had surprised the secret of the Shell trio, and they meant to make the most of it. The rivalry between the two Co.'s in the School House was very keen, though they generally united loyally enough when it was a question of going for Figgins & Co. over in the New House.

The chums of No. 6 felt that they held the Terrible Three in the hollow of their hands this time.

They hurried up to their study, and Blake scribbled upon a sheet of impromptu paper. Digby suggested wiring into prep, and was promptly frowned down. It was no time for prep.

With his paper in his hand Jack Blake descended to the Junior Common-room, followed by D'Arcy, Digby, Herries, and Reilly.

It was close upon bed-time for the juniors of the School House, and most of them had finished their preparation, and were gathered in the Common-room for a chat before going to bed.

The Terrible Three were there, standing in a group by themselves, and talking in low tones. Blake chuckled as he saw them. He could easily guess that they were discussing the strange events in the old crypt.

Blake looked round the Common-room.

"Anybody got a tack?" he asked.

"Attack of what?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"I didn't ask for a rotten pun!" granted Blake. "I want a tack, to tack a notice up on the wall. Anybody seen a tack?"

"Yes, indeed!" said Skimpole of the Shell.

"Good! Where is it?"

"I saw it in Taggles' toolbox this morning!"

"Ass!" roared Blake. "A pin will do. Anybody got a pin?"

"Here you are!" said Monty Lowther, extending his hand.

"Ow!" roared Blake. "Yow! I didn't say stick it into me, you silly ass!"

"Sorry—"

"Ow! You fathead!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake glared as he took the pin and pinned the notice on the wall of the Common-room. But he took comfort in the anticipation of the looks of the Terrible Three when they read the notice.

The juniors were curious to see what it was, and they crowded round. Kangaroo of the Shell read it aloud to the crowd:

"Notice.—Amateur musicians who desire to join an orchestra are requested to send in their names to Study No. 6, Fourth Form passage, at their earliest convenience.—Conductor, J. BLAKE, Esq."

"Orchestra—eh?" said Kangaroo.

"My hat!"

"What's that?" exclaimed the Terrible Three, with one voice.

Blake looked at them innocently.

"New idea of ours!" he exclaimed.

"We're going to get up an orchestra to visit the Rylcombe Fete and play to the people."

"M-my hat!"

The Terrible Three stared at Blake and then at the notice, and then at Blake again, in blank amazement.

"Orchestra!" they howled together.

Jack Blake nodded cheerfully.

"Yes, that's the idea!" he said.

"Wathah a good idea, don't you think, Tom Mewwy?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy affably.

"Not bad," said Reilly, with a chuckle, "is it, Lowther? Sure, I shall play the trombone!"

"Good egg!" said Gore. "I'll come in with the cornet."

"That won't do!" said Herries promptly. "I'm cornet player to this band!"

"First and second cornets," said Blake pacifically; "the more the merrier! We want a good string orchestra!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You—you bounders!" roared Tom Merry, finding his voice at last.

"You've boned our wheeze!"

"En?"

"You've collared our scheme!"

"What scheme?" asked Blake, in great astonishment.

"Our orchestra!" yelled Manners.

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Blake, in a tone of patient remonstrance. "I put it to the fellows whether they have heard a single word on the subject of Tom Merry getting up an orchestra?"

"Not a whisper, that I know of!" said Kangaroo.

"Not a syllable!" said Gore.

"We haven't said anything!" roared Lowther. "But it was our idea. Those bounders have got on to it somehow!"

"Oh, draw it mild!"

"Come off!"

"Don't be funny, you know!"

You—you giddy plagiarists!"

shouted Tom Merry. "I tell you it's our wheeze!"

Blake shook his head sorrowfully. "You're dreaming!" he said. "Of course, I suppose it isn't nice for you for other fellows to get ahead of you in this way. But, really, I must say this is awful cheek on your part!"

"Sure, it's the limit!" said Reilly.

"I—I—I tell you—"

"My dear chap, you're dreaming!"

"I—I— Oh, go for 'em!" roared Tom Merry. "Bump them! They know jolly well it's our wheeze, and they've spotted it somehow. Go for 'em!"

But at that moment Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, put his head in at the door.

"Bed, you kids!"

"Oh!"

And the threatened scrimmage was nipped in the bud.

The Terrible Three exchanged grim looks when they went up to the Shell dormitory.

"Game's up!" growled Lowther.

"They've spotted us somehow!"

grunted Manners. "How on earth did they get on to it?"

Tom Merry snorted.

enthusiasm with which the fellows took it up.

Offers to make members of the orchestra were thick and fast; some of them a humorous description, but most of them in deadly earnest.

After dinner Blake tapped Tom Merry on the arm as the junior came out of the dining-hall.

"I've been thinking," said Blake.

"Look here, if you like we'll take you fellows into the orchestra scheme."

The Terrible Three stared.

"Well, that's pretty cool, as it's our wheeze!" said Manners.

"Ours, you mean!" said Blake.

"We've bagged it, anyway. Upon the whole, we're willing to take you chaps into the game and give you a show in the band."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"My dear chap, we couldn't play along with Gore's cornet. Why, it's worse than Herries'—and his is a terror! And as for Kangy, we've bagged him as our banjo."

"So you're going to run a band, too?"

demanding Blake.

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, let's amalgamate," said Blake.

The woodshed was a large building which served other purposes as well as that of stacking faggots. Indeed, it had served purposes never intended by the builder, as it was a favourite place for meetings and amateur dramatic rehearsals.

The Terrible Three came in, and the chums of Study No. 6 were soon after them, and then Reilly, Kangaroo, and Bishop and Clifton Dane dropped in.

Tom Merry had the half of a broken cricket stump in his hand, which he was to use as a conductor's baton.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I think we are all here—"

"There'll be some more coming," grinned Harry Noble. "The word's got round that there's going to be a rehearsal here. I left Glyn hunting for his violin."

"Had he lost it?" asked Blake.

"No; I lost it for him," said Kangaroo.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gore was looking for his cornet, too," said Monty Lowther. "Unless he thinks of looking behind Gussy's trunk in the top box-room I don't think he's likely to find it."

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"The ghost in the crypt!" he growled. "We know where the groans and the shrieks came from now."

"M-my hat!"

"They spotted us somehow—and they've bagged the wheeze! Never mind—they haven't got up the orchestra yet!" said Tom Merry. "We'll see about that!"

Blake & Co. went to bed in high feather; and after lights-out in the Fourth Form dormitory there were muffled peals of laughter as Jack Blake & Co. told the story of the ghost in the crypt.

CHAPTER 5.

Plenty of Talent!

THE next morning Jack Blake & Co. had an unenjoyable quarter of an hour in the Fourth Form Room with Mr. Lathom. The master of the Fourth took no interest whatever in ghost hunts and orchestras, and so it was useless to explain to him why preparation had been neglected.

The chums of Study No. 6 received a severe lecture and a hundred lines each. It was worth while, as Blake remarked afterwards, to stand a little ragging for the sake of bagging a really good wheeze from the Shell. And that it was a great wheeze was soon proved by the

"No good running rival shows. Let's stick together and make up a good band."

"Well, that's all right," said Tom Merry, after a pause. "It was like your cheek to bag our wheeze in the first place; but if you admit that you can't run it—"

"I don't admit anything of the sort," said Blake warmly.

"Well, it's all right. Only, I conduct the band, you know."

"That's all right," said Blake. "I'd rather not conduct, when I come to think of it, because I'd rather put in my bit with the guitar!"

"Good! First rehearsal at five in the woodshed," said Tom Merry.

"Right-ho!"

During afternoon lessons that day the thoughts of the juniors were running very much on musical concerts.

Lines fell thickly in the Fourth Form and Shell class-rooms, Mr. Lathom and Mr. Linton both being considerably exasperated at an unexampled want of attention on the part of their pupils.

Masters and pupils were equally pleased when the hour of dismissal came.

After school Tom Merry and Blake met to discuss matters, and then the members already selected for the orchestra met in the woodshed.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gentlemen—" said the conductor.

"Hear, hear!"

"Gentlemen of the T.M. Melody Makers—"

"Hurrah!"

"We are going to get up a band to perform instrumental music in a way that will redound to the credit of St. Jim's. Some schools have amateur orchestras, and why shouldn't we?"

"Echo answers why!" said Jack Blake.

"Surely that is a mistake, dear boy?" said Arthur Augustus.

"Eh?"

"Surely echo should answer 'we' if Tom Mewwy's remark is echoed at all?"

"Ass!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Gentlemen—"

"If echo does not answer the last word uttered there must be somethin' decidedly wong with the accoustics of this building."

"Order!"

"Gentlemen, we are laying the foundation of a great movement—the immovable foundations of a rapid movement."

"Hear, hear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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"That movement will blossom forth," continued Tom Merry. "We may regard ourselves as the musical educators of the school. In the words of the poet:

"When music, heavenly maid, was young,
When first in early Greece she sung—"

"Yes, I've seen her," said Monty Lowther.

"Eh? What do you mean?"
"I've seen a maid singing in early grease when I've been down extra early in the morning," Lowther explained.

"If Lowther's going to be funny—" began Blake.

"Yaas, watah! I pwotest against Lowthah takin' advantage of us in this way—"

"Fathead!" said Monty Lowther.

"I wufuse to be called a fathead—"

"Order for the chair!" said Manners.

"Order! Look here, hadn't we better get on with the washing? Lowther won't be funny if Tom Merry doesn't spout any more poetry. That's a fair arrangement."

"Hear, hear!"

"Get on with the washing, Tommy!"

"As I was saying, when you duffers interrupted me, this is the beginning of an immovable movement—I mean, a great foundation—that is to say—"

"Hear, hear!"

"We are going to set an example to St. Jim's. We are going to select the budding talent of the Lower Forms. Gentlemen, we shall now proceed to rehearse the first concerted number. I have selected—"

"We have selected," corrected Blake.

"Ass!"

"Fathead!"

"We have selected," continued Tom Merry, when these amenities had been exchanged.

"We have selected the celebrated tune, 'Rhapsody in Blue,' arranged for the band. We have the music here, and every chap will have to copy out his part. Parts for trombone, cello, and first and second violins are written out already, so those instruments can now rehearse, and the other fellows can listen."

"Good!" said Lowther, taking out his violin.

"Good!" said Manners, starting on his trombone.

"Good!" said Blake, who had also provided himself with a fiddle.

"Rotten!" said the others, with unanimity.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in a tone of patient remonstrance, "would it not be bettah—I only suggest it, of course—to let me sing it, and the instruments accompany me?"

"Rats! It has no words."

"If you say wats to me, Tom Mewwy, I—"

"The editor's decision is final—I mean, the conductor's decision is final," said Tom Merry. "This is a ripping tune, and it will do for overture when the orchestra starts. Now then, first and second violins, and trombone."

"Ready!"

"Faith, and I—"

"I'll put in a flute obligato," said Bishop, producing his flute.

"Got the part written?" demanded Tom Merry.

"No. I'll play it by ear."

"Ear, 'ear!" said Lowther.

"You won't!" said Tom Merry.

"None of your blessed rot! We're going to play this tune in tune, if we play it at all."

"But I tell you I play better by ear than by music."

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"I dare say you do; but if you can't play from music, old man, you can go and bury that flute. Now then—I wish we had a violoncello—it pulls a band together."

"Could hire one," said Digby.

"Who can play it?"

"Kerr of the New House can."

"Oh, blow Kerr! This is a School House wheeze, and the New House bounders are barred. It's bad enough to let the Fourth Form into it," said the conductor.

"What's that?" roared all the Fourth Formers together.

"Ahem! I mean—er—get on with the washing. Manners will have to do the best he can with the trombone. A piano would be all right, and I could play that; but we can't have a piano here."

"Jolly useful thing, a piano, for accompaniments!" said Monty Lowther thoughtfully. "And in case of a flood—"

"A what?"

"A flood," said Monty Lowther seriously. "I heard of a case once when a musician was washed out by a flood; he floated away on his cello, and his wife accompanied him on the piano."

"You—you funny ass—"

"Order!"

"Now, then!" said Tom Merry, raising the half of the cricket stump.

"Ready?"

"All serene!"

And the band played.

CHAPTER 6.

Services Not Required!

TROMBONE and two violins

wailed out in the woodshed.

Manners, with the trombone,

took it easy; Lowther, with the

first violin, bucked up. Jack Blake,

second violin, hit the happy medium.

The effect was striking, though it

could not be called effective from a

musical point of view.

Tom Merry continued.

He put plenty of energy into the

conducting. If his hair had been a

little longer, and his face a little fatter,

he might have passed for a fashionable

conductor in a West End concert-hall—

certainly his antics were wild enough.

He used both arms and both legs in

conducting, in the latest modern style.

But, somehow, he couldn't quite keep

the band together.

First violin was evidently in a hurry.

He played two bars to everybody else's

one. At times the trombone bucked up

very creditably, but he never succeeded

in catching up the first violin, though

he sometimes overtook and passed the

second.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur

Augustus D'Arcy. "Is that 'Rhapsody

in Blue'?"

"Tom Merry says so," grinned

Kangaroo.

"It sounds more like two cats on the

tiles at night," said D'Arcy.

"Or a lawn-mower run mad!"

chuckled Digby.

"Or a saw-mill out of gear!" re-

marked Herries.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" roared the conductor.

"Order! Slack a bit, Manners! You're

going too fast! Put the brake on that

fiddle, Lowther!"

The door of the woodshed opened, and

Taggles, the porter of St. Jim's, put

his head in.

Taggles was looking very bewildered.

"Wot's all this, young gents?" he

asked. "It ain't like you young gents to torture cats in the woodshed, I'm sure— Oh!"

Taggles saw that it was a band, and fled.

The band raced, and dragged, and shrieked on, and Tom Merry brandished his baton, and the other fellows stood round and watched the conductor with great interest.

"Good idea!" said Kangaroo.

"Musical gymnastics, you know. It's

bound to go."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The strains died away. First violin

was finished first, and then the second.

Trombone had a dozen bars yet to play,

and he played them out with grim

determination.

Tom Merry breathed hard.

"If that's the way the band is going

to play, we shall be chivvied off the

ground at the fete!" he remarked. "Of

all the horrid cacophonies—"

"Well, that's a good word!" said

Herries.

"First violin's fault," said Manners.

"The trombone was exactly to time."

"Yes; if you'd been playing the

'Dead March in Saul'!" snorted

Lowther.

"Look here, Lowther—"

"Look here, Manners—"

"Here they are!" roared a voice at

the door.

Wally & Co. entered.

D'Arcy minor was accompanied by

Frayne, Hobbs, Jameson, and Curly

Gibson of the Third. The Third

Formers had brought musical instru-

ments with them.

"Oh, get out!" said Tom Merry.

"You mustn't interrupt!"

"Yaas, watah! We've had wow

enough!" said Arthur Augustus.

Wally snorted.

"We've heard that you're the con-

ductor of an orchestra now, Tom

Merry?" he said.

"Yes, that's so!" said Tom Merry.

"But—"

"We've heard the awful row these

chaps have been making," said Wally,

with a nod towards the enraged band.

"We want to give you a sample of what

music is like! We've got music with

us—'The Wedding March of the

Priests.'"

"The what?" yelled the band.

"I mean 'The War March of the

Priests,'" said Wally hastily. "We

were undecided whether to select that

or the 'Wedding March,' you know.

Both by the same composer—Wagner—

and—"

"Wagner!" yelled Tom Merry.

"Mendelssohn, you ass!"

"Yes; I meant Mendelssohn," said

Wally, unabashed. "We can play it

splendidly, and I should like you to

hear it. Will you give us a show, Tom

Merry?"

Tom Merry hesitated.

He was good nature itself, but, as

the conductor of a real orchestra, such

musical instruments as mouth-organs,

tin-whistles, and combs were beneath his

professional notice.

"Well, you see—" he began.

"If you don't let us into the band,

we're going to run a rival one!" said

Wally. "You know what to expect!"

"So look out for squalls!" said

Jameson truculently.

"We will—if Wally sings!" said

Monty Lowther.

And the juniors chuckled.

"Play up!" said Wally, turning to his

followers. "'The Wedding March of

the Mendelssohn"—I mean, 'The War

March of the Priests.' Now, then—tum-tum-tum! Tooral-looral—"

The Third Form band struck up. It might have been "The War March of the Priests"; it might have been the "Wedding March" from "Lohen-grin"; it might have been anything else. Certainly it did not resemble anything on the earth, or above the earth, or in the waters under the earth. There was one unanimous roar from Tom Merry & Co.:

"Shut up!"
"Play up, my sons!" said D'Arcy minor, unheeding.
"Kick them out!"
"Bump them!"
"Jump on them!"

And the juniors made a furious rush. The Third Form band was swept into the yard outside the woodshed, rolling over one another.

"Bump them!" roared Blakk.
"Yaas, wathah!"
"Yow-ow!" roared Wally, as Blake and Kangaroo grasped him, and he smote the hard ground. "Yaroooh! Yah! Leggo!"
"Ow! Help!"
"Oh! Ah! Yowp!"
"Gero-oo-oogh!"

The orchestra retired into the woodshed again, leaving the fags and their musical instruments strewn upon the ground.

Wally & Co. picked themselves up dazedly.

"The rotters!" gasped Wally.
"The bouncers!"
"Beasts!"
"Groo-oogh!"

"That's their last chance!" growled Wally. "They haven't any ear for music! They don't know a good thing when they see it! We won't join Tom Merry's band now if he goes down on his knees and asks us!"

"I can see him doing it—I don't think!" growled Jameson.

"Ow!" murmured Joe Frayne. "I've got a pain! Ow!"

"I've got an ache all over!" gurgled Hobbs. "Ow! Yow! Wally, you silly ass, what did you bring us here for?"

"That's right! Put it on me!" said Wally witheringly. "I'm trying to buck you chaps up, and show the fellows that the Third Form can't be passed over."

"They've passed us over with their blessed boots on!" groaned Hobbs.

"Ow! Yow! Yah!" murmured Jameson.

"We'll start a rival band!" growled Wally. "And when they go to play at the giddy fete, we'll go, too, and play against them! We'll take our biggest tin-whistles, and play within a yard or two of them! We'll show the bouncers!"

And the fags limped away.

As they passed round the School House they encountered three juniors belonging to the New House—Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn of the Fourth. The New House juniors looked at the dusty and rumpled fags in amazement.

"Hallo! Been sweeping up the yard with yourselves?"

D'Arcy minor snorted.
"No, ass! We've offered ourselves to Tom Merry's band, and they cut up rusty. They've got no ear for music."

"Tom Merry's band?" echoed Figgins. "This is the first I've heard of it. Is it a new wheeze?"

"They're rehearsing in the woodshed!" growled Jameson, who was a New House fag. "Go and raid them, Piggy, old man, and smash up their instruments! They're making an awful row, and it would be kindness to the whole school!"

Figgins & Co. exchanged a joyous grin.

"My word!" murmured Kerr.

"We're on this!" said Figgins.

And the New House trio strolled away in the direction of the woodshed, while Wally and his comrades departed in search of a much-needed wash and brush-up.

CHAPTER 7.

A Tenor in Trouble!

Figgins chuckled as he drew near the woodshed with his chums.

A voice—which may or may not have been a tenor, but which was certainly very high—was sounding through the open window.

It was the voice of D'Arcy.

"MacCormack the Second!" murmured Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus was evidently bestowing upon the concert party a specimen of his vocal powers, which he intended to ravish all hearts when the band played at the Rylcombe Fete. The voice of the swell of St. Jim's rose loudly and clearly, though the words were in a foreign tongue which nobody understood excepting Kerr, probably Arthur Augustus himself having a very dim idea of what they meant.

"Vesti la giubba—" came the solo from the woodshed.

Figgins & Co. approached the window and peeped in. Tom Merry's band were standing round, with various expressions of anguish upon their faces. Arthur Augustus appeared rather at a loss for words, or perhaps the shriek of Lowther's accompanying fiddle put him out. He paused.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

Monty Lowther sawed on.

"Lowthah, you ass, you are goin' too fast!"

"Buck up, then!" said Lowther. "You're going too slow!"

"The accompanist has to keep time with the singah, you feahful ass, not the singah with the accompanist!"

"Rats!"

"You fidgetful ass!"

"Why not let me give you a flute obligato instead of that see-saw?" suggested Bishop. "That song goes all right with a flute obligato."

"Br-r-r-r-r!" said Lowther.

"Buck up, Gussy—unless you're finished," said Blake.

"I'm not finished, you ass!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I am simply goin' to knock them with this Italian awiah! Vesti la giubba—"

"What on earth does that mean?" demanded Kangaroo.

"On with the motley," said D'Arcy.

"It's a wippin' tenah solo, fwom Leoncavallo's opewah, 'I Pagliacci.'"

"Is it necessary to sing it now?"

asked Bishop, putting up his flute with a sniff.

D'Arcy snorted.

"You uttah ass! Aren't we whearsin'?"

"Well, go ahead and get it over," said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Pile in!" roared Blake.

"Oh, vewy well! Pway keep time, Lowthah!"

And the voice of the swell of St. Jim's rose in melody once more. It was certainly a ripping aria, and perhaps it was sung ripingly—at all events, it seemed to rip the air, as Figgins remarked in a whisper to Fatty Wynn.

Kerr had stolen away from his chums

(Continued on the next page.)



MAKE THE JESTER SMILE AND WIN HALF-A-CROWN!

Send your Joke to *The GEM Jester*, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.).

HUNDRED YEARS HENCE.

Ma: "I think you'll have to give Johnny a good talking to."

Pa: "What's the matter now?"

Ma: "He's been flying up and down the Atlantic all the morning, and I wanted him to go to China for the rice for dinner!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. Bees, 69, Necropolis Road, Lidget Green, Bradford.

A SOLO OF ANOTHER SORT.

At a celebration in Tom Merry's study, Gussy sang several tenor solos, and his chums got fed up. At last the humorous Lowther remarked:

"Do you know 'There's a long, long trail,' Gussy?"

"Yaas, deah boy. Shall I sing it?"

"No, hike it!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to D. Gordon, 5, Ormiston Park, Knock, Belfast.

COOL.

Farmer (aroused at one o'clock): "What do you mean by knocking me up at this hour of the night?"

Tramp: "Sorry to trouble you, guv'nor, but I'm sleeping in yer barn to-night, and I want to be called at seven sharp!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to C. Boxall, 14, Chapel Street, Marlpool, Heanor, Notts.

A CHANGE OF DIET.

Zoo Attendant: "Don't be afraid of the tiger, sonny. He was brought up on milk."

Boy: "So was I, but I eat meat now!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. McIndoe, 190, Albertbridge Road, Belfast, N. Ireland.

SOMETHING HE OVERLOOKED.

Very Stout Explorer (lecturing): "There is nothing in the world I have not seen in the last three years."

Voice from Audience: "Hey, guv'nor, you've forgotten your feet!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. Hardcastle, 42, Bradley Mills Lane, Huddersfield.

HELPFUL.

Old Gent: "Have you by any chance seen a fox terrier about, my boy?"

Boy: "Small black and white one, sir?"

O.G.: "Yes."

Boy: "With a sharp nose and stumpy tail?"

O.G.: "Yes."

Boy: "With ears stuck up?"

O.G.: "Yes."

Boy: "No, I haven't seen him, mister, but I know the sort you mean!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to S. Doughty, 56, Wesley Avenue, Acton Lane, Harlesden, London, N.W. 10.

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for a moment, to jam a wedge of wood under the shed door, which opened outwards. The concert party were prisoners in the shed now. Kerr rejoined his chums with a grin. Arthur Augustus was going very strong now.

"Vesti la giubba,
E la faccia infarina,
La gente pagar, e rider vuole qua,
E se Arlecchin t'involà Columbina,
Ridi, Pagliaccio, ognun applaudira."

Words and music, both straight from the heart of a great musician, needed a greater tenor than Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to do them justice.

And as the juniors understood hardly a word of Italian, and as D'Arcy's voice wandered around into several keys, the orchestra may be forgiven for not enjoying the performance.

D'Arcy had just reached "applaudira," when there was a sudden, sharp, loud squeak in the air, and it seemed so like a continuation of D'Arcy's note, that the swell of St. Jim's was almost deceived himself.

And Arthur Augustus sailed on with Leoncavallo's masterpiece.

"Tramuta in lazzi lo spasmo ed il pianto!"

Squeak!

It was a loud and prolonged squeak from the window.

Tom Merry & Co. glanced in that direction, and saw three grinning faces. Kerr held a toy squeaker in his hand with which he was evidently bent upon accompanying the amateur tenor of the School House. It was one of those terrible instruments much used by hilarious youths at places of amusement where holiday-makers congregate, and it had a particularly loud and raucous tone.

The School House juniors grinned. Arthur Augustus sailed on unheeding.

"In una smorfia il singhiozzo e'l dolor!"

Squeak, squeak, squeak!

"Ridi, Pagliaccio—"

Squeak!

"Sul tuo amore infranto—"

Squeak, squeak, squeak!

Arthur Augustus' eyes were gleaming with wrath. He lowered his copy of music, and glared round in search of the impertinent squeaker.

"You feafal asses!" he yelled. "You have uttally spoiled my awiah!"

Squeak!

"Who is makin' that widiculous noise?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The School House juniors burst into an irresistible roar of laughter; they could not help it. Arthur Augustus had his back to the window, and could not see Figgins & Co. there. The amateur tenor was pink with fury.

"I shall have to twy it ovah fwom the beginnin' now," he said. "Lowthah, you may as well leave the fiddle alone. You put me out."

"You want putting out badly!" growled Lowther.

"You have done it very badly, Lowthah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Vesti la giubba," recommenced Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, getting within some yards of the right note. "E la faccia infarina—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"La gente pagar—"

Squeak, squeak, squeak!

"You uttah asses—"

Squeak!

Arthur Augustus realised at last that the sound was behind him. He whirled round and stared at the three grinning

juniors at the window. The juniors in the woodshed yelled. Figgins & Co. blew kisses to the swell of St. Jim's.

"Go on!" said Kerr sweetly. "I'm accompanying you—or punctuating you, whichever way you like to look at it."

"You fwightful boundahs—"

Squeak!

"If you do not go away immediately I shall come out and give you a feafal thwashin' all wound!" shouted the swell of St. Jim's.

Squeak!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus wasted no more breath in words. He rushed at the door and turned the handle. He expected it to open as he pushed it, of course; but as it was wedged from the outside it did not budge an inch. Arthur Augustus bumped upon it with the impetus of his rush, and his aristocratic nose came in violent contact with the wood. There was a howl in the woodshed which put the top note of "Vesti la giubba" completely in the shade.

"Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Blake, staggering to a heap of faggots and sinking upon them breathlessly. "Gussy will be the death of me yet—I know he will!"

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

"Ow!" groaned Arthur Augustus, rubbing his nose. "The beastly door's fastened somehow! Ow! Yow!"

Gwooh! Help me open the door, so that I can go out and thwash those New House boundahs!"

Squeak!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus drove at the door, and after some minutes it yielded. The other fellows were laughing too much to help him.

The door flew open at last, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rushed out, on vengeance bent. But the squeaker was gone, and Figgins & Co. were gone with it, and only from the distance round the corner of the House came back a faint echo of them.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 8.

The Rival Band!

A JUNIOR with a large, bumpy forehead, and a pair of large spectacles, looked into Tom Merry's study as the Co. were having tea after the rehearsal.

It was Skimpole, the genius of the Shell. Skimpole was a youth with any amount of brain, though, as Lowther had remarked, it did not seem to be in very good working order.

"Ah! I'm glad I found you fellows here," said Skimpole, with a beaming smile.

"Can't say the same," growled Monty Lowther.

"But it's about the orchestra."

"Oh! Do you want to play first fiddle?" asked Lowther sarcastically.

"I was thinking of offering my services as 'cellist,'" said Skimpole modestly. "You need a 'cello in the orchestra, I've heard you say several times, and you can't find one. I should be very happy to oblige."

The Terrible Three stared at him. They had never suspected the scientific Skimpole of musical proclivities before.

"You play the 'cello!" demanded Tom Merry.

"I did not say I played it," corrected Skimpole. "I merely remarked that I was willing to play it. A fellow never knows what he can do till he tries, of course."

Tom Merry gasped.

"You—you ass! Do you think we're

going to let you start practising for the first time in our orchestra?" he roared. "You fathead!"

"My dear Merry—"

"Weigh the solar system—"

"Go and try Figgins & Co."

Skimpole shook his head.

"No use, my dear fellow. Figgins is strangely obstinate. I have already offered him my services for his orchestra and he has declined."

"His what?" roared the Terrible Three, with one voice.

"His orchestra."

"You—you mean to tell us that that New House boulder is starting an orchestra, too?" roared Tom Merry.

"My dear Merry, I see nothing to get excited about. I happened to come across Figgins & Co. practising in the old chapel garden, and I offered—"

Tom Merry looked at his chums.

"The boulders!" he exclaimed. "They've had the cheek to bag our wheeze, the same as Blake. And—"

"And they've got better players than we have!" grinned Manners.

"The awful spoofers!"

"How many of them were there, Skimmy?" asked Monty Lowther.

"I saw Figgins, Kerr, Wynn, Redfern, and Owen. I offered Figgins to play the 'cello for him upon scientific principles—"

"In the old chapel garden?"

"Yes; I offered—"

"Are they still there?"

"I left them there," said Skimpole, blinking in surprise at the excitement of the chums of the Shell. "I offered to—"

"Come along!" shouted Tom Merry. The Terrible Three rushed for the door.

"Dear me!" gasped Skimpole, as he was charged out of the way. "How very extraordinary! I really do not understand this at all!"

But the Terrible Three did not stop to bother about whether Skimpole understood or not. They shouted to Kangaroo, Clifton Dane, and Bernard Glyn, and yelled into Study No. 6 for Blake & Co., and the whole band ran off to the chapel garden to interview the new Figgins' orchestra!

Sweet strains of music proceeded from the old garden. It was a somewhat solitary spot, secluded from the rest of St. Jim's. The garden had belonged to the ruined chapel, and fragments of the old building encumbered it, and the walks were shaded with thick trees. Hidden by the trees, the Figgins' orchestra was at practice.

Tom Merry & Co. heard the sweet strains as they advanced. Tom Merry made a sign to his followers, and they approached quietly through the trees to take the enemy by surprise.

They glared from the trees upon the orchestra.

Figgins & Co. were going strong.

Figgins had a 'cello, Kerr a violin, Fatty Wynn a cornet, Redfern a clarinet, and Owen the second violin. They had music pinned on to the trees, or on sticks stuck in the ground, and were playing in time and tune—wonderful to relate! There was no doubt that Figgins & Co. had made up a better orchestra than the School House Co. It was due to Kerr and Fatty Wynn, both of whom were born musicians.

"The boulders!" murmured Tom Merry.

"The awful wottahs!"

"Kerr's conducting with his eye-lashes, I s'pose," murmured Monty Lowther. "The cheek, to borrow our wheeze like this!"

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "This is what comes of Fourth Form kids bagging our schemes," said Manners.

"Oh, rats!" said Blake.
 "Quiet! Listen!"

There was a pause in the music.
 "Good!" said Kerr. "You'll have to buck up with that 'cello, Figgins. But, really, you're all good—a bit different from the School House stuff!"

"What-ho!" said the Co. heartily.
 "Like their cheek to take up the idea at all," remarked Redfern. "They can't play for toffee. Tom Merry can play the piano, but he's no good at anything else."

"And have you heard Lowther's fiddling?" grinned Owen.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 The New House juniors laughed in chorus, and Monty Lowther turned crimson.

"Did you hear that, Monty?" murmured Manners. "What did I say?"

"Oh, shut up!"
 "And Manners' trombone!" went on Kerr, chuckling. "Have you heard Manners play the trombone? It's a treat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 And the New House musicians laughed more heartily than ever; and this time it was Monty Lowther's turn to nudge his chum.

"Hear that, Manners?" he murmured.
 "Oh, cheese it!" growled Manners.
 "And Reilly with his flute!" said Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "And Gussy's tenor solos!"
 The musicians shrieked.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I wefuse to wemain here and listen to this wot! Let's wush the boundahs!"

"And Blake's guitar!" grinned Fatty Wynn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "They'll get chased off the ground at the fete," said Kerr. "Serve them right, for their cheek! We are the musical geniuses of St. Jim's."

"We are!" said Redfern. "We is!"
 "Queer we didn't think of the idea ourselves," Figgins remarked. "But we're the chaps to carry it out."

"Hear, hear!"
 "Well, let's go on to the next piece," said Kerr. "I've got the Grand March from Tannhauser written out for these instruments. I wrote it out from the score. Here you are!"

"Good egg!"
 Kerr handed out the pencilled sheets. The band was about to commence when there was a rush of feet and Tom Merry & Co. burst upon the scene.

In a moment each of the musicians was struggling in the grasp of a couple of the School House fellows.

There was a roar of wrath from Figgins & Co.

"Yah!"
 "Leggo!"
 "Gerrouit!"

The New House fellows could not offer a vigorous resistance for fear of damaging their instruments. They were taken at a disadvantage.

"Now, you bounders!" said Tom Merry.

"Gerraway!" roared Figgins. "You'll damage my 'cello! Buzz off!"

"Put it down!"
 "Shove all those instruments down!" commanded Tom Merry. "We're going to bump you. If the instruments are bumped, too, they'll be hurt."

"Hold on!" yelled Kerr. "If you damage my violin I'll scalp you!"

"Put it down, then!"
 The infuriated musicians put their instruments down.

Then they fought, but they fought in vain.

The School House party were two to one, and they were prisoners.

Tom Merry surveyed them with a stern and frowning brow.

"You bounders!" he exclaimed. "So you were going to borrow our wheeze, were you, and take an orchestra to the fete?"

Figgins grinned breathlessly.
 "All's fair in war!" he remarked.

Tom Merry nodded.
 "Exactly. All's fair in war; and so we're going to confiscate your instruments."

"What!" roared the New House juniors.

"Getting deaf?" asked Tom Merry pleasantly.

"Look here——"

"You awful rotter——"

"Gather up the instruments, you chaps," said Tom Merry. "Take them away, and put them in my study in the School House."

"What-ho!" grinned Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"
 And Blake, D'Arcy, and Kangaroo gathered up the eight instruments, and put them in their cases, and disappeared with them under the trees in the direction of the School House.

Figgins & Co. struggled desperately.

But they struggled in vain. The odds were too great, and Tom Merry & Co. had the upper hand.

"Look here, you rotters!" yelled Kerr, as he sank down again breathlessly.

"Look here, you can't take our instruments."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Seems to me that we've taken them," said Tom Merry, with a smile. "Of course, we're not going to keep them permanently."

"I should say not," yelled Redfern.

"You—you giddy burglars!"
 "We're only going to keep them till after the Rylcombe Fete," said Tom



As Arthur Augustus sailed on with his tenor solo, there was a loud and prolonged squeak from the window. Tom Merry & Co. glanced in that direction and saw the grinning faces of Figgins & Co. Squeak, squeak, squeak! D'Arcy sang on, unheeding the accompaniment.

Merry. "We can't have a rival orchestra there."
 "You—you—"
 "We can do with that 'cello," Manners remarked.
 "Yes, and an extra violin, and a clarinet."

"You're not going to use our instruments," shrieked Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Who's going to stop us?" asked Digby agreeably.

"Why, you—you—"
 "All's fair in war, as you just remarked, Figgins, old man," said Tom Merry. "You bagged our idea, and you were going to take a rival band to the fete. We've bagged your instruments, and stopped you. One good turn deserves another."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "We'll take the very best care of them, and let you have them back the day after the fete," promised Tom Merry.

"You—you—"
 "And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came back through the trees, with a sweet smile upon his aristocratic face.

"It's all wight, deah boys. The instruments are quite safe."

"Good!"
 "Look here!" roared the exasperated Figgins. "I tell you—"

"Bump them!" said Tom Merry. "Bump them for their cheek! Who's Cock House at St. Jim's?"

"School House!" roared the juniors. "Who's done brown?"

"Figgins & Co."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 Bump, bump, bump!
 And Figgins & Co. were bumped

heartily, and then the School House fellows departed, leaving the unfortunate orchestra sprawling in the grass, gasping for breath.

From the School House party, as they retreated, came an echoing yell through the trees.

"Hear us smile! Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 9.

The Night Raiders!

F IGGINS sat up.

He was dusty, he was ruffled, and he was enraged. He gasped for breath, and rubbed his nose, which had come into violent contact with somebody's elbow in the struggle and was emitting a stream of red.

"M-my only Aunt Georgina!" gasped Figgins.

"Ow!" groaned Fatty Wynn.

"Groogh!"

"Yah!"

"Oh!"

"Done!" grunted Kerr. "We were asses to let ourselves be taken by surprise like this. They've got our instruments."

"All's fair in war!" groaned Redfern. Figgins snorted.

"We're going to have them back!" he exclaimed.

"How are we going to get them?"

"How should I know, fathead? We've got to think of a way."

"We can't raid the giddy School House," growled Owen. "They've got 'em safe in Tom Merry's study. We shall have to make terms with them somehow."

Figgins shook his head.

"Can't be did! They won't give them back to us unless we agree not to start a band at all."

"That's not to be thought of," said Kerr. "We've simply got to have an orchestra to show the people that there are some chaps in St. Jim's who can play in tune."

"Let's go down to the tuckshop, and think it over," said Fatty Wynn, raising his ample person with an effort from the grass.

"Blow the tuckshop!" groaned Figgins.

The New House juniors, grunting, growling, and gasping, picked themselves up, and made their way disconsolately towards the House.

They passed the School House on the way, and as they glanced up at the window of Tom Merry's study, they had the pleasure of seeing the Terrible Three there. Tom Merry held up the captured violoncello, and Lowther exhibited Kerr's fiddle. The New House juniors, with frowning brows, went on their way.

They had tea in Figgins' study, and discussed ways and means. It was pretty certain that they would have to give up the idea of ravalling the School House orchestra, unless they could recapture their instruments.

And it was impossible to raid the School House in broad daylight. So far, Tom Merry & Co. were masters of the situation. So long as they kept the captured instruments within the walls of the School House, Figgins & Co. were powerless.

"And they won't bring 'em out!" Figgins growled. "They'll do their practice in the studies and the box-rooms, you bet. They won't run any risk!"

"And they'll practise with our instruments," grunted Kerr. "And the music I wrote out for our band—they've got that. They'll play our march."

"The rotters!"

"We're done all along the line," said Figgins. "We've got to recapture the instruments, that's all!"

"But how?"

"We shall have to raid 'em at night!"

"Phew!"

"It's the only way!" said Figgins decidedly. "We can't go into the School House before bed-time without being chucked out on our necks. We shall have to wait till they've gone to sleep, and then get in somehow and raid Tom Merry's study."

"Good!" said Redfern. "It's risky, but it's the only way."

"And we may be able to burgle their own instruments at the same time," said Kerr.

"Hurrah!"

Figgins' eyes gleamed.

"That would be ripping!" he exclaimed.

"Tit for tat!" grinned Owen.

And after some discussion Figgins & Co. decided that it was the only way.

They waited eagerly for night.

Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn were the selected burglars, and they all three looked extremely secretive and mysterious when they went to bed.

"What's the little game, you fellows?" demanded Pratt of the Fourth, sitting up in bed when Monteith had seen lights out.

"Burglary!" said Figgins.

"Eh?"

"There's going to be a burglary to-night."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Pratt in alarm. "How do you know?"

Figgins chuckled.

"I'm one of the gang!" he exclaimed.

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"What?"
"We're going to burgle the School House."
"Oh!" said Pratt. "You ass! It's a raid!"

"No; it's a burglary. 'We're going to burgle Tom Merry's study.'
"Better not let a prefect spot you, that's all!" said Lawrence.

"When are you going?" asked Pratt.
"Eleven o'clock. You can stay awake and wake us up, if you like, when the clock strikes."

"No fear!" said Pratt promptly.
And Pratt went to sleep.

The Co. remained awake after all the other fellows were asleep; but about half-past ten Fatty Wynn's voice was heard in sleepy tones.

"Figgy, old man!"
"Hallo!" said Figgins rather drowsily.

"If I nod off, I suppose you can call me at eleven?"

"Right-ho!" said Figgins. "But suppose I nod off, too?"

"Well, Kerr will call both of us."
"Kerr! Are you awake, Kerr?"

"Snore!"
"Kerr!"
"Snore!"

"Kerr's nodded off already," chuckled Figgins. "I feel pretty like it myself. Can't you keep awake, Fatty, you slacker?"

"Well, yes; but—"

"I told you to make a light supper, so as to keep awake!" said Figgins severely. "You were bound to tuck in as usual, all the same."

"Oh, I say, Figgy, I made a jolly light supper. I only had some bread and cheese, and biscuits, and ham, and a few tarts, and the doughnuts, and the cold pie, and the jam pudding, besides the sausages and the cake."

"Is that all?" said Figgins sarcastically.

"Yes, that's all—excepting the toffee and the marmalade tarts."

"Then I dare say you're getting sleepy because you're awfully empty," said Figgins, with a sarcasm that was quite lost on his fat chum.

"Yes, I shouldn't wonder if that's it," agreed Fatty Wynn. "Still, I'll keep awake, Figgy, old man, if you'd like to snore. I'll make up my mind to it."

"You may make up your mind to it, but I don't suppose your fat corpus will take any notice of your mind," said Figgins. "It's all right; go to sleep, and I'll call you at eleven sharp."

"I'll stay awake if you like," said Fatty drowsily.

"Oh, go to sleep!"

"Good enough!"

And Fatty Wynn was asleep in sixty seconds.

Figgins stayed awake.

He waited for the clock to strike; but it was not easy for a healthy junior, who was never troubled with insomnia, to keep awake.

Figgins was soon nodding. He closed one eye, and then both. He started out of a doze.

"I must keep awake!" he murmured.

"I must—keep—"

And he slept.

The Fourth Form dormitory in the New House of St. Jim's was plunged into slumber, the silence only broken by heavy breathing and an occasional snore.

Figgins did not sleep so soundly as usual; the duty of awakening at eleven haunted him in his slumbers.

He awoke suddenly.

Deeply and dully the boom from the clock tower came through the night air and sounded in his drowsy ears.

JUST MY FUN

Monty Lowther Calling



Hallo, everybody! The Wayland bank manager is looking for a cashier. Unfortunately, he has no idea which way he went. "What does one take on a walking tour?" asks Blake. Often a train. Next—a bootblack wants to know how to become an actor. Just acquire polish, brush up your English, and shine! Crooke says he is going to a spa with Ponsonby of Highcliffe. His "spa-rring" partner. "Are Scotsmen generous to concert parties?" asks D'Arcy. Well, they certainly "give" them their attention. "So you were born in Devonshire?" said Mr. Selby to Gibson. "Yes, sir." "What part?" "All of me, sir." Next: "Farmer Blunt calls his prize pig 'Ink,'" said Wally D'Arcy. "Why?" asked Jameson. "Because he's always running from the pen," answered Wally. Skimpole caught a cold swimming, and Tom Merry advised him

"My hat!" murmured Figgins. "Lucky I woke—there goes eleven!"

He waited for the clock to finish striking. But after that one stroke there came no more. Figgins listened in vain.

"Must be the last stroke that woke me!" he murmured.

He crept out of bed and mounted to the dormitory window and looked out.

The old quad was very dark and silent. Across the quadrangle he could not catch a glimpse of light from the School House.

"Queer!" murmured Figgins. "Everybody gone to bed at eleven!"

He returned to his bed and groped under the pillow and pulled out his watch.

Scratch!

A match flickered out, and he glanced at the dial of his watch.

Then he uttered an exclamation.

"My hat! One!"

The fact that he had heard only one stroke from the clock tower was accounted for now. It was one o'clock in the morning.

He had slept for two hours and a half instead of for half an hour, as he had supposed.

"My word!" murmured Figgins. "One o'clock! Well, it can't be helped—we've got to go if it were seven o'clock."

He shook Kerr by the shoulder. The Scottish junior came out from the land of dreams with a start.

"Groogh! 'Tain't rising bell!"

Figgins chuckled.

"I know it isn't," he said. "It's Figgy! Time, Kerr, old man. Jump out!"

"Oh, is it eleven?"

"No; it's one!"

"Phew!"

Kerr tumbled out of bed, and Figgins went along to Fatty Wynn's bed and shook the fat Fourth Former. Fatty Wynn was a heavy sleeper, and he was more difficult to wake than Kerr.

But he rolled out of bed. The other fellows were sleeping soundly at that late hour. Figgins & Co. put on coats

to drink a hot lemon after a hot bath. Skimpole looked apologetic next day. "I did my best, Merry," he said, "but I couldn't finish drinking the hot bath!" Next: "Did you ever see anything so unsettled as this weather?" demanded the holiday-maker. "Well, there's your bill!" suggested the landlady. You heard about the naval cadet who, on being told to sweep the horizon, asked for a broom? Same chap, after being knocked out in the feather-weight contest, demanded a recount. Harry Noble says his trip to the Continent depends on the weather. Whether or not he can afford it. "Let me think a minute," said Gore. "Can you keep it up that long?" asked Kerr. Burglars stole a loudspeaker from a pier the other day. Police are now looking for the receiver. Sensational news: Tom Merry has just dropped twelve stories. Yes, into the waste-paper basket. Then there was the seaside "cadger" who wheeled half-a-crown out of Skimpole. The man with a "catch" in his voice. Mr. Rateliff is writing his autobiography, to be published at £10-10-0. Selling his life dearly. Oh, I hear the chap who got round Skimpole has had a seizure. Heart? No, police. Then there was the motorist who reported that his car had been stolen, because the garage people had told him it was "missing." That's all this week, chums. Cheerio!

and trousers over their pyjamas and stole out of the dormitory. The House was very silent.

"Groogh!" murmured Fatty Wynn. "We oughtn't to have left it so late, you know. It—it seems uncanny."

"Oh, buck up!" said Figgins.

He led the way to the lower box-room and opened the window. Two minutes later the heroes of the New House were standing under the stars.

CHAPTER 10.

Ghostly!

THE School House was buried in slumber.

Not a light glimmered from the great building as Figgins & Co. approached it from the direction of the New House.

The deep silence and gloom of the midnight hour had its effect upon the spirits of the New House trio.

Fatty Wynn cast hurried glances into the dense shadows of the old elms as they crossed the quadrangle, and Figgins himself was less full of cheery spirits than usual.

But the New House chums were committed to the task now, and they did not hesitate.

They reached the School House.

"We've got to get in at the back," Figgins whispered. "The old box-room window, you know; we've been in that way before."

"R-r-right-ho!" murmured Fatty Wynn.

"What's the matter, Fatty?"

"N-nothing!"

"Your teeth are chattering!"

"R-rot!" stuttered Fatty Wynn.

"Look here, if you're nervous—"

"What rot!" said Fatty Wynn indignantly. "But I say, suppose somebody should awake—"

"Oh, rats!"

"They might take us for burglars! There was a burglar in the School House once, you know, and—and—"

"Bosh!"

"Suppose we should get sh-shot—"

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"Oh, you won't get shot!" said Figgins cheerily. "If you were in any danger of that, there would be a notice up here."

"A—a notice!"

"Yes. 'Rubbish may be shot here,' or something of that sort!" exclaimed Figgins.

"You—you ass!"

Figgins chuckled.

"Well, come on!" he said. "Follow your leader."

And he led the way round the old House.

"I—I say!" murmured Fatty Wynn. "We shall have to pass in sight of the old ruined chapel if we go that way."

"Well, what about it?" demanded Figgins.

"The g-ghost—"

"Ass! You don't believe in ghosts!"

"Not in the day-time," said Fatty Wynn. "B-but—"

"Oh, come on, and don't talk piffle, or you'll make my flesh creep!" growled Figgins. "Shut up, and let's get the burglary over!"

"Right-ho!"

They skirted the House, and Figgins, in spite of his bold words, cast a very uneasy glance towards the ruins as they passed them in the distance. The starlight gleamed upon the old trees and the masses of fallen masonry. The wind whistled softly in the branches, and to imaginative minds it might easily have seemed the voice of the spectre monk calling from his untimely grave.

"B-buck up!" muttered Fatty Wynn. "Here we are!"

They stopped by an outhouse, and Figgins climbed to the roof. Kerr and Wynn followed him. There was a window opening into a box-room before them, and Figgins had been through that window before on the occasion of a House raid. He slipped his penknife between the sashes and pushed back the catch.

"All serene!" he murmured.

He pushed up the lower sash.

Deep darkness lay before the enterprising burglars as they looked into the box-room.

Figgins clambered in over the window-sill and dropped lightly into the room. He disappeared in the darkness, and the next moment there was an ejaculation in a sulphurous voice.

"Yow!"

"What's the matter?" murmured Kerr.

"Ow! I've knocked my beastly ankle on the beastly corner of a beastly box! Ow!"

Kerr grinned, and climbed in through the window. He dropped inside, and there was a suppressed yell from his leader.

"Yaroo!"

"What's the matter?" gasped Kerr. "Have you knocked your ankle?"

"Ow! No! Oh! Yow! You ass—"

"Why, what?"

"You've dropped on my toe! Yow!" "Sorry!" murmured Kerr. "I didn't see it—"

"Well, get off it, you dangerous idiot, if you're not going to keep on it all night!" said Figgins, in a suppressed voice.

"Oh! I—I thought there was something under my boot."

"You—you fathead!"

Fatty Wynn clambered into the window.

Figgins rubbed his boot and ankle alternately for some minutes, his two chums waiting patiently until he had finished.

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Then he opened the door of the box-room, and the three juniors crept out into the passage.

Figgins & Co. knew their way well enough about the School House, and they did not need a light to guide them.

Creeping about the silent, slumbering House in the dead of night gave them a creepy and uncanny feeling; but they would not allow it to affect them.

They crept on without a pause, and in a few minutes found themselves in the Shell passage.

Figgins counted cautiously along the doors until he came to Tom Merry's study, and he tried the handle.

Then he muttered an ejaculation of satisfaction.

"Good egg! It's not even locked."

"Hurrah!" murmured Kerr.

"I—I s-say, Figg—"

"Oh, don't say anything!" growled Figgins.

"But while we are here, we may as well raid the grub, too!" said Fatty Wynn, in a thrilling whisper. "We'd better clear out the cupboard, too, and—"

"You—you fat. gormandiser!"

"Well, it would be a big joke on them, you know. Besides, I'm peckish. Getting up in the middle of the night always makes me hungry, and at this time of the year, too—"

"Shut up! Quiet, you chaps!"

Figgins opened the study door.

He opened it wide, and the three juniors stepped in together.

The next instant there was a yell of terror in the darkness of the Shell passage, and three panic-stricken juniors came bolting out of the study, tumbling over one another in their rush to escape.

CHAPTER 11.

The Spectre of the Study!

"RUN!" gasped

Figgins.

"Oh!"

"Help!"

The three terrified juniors bolted down the passage.

They did not stop till they were in the Fourth Form passage, close to the head of the stairs, and there they paused, gasping with affright, and casting wild glances behind them.

"D-did you see it?" panted Figgins.

"Groogh! Yes! Oh!"

"It was the g-ghost!" moaned Fatty Wynn. "Let's get out—let's get out! We—we've come the wrong way for the box-room window!"

"We—we can't go back past the study!" groaned Figgins.

"S-suppose it follows us?"

"Groogh!"

"Don't make a row!" murmured Kerr. "There would be trouble if we were found here!"

"But the g-ghost!"

"Quiet!" The keen, cool, Scottish junior was the first to recover his wits.

"It's rot! It wasn't a ghost!"

"But I saw it!"

"So did I!" said Kerr. "But we ought to have guessed. Tom Merry guessed

that we should be coming here to-night for the things, I suppose, and he's rigged it up to give us a scare. Anyhow, it hasn't followed us, you see."

Kerr's theory afforded his comrades some comfort.

"Well, I shouldn't wonder," said Figgins, after a pause. "B-but—I don't see how we can make sure."

"I do!" said Kerr.

"How, then?"

"By going and seeing."

Figgins and Fatty Wynn shuddered.

"I—I'm not going back there!" murmured Fatty Wynn.

"I don't like the idea," said Figgins. Kerr grunted.

"I'm not going to be done by a dummy ghost, anyway!" he said. "I'm going back!"

"Hold on, Kerr—"



"Where are the instruments?" demanded Figgins, thr—
"No!" roared Tom Merry. "Rescue!" Swoosh! as it swo

"Wait a bit—"

"Oh, come on!"

"I—look here!" stammered Fatty Wynn. "You—you say that Tom Merry & Co. guessed that we were coming, and rigged up that—that awful thing—"

"Of course he did!"

"Then, if they knew we were coming, they won't have left the musical instruments in the study for us to take, so it's no good going back," said Fatty Wynn, with quite a brilliant outburst of logic.

Kerr snorted.

"I don't care. We'll find out, wherever they are! Look here, I'm going back to burst up that ghost, and show those bouncers that they can't frighten us."

"B-but they have!"

Kerr grinned.
"Well, if they have, we're not going to let 'em know it!" he said. "Come on! I tell you it's a rotten spoof. I'll go in first!"

"That you won't!" said Figgins decidedly. "I'm leader!"

"Well, if you're leader, lead!" said Kerr impatiently. "I'm waiting for you, Figgy!"

Thus adjured, Figgins led the way along the passage, on tiptoe, and certainly with great reluctance.

Not a sound was audible in the Shell passage as the New House juniors re-entered it. But that did not reassure them. Ghosts were not expected to make any sound. The silence, in fact, was creepy and unnerving.

They reached Tom Merry's study. The door was still wide open. Even

arm was raised, pointing towards the juniors in the doorway.

The sight was enough to unnerve the stoutest-hearted burglar in the profession.

Kerr heard Figgins' teeth chattering behind him in the doorway. Fatty Wynn's knees knocked together, and he held on to the doorpost.

Kerr reached for the switch and pressed it down.

The study was flooded with light, and immediately it shone upon the terrible figure the juniors were relieved of their fears.

For in the clear light the terrible figure was revealed as a dummy made up of two chairs placed one upon another, with a couple of sheets draped over them with artistic effect. The

outstretched arm was a fencing foil, draped in a white sheet. The face was made of cardboard, and the glittering eyes were two holes cut in the cardboard and covered with green gauze, with a tiny electric torch burning behind.

The New House juniors grinned rather shamefacedly.

"The spoofers!" murmured Figgins.

"The bounders!"

"What asses we were!"

Kerr closed the study door. Then he calmly dismembered the terrifying figure, and laid the various pieces on the floor. He spread out one of the sheets upon the carpet, and laid the fender on it to keep it down, and then selected a chunk of half-burned coal from the grate.

"What are you going to do?" asked Figgins.

"Leave 'em a message!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn made a direct line for the cupboard. His fright had not impaired his appetite in the least. Figgins watched the Scottish junior as the latter scrawled a message on the white sheet with the fragment of coal.

"Try again! Signed, Figgins & Co."

"P.S.—Rats!"

"Good egg!" said Figgins, with a chuckle.

"That'll show 'em we weren't—ahem—frightened! What have you got there, Fatty?"

Fatty Wynn gave a grunt of disgust.

"Nothing!" he growled. "They knew we were coming. Look here!"

Figgins and Kerr looked into the study cupboard. It was quite innocent of anything in the way of refreshments, but there was a card, written in Tom Merry's handwriting. But the composition was evidently Monty Lowther's; it was in his poetic vein:

"Like old Mother Hubbard,
Wynn came to the cupboard,
Though he already weighed a ton!
But when he got there,
The cupboard was bare,
And so the poor beast got none!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn glared at his two chums.

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at in that!" he growled. "I call that adding insult to injury!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't cackle, for goodness' sake! Look here, they've hidden all the grub away somewhere. I call it a swindle!"

"Worse than that, they've hidden the instruments!" said Figgins, looking round the study. "I suppose it's no good looking for them here."

Kerr shook his head.

"They're not here," he said. "If we could guess where the bounders have put them—most likely taken them to the dormitory with them—"

"Bit too risky to try the dorm," said Figgins dubiously.

Kerr's jaws set grimly.

"We haven't come all this way for nothing!" he said.

"But—but we shall have to have a light—and they'll all wake up—"

"Let's chance it! We may be able to grab the things and bolt, or some of them, at any rate!" said Kerr.

"Well, I'm game, if you are! What do you think, Fatty?"

"Eh? I think we'll try the next study!"

"What! They wouldn't be likely to leave musical instruments in any of the Shell studies, as it's pretty clear now they guessed we should come for them," said Figgins.

"I—I meant to try the study cupboards!" said Fatty Wynn. "Gore has the next study, and he generally has plenty of grub!"

"You—you fat boulder!" said Figgins, in disgust. "Are you still thinking of the grub?"

"Well, you see, I'm hungry, and—"

"Come on," said Kerr, switching off the light.

"Shall we try Gore's study first?" asked Fatty Wynn eagerly, as they moved out into the Shell passage in the darkness.

"No. The dorm."

"But I say, I'm—"

Figgins and Kerr took Fatty Wynn by either arm, and propelled him towards the upper staircase. And the Falstaff of the New House grunted and yielded the point.

CHAPTER 12.

Figgins & Co. Fail!

TOM MERRY started and awoke. A sudden light gleamed out in the Shell dormitory in the School House.

The captain of the Shell sat up in bed.

The long, lofty room was flooded with light. Three figures had entered at the door, and one of them had turned on the electric light. It was a bold move, but it was impossible for the New House raiders to search for the musical instruments in the dark.

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Oh, rescue!"

Figgins & Co. were upon him in a moment, and they pinned him down in bed. Kerr and Wynn held him, and Figgins reached for the water-jug on the nearest washstand.

"Rescue!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Where's my fiddle?" asked Kerr.

"Where's my clarinet?"

"Where's my cello?"

"Answer, you boulder!"

"Yow! Rescue!" bawled Tom Merry. Figgins held the water-jug over him.

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Tom Merry with the water-jug. "Will 'you tell me?"
er came down in a flood, and Tom gasped and gurgled
his face.

Kerr hesitated a moment before he reached the doorway. Figgins noticed it.

"We—we'll go back if you like," he murmured.

"Oh, rats!" said Kerr.

And, taking his courage in both hands, so to speak, the Scottish junior strode into the darkened study.

Cool and courageous as he was, Kerr needed all his nerve not to turn and fly.

There was a dim glimmer of starlight in at the window of the study, and in the glimmering light stood a fearsome figure.

It was a white-sheeted figure, with two eyes that gleamed and shone with a strange unearthly light. Its right

"Tell us where they are, or I'll swamp you!" he shouted.

There was no time to waste. The Shell fellows were waking up on all sides now, and moments were precious. Tom Merry looked up at the water-jug and shivered.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed.

"Where are the instruments, then?"

"Rats!"

"Will you tell me?"

"No!" roared Tom Merry. "Rescue!"

Swoosh!

The water came down in a flood, and Tom Merry gasped and gurgled as it swept over his face, and drenched his head, his pillow, and half the bed.

"Groogh!"

"There's some more to come," grinned Figgins. "Tell us where our musical instruments are, or you'll get it in the neck!"

"Find out!"

Swoosh!

"Yaroo! Help!"

"Rescue!" shouted Monty Lowther, tumbling out of bed.

Manners and Kangaroo were only a second behind him. They rushed upon Figgins & Co. Figgins dropped the jug, and there was a crash as it smashed on the floor.

In a moment more Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were struggling in the grasp of the Shell fellows. They had to let Tom Merry go, and the captain of the Shell turned out to aid his chums. Gore, Dane, and Bernard Glyn jumped out of bed, and came to their assistance, and Figgins & Co. were whirled towards the door.

"Not too much row!" gasped Manners. "We don't want to have a prefect up here."

"Yow!"

Bump!

"Yah!"

"Chuck them out!"

"Groogh!" snorted Figgins. "Where are our instruments? Yow! Oh!"

"Sling 'em into the passage!"

Glyn opened the dormitory door. Figgins & Co. were whirled out, and bumped in the passage.

Tom Merry shook a warning forefinger at them.

"Now, buzz off! How dare you come burgling a respectable dormitory at this time of night?"

"Give us our instruments!"

"We'll give you a set of thick ears if you don't buzz off!"

And Monty Lowther closed the door upon the gasping New House juniors.

Figgins rose to his feet ruefully. Kerr followed his example. Fatty Wynn remained extended upon the linoleum, still struggling to recover his breath.

"My hat!" said Kerr ruefully. "The game's up! Let's buzz off before some rotten prefect wakes up and comes to inquire what we're doing in the wrong House."

"I suppose we shall have to chuck it now they're awake!" growled Figgins. "They've got our things in there right enough."

"Come on, Fatty!" said Kerr.

Fatty Wynn pumped in breath.

"Ow! Groogh! Oh!" he murmured.

"Oh, come on! Drag him up, Figgins!"

Figgins and Kerr took an arm each of Fatty Wynn, and dragged him to his feet—no light task. They marched him away, gasping, and retreated from the School House the way they had come. The expedition could not be called a success. The bold stroke had failed, and Figgins & Co. had to go bootless home. But they had done their best, and they could do no more.

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In the Shell dormitory Tom Merry towelled himself down, while the other fellows went back to bed.

"I'm jolly wet!" growled Tom Merry. "Lucky I woke up. The bounders were here after their giddy instruments."

"And they are under the beds," grinned Monty Lowther. "If they'd known they could have got 'em in the dark. I wonder if they've been to the study?"

"And seen the ghost!" grinned Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, they haven't got the instruments," said Tom Merry. "And they jolly well won't get them! Phew!"

"What's the matter now?"

"My bed's soaked," said Tom Merry, regarding his bed in dismay. "I shall not be able to sleep in it again."

"Try the floor," suggested Gore.

"Rats! Who's going to take me in?" asked Tom Merry.

"Here you are, old man," said Lowther.

"Good!"

And Tom Merry turned out the light, and got into Lowther's bed.

The Shell fellows waited, awake, for some time, in case their enemies of the New House should return. But Figgins & Co. did not come back, and one by one the Shell fellows dropped off to sleep again.

Figgins & Co. were not thinking of returning. They had gone back to their own House in an exasperated frame of mind.

They reached their dormitory as two o'clock struck from the old tower.

"Hallo!" came a sleepy voice, as they entered the Fourth Form dormitory in the New House; and Fatty Wynn grunted as he caught his foot upon a chair. "Hallo! What's that?"

"Oh, go to sleep!" growled Figgins.

Pratt sat up in bed.

"That you, Figgins?"

"Yes, ass!"

"Been over the way?"

"Yes, fathead!"

"Got the things?"

"No, chump!"

"Well, I knew you wouldn't," said Pratt; and he turned over to go to sleep again.

Figgins grunted, and went to bed. Redfern had awakened, and he inquired drowsily what had happened.

"We did our best," said Figgins. "They'd got the things in their dorm, and they woke up when we went in. That's all."

"Hard cheese!" said Redfern sympathetically. "And after this they'll be more on their guard than ever, too, and there won't be a dog's chance of getting at the giddy instruments."

"You're a rotten comforter, anyway!" growled Figgins, in disgust.

Redfern laughed.

"I've got a suggestion to make," he replied.

"Oh, go to sleep!" snapped Figgins, who was not in a humour just then to listen to any suggestions, good or bad.

"But it's a ripping one. We can't get the instruments back, but we don't want to be left out of the show. Let's make it pax with Tom Merry, and play in his band."

"What?"

"He'd be glad to have us, you know; he knows we play better than his crowd, especially Kerr," said Redfern confidently. "He'll jump at it if you propose it to him."

"Well, we might think of it!" conceded Figgins.

And the New House juniors went to sleep. Figgins & Co. were not in a

hurry to get up when the rising-bell rang out in the morning. They had a feeling as if they'd been up all night—a most unpleasant "next-dayish" feeling. And they nearly nodded off to sleep in the Fourth Form Room in class that morning, much to the amusement of Blake & Co., who had heard of the nocturnal adventure from Tom Merry & Co.

CHAPTER 13.

More Band Recruits!

TOM MERRY was looking particularly cheerful when he came out of the Shell class-room that morning after lessons.

Whether his instrumentalists were quite up to the mark or not, there was no lack of instruments for the orchestra, and that was a good thing. And his rivals of the New House had been defeated, and that was better still.

The Terrible Three gloated.

As they came down the Form-room passage, the Fourth Form came out of their class-room, and Figgins & Co. came over towards the Terrible Three at once.

The chums of the Shell were ready for war. But Figgins was not on the warpath this time. He held up his hand in sign of peace.

"Pax!" he said.

"Certainly, old man!" said Tom Merry, smiling. "We found your message in the study this morning. Did the ghost give you several kinds of blue funk?"

"What rot!" said Figgins loftily. "As if we were likely to be scared by a dummy!"

"I wish I had seen you, though!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Did you go straight into the study when you saw it?"

Figgins turned pink.

"Never mind that," he said, changing the subject abruptly. "Look here, I want to talk to you about the band business."

"Go ahead!"

"You've got all our musical instruments—"

"Spoils of war, Figgy, old man," said Tom Merry solemnly. "To the victors the spoils, you know. Vae victis!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all right," said Figgins. "We would have done the same to you, and we're not grousing. But I've got a proposal to make."

"To which of us?" asked Monty Lowther, with a grin.

"All of you."

"Why, you giddy Mormon!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Figgins.

"I want to propose to you—"

"Ask mamma!"

"You ass! Don't be funny!" roared Figgins.

"I want to propose to come into the band. You've got our instruments, but you can't play 'em for toffee. We're willing to come into the band and make it pax."

Tom Merry's face brightened.

"Well, that's a jolly good idea!" he exclaimed. "We want some more instrumentalists. We are willing to take in recruits."

"But about the conductor?" asked Figgins.

"I'm the conductor," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "It's Tom Merry's Melody Makers, you know. I conduct."

"Br-r-r-r! You couldn't conduct a bus!"

"Look here—"

"Now, be reasonable," urged Figgins.

(Continued on page 13.)



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! As you have probably seen on page 7, another grand story, by Mr. E. S. Brooks is starting next Wednesday. It is a four-week serial, dealing with the adventures of the boys of St. Frank's. It is a new departure for the GEM to publish so short a serial, but I anticipate that, owing to the excellence of this yarn, it will be received with enthusiasm by readers.

"MYSTERY MILL!"

is a story of two baffling things that happened on the River Stowe, near St. Frank's, and the thrilling adventure, centred around an old mill, which was the outcome of them. When Willy Handforth discovered many dead fishes in a section of the river, he was surprised and mystified. What could have caused the wholesale slaughter of so many fishes? But that baffling incident was later followed by one even more inexplicable. Willy's chum, Juicy Lemon, falls into the river, and afterwards turns yellow. These startling incidents certainly provide the chums of St. Frank's with a problem. What is wrong with the river? But you can be sure that Nipper & Co. won't be satisfied until they have sifted the mystery to the bottom.

Look out for the opening chapters of this great mystery story, and don't forget to order your GEM in advance.

"THE STAGE-STRUCK SCHOOLBOY!"

Martin Clifford strikes a new note with his next story of the chums of St. Jim's. He is an authority on matters connected with the stage and life behind the footlights, and in his clever and inimitable style he takes the reader through the trials and adventures of a third-rate touring show.

The story reveals Monty Lowther, the

humorist of the Shell, in a different light. He becomes obsessed with the stage, and he would give anything to become a real actor in musical comedy. So it is that when he is suddenly offered the chance of going on the boards, he doesn't hesitate to run away from St. Jim's. Of his adventures in the chorus of a touring company, you will read all about next week.

"HOLDING THE FORT!"

The rebels of Packsaddle School are still at it, and as they show in the next yarn of the cow town school rebellion, they are prepared to hold their stronghold against all comers. Thanks to Dick Carr, they are no longer foodless. But there's one fly in the ointment—Dick is a prisoner in the hands of the enemy. With rare cunning Job Wash uses him as a lever to make the rebels surrender. The pals of Packsaddle, however, prove that they are worth a trick more than that. Make sure you don't miss Frank Richards' next smashing story!

SAVED BY A SECOND!

The United States of America must have been relieved to learn that recently they just escaped a catastrophe that would have shaken the country from end to end. Scientists say that on May 26th, had a large meteor not exploded when but fifteen miles from the earth, an area of unknown extent would have been devastated. The meteor, estimated to be travelling at nearly twelve miles a second, was heading for Western Massachusetts, but its tremendous speed through space brought

it to such a white-hot heat that it exploded 1.25 seconds before it would have struck the earth. The explosion was so great that it was heard over a wide area. However, a miss is as good as a mile.

SPEED AND STRENGTH!

I have just been reading about the astonishing speed and strength of insects in comparison with men, and the facts revealed are very interesting. For instance, the beetle is the "strong man" of the insect world. It can carry 850 times its own weight. On this calculation, a twelve-stone man, if his strength was in proportion to the beetle's, would be able to lift a weight of 65 tons.

For speed in relation to size the fastest runner in the world is left hopelessly behind when compared with the spider, which can travel 100 times its own length per second! A six-foot man would have to run 200 yards per second, or at a speed of 409 m.p.h. to equal this.

AN ATLANTIC MYSTERY!

It is the ill-fated sailing-vessel, Mary Celeste, J. Briggs, of Manchester, that you are thinking of. She put out from New York in 1872, and in December of the same year she was discovered with all sails set, but with every member of the crew of ten missing. What happened to them has never been satisfactorily solved. It is a mystery of the Atlantic. But one theory advanced is that there was an explosion aboard, and the crew, frightened that there would be others, put out in a boat to a safe distance. Then a wind sprang up, and as the Mary Celeste had all her sails set she sailed on, leaving the crew stranded, and afterwards to perish.

LOST—AND FOUND!

When a miner lost his watch while digging out coal recently, he thought that he had looked the last upon his timepiece. But that's where he was wrong. The watch was shovelled up with coal, taken to the pithead, where it was shot into a truck, and carried to a brickworks. There the coal was unloaded into a bunker. A barrow-load was taken from it, and out came the watch. It was still ticking away, and it only had a broken glass.

TAILPIECE!

First office-boy: "Did you succeed in making your boss toe the mark over your rise?"

Second office-boy: "Yes; but I was the mark!"

PEN PALS COUPON

20-7-35

THE EDITOR.



A free feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging views upon topics of interest. If you want a pen pal, post your notice, together with the coupon on this page, to The GEM, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Graeme Waller, 15a, Barrack Road, Penang, Straits Settlements; British Empire, including Great Britain, France, Pacific Islands; snaps, motor-racing, music, dancing, boxing. Murdoch Matheson-Lines, Drumbuie, 23b, Newcastle Street, Rose Bay, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia; stamps; age 11-12. Miss Norma Cullen-Ward, 35, Gipps Street, Drummoyne, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia; girl correspondents; Europe, Africa, U.S.A.; interested in riding, stamps and sports; age 12-16.

D. Bourlin, 10, Wu-tai-shan-tsing, Nanking, China; age 16-20; Africa, Australia, Canada, India, South Seas; interested in the history of the races of mankind.

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Reg Redman, 56, St. Nicholas Road, St. Paul's, Bristol; North Africa; age 15-16; stamps.

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Victor Tait, 81, Wansford Road, Woodford Green, Essex; Spain; age 14-16.

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Tom Merry's Melody Makers!

(Continued from page 16.)

"I don't say it because Kerr is a New House chap, but you know he's the best conductor we've got!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, I'll be reasonable," he agreed. "Kerr can conduct better than I can, I know that. Only it's Tom Merry's Melody Makers—that's understood."

"Right you are! But Kerr conducts!"

"Agreed!"

"We'll have a rehearsal before dinner," said Kerr briskly. "I dare say I shall be able to knock you chaps into shape before the Rylcombe Fete."

"Will you?" said Monty Lowther, rather truculently.

"Well, we'll try," said Kerr blandly. "Go and dig out the instruments, and we'll get down to the woodshed and play up."

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry. "It's pax, then—no larks?"

"Honour bright?"

"Honour bright!" said Figgins.

"Good enough!"

And the captured instruments were brought down, and the united bands—massed bands, as Tom Merry proudly called them—adjourned to the woodshed for rehearsal.

Blake & Co. were quite agreeable to the new arrangement, and in a short time the united bandmen were going strong.

There was no doubt that Kerr was the best conductor that could be found in the Lower School, and his gift for writing out parts at express speed was extremely useful, too. He could write out a part for any instrument at a moment's notice—a power that seemed quite weird to some of the juniors.

Under the conductorship of Kerr, the now numerous band practised several pieces with great success.

There was no doubt that the St. Jim's orchestra was going to be a success.

The Rylcombe Fete was drawing near.

It was a local affair of very considerable importance, and, indeed, famous for three or four miles in every direction from Rylcombe.

It was given in the grounds of General Sir Hotham Wapps, a retired Anglo-Indian veteran, whose extensive estate ran for many a mile along the banks of the Rhyl. The fete was given annually in the cause of charity, the chief beneficiaries apparently being the local tradesmen, who did very good trade on the occasion. Crowds came from far and near to the fete, and the St. Jim's juniors usually turned up in force.

But the idea of taking a school orchestra there had not been thought of before that brilliant idea occurred to Tom Merry.

After many vicissitudes, Tom Merry's Melody Makers seemed to be in excellent working order at last.

It had been greatly improved by the addition of the New House members, and under Kerr's conductorship it was going really strong.

By the time the fete day came Tom Merry was quite satisfied with his band, and he had easily obtained permission for it to perform in the general's grounds on the occasion of the fete.

Some of the juniors suggested making

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a collection for the performance, but Tom Merry would not hear of it.

"Can't be did!" he declared. "We're amateurs, not professionals, and we're not after the shekels. It's in the cause of charity, my dear chaps."

"Yaas, wathah! When a chap has a wippin' tenah voice, for instance, I considah that he ought to be willin' to place it at the disposal of othahs," remarked D'Arcy.

"Ahem—yes! We shall get lots of kudos, anyway, especially if Gussy sings 'Vesti la Giubba'!" said Monty Lowther solemnly.

"Quite wight, deah boy!"

"I suppose you're going to sing it in Dutch?" asked Redfern.

"Weally, Weddy, the song is in Italian, you know!"

"Still, you might as well sing it in Dutch!" said Redfern gravely. "The people won't know any difference!"

"I shall sing it in Italian," said D'Arcy. "I will wun ovah it now, if you fellows like—"

There was a rush to escape.

"Weally, you fellows, you know—"

But the orchestra was gone.

The school had a half-holiday on the day of the fete, and after dinner that day the band made great preparations.

There was a last rehearsal in the woodshed, and Kerr expressed himself satisfied; and, later in the afternoon, the bandmen packed up their instruments and prepared to start.

As they came out with their bags and cases in their hands, another party emerged from the School House. There were five members of it, and they belonged to the Third Form. Tom Merry cast his eyes suspiciously on the fags.

"Where are you chaps going?" he asked.

"To the fete," said Wally cheerfully.

"Oh!"

"My band!" exclaimed Wally, indicating the grinning fags with a wave of his hand. "We haven't been rehearsing quite so much as you chaps have, but I think it will be all right."

"Your band!" exclaimed Tom Merry. D'Arcy minor nodded.

"That's it! Jameson plays the tin-whistle in first-rate style, don't you, Jimmy?"

"What-ho!" grinned Jameson.

"Frayne does the bones, don't you, Joe?"

"Watto!" said Joe Frayne.

"Curly does the mouth-organ, don't you, Curly?"

"Not half!" said Curly Gibson.

"And Hobbs can play the tin-whistle, too."

"My strong point!" said Hobbs blandly.

"I'm conductor," said Wally. "But I can play the tin-whistle when required, or click the castanets."

"Look here, you young bounders," exclaimed Tom Merry wrathfully, "do you mean to say that you are going to make a row at the fete?"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gussy!" said Wally imploringly. "As for making a row, Tom Merry, I don't know what you mean. We are a band!"

"A what?"

"Band!" said Wally affably.

"B-a-n-d! We're going to enliven proceedings at the fete for the honour of the school. With a school band playing out of tune, you know, it's up to us to show the public that there are some real musicians here!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Curly can sing, too," said Wally. "He can do the Chickabiddy song

from La Bosh de Piffle, by the celebrated composer Ratz!"

"You—you young ass!"

"March!" said Wally, waving his hand to his orchestra. "Tempo di marchia! Buzz!"

And the grinning fags marched off towards the gates.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Figgins.

"They'll have to be stopped!" exclaimed Kerr. "They're going to rot us at the fete and spoil the whole show!"

"The feahful wascals! Pway hold my music, deah boys, while I wun affah them and give them a feahful thwashin'!"

"They're gone!" growled Tom Merry. "Come on!"

"But we can't let them rot us at the fete!" said Manners excitedly.

"I don't see how we're to stop them."

"Bai Jove! I considah—"

"Why don't you keep your blessed minor in order, Gussy?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Oh, come on!" said Tom Merry.

"If they bother us, we'll chase 'em out of old Wapps' grounds, that's all!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the St. Jim's orchestra started off. But some of them were looking very thoughtful. They had almost forgotten about Wally & Co. in the intense interest of rehearsing for fete day, and they had now discovered that they had to reckon, after all, with the heroes of the Third Form.

There were a great many St. Jim's fellows on the road, all of them bound for the grounds of Sir Hotham Wapps.

Many country people, too, were coming in, and the village of Rylcombe seemed to have transferred itself bodily there.

The extensive grounds were crowded.

The trees were hung with Chinese lanterns, to be lighted when darkness fell; and there were entertainments of all sorts going on, and tents at which refreshments could be obtained in all varieties.

Fatty Wynn cast a glance towards the refreshment quarters as Tom Merry's Melody Makers arrived upon the scene.

"I say, Figg—"

"No, you don't!" said Figgins.

"I was just thinking—"

"I know what you were thinking of, my boy," chuckled Figgins, "and you're not going to."

"But, I say, I'm hungry."

"You will play better when you're hungry, old man."

And Fatty Wynn grunted, and gave it up.

CHAPTER 14.

Discord!

SIR HOTHAM WAPPS, a stout old gentleman, with white whiskers arranged like a fringe round a purple countenance, moved among the merry-makers with a benevolent smile.

He spotted Wally & Co. as they arrived, before the real orchestra, and gave them a very warm welcome.

"Ah! You are the orchestra, I presume?" he remarked.

"Yes, sir," said Wally meekly. "We want to do our little bit of entertaining the people, sir."

"Quite right! Quite right!" said the general. "A very proper spirit."

"There's another party coming from St. Jim's," said Wally. "They're an imitation gang, and not much good."

Sir Hotham Wapps laughed.

"Quite a musical school!" he said.
"Very well, the more the merrier."
And he passed on.

A band was discoursing sweet music near the river bank, and in a large rent couples were already dancing. When that was over for a time, Tom Merry's Melody Makers got to work. Kerr planted his band on the great lawn, and the instruments were taken out of their cases, and the bandmen tuned up. A good many St. Jim's fellows were in the crowd that gathered round to listen.

"My word!" said Gore. "You might have chosen something a bit more cheerful than that, Kerr."

Kerr glared.
"You ass! We're tuning up!"
"Oh!" said Gore blandly. "My mistake! I thought it was something very classical."

"Oh, go and eat coke!"
The amateur orchestra were starting, with the Grand March from "Tannhauser," a stirring march, that was to give the entertainment a good send-off. As there were twelve instruments in all, and the bandmen had been rehearsing hard, there was no reason why the march should not have been a big success.

But just as the opening bars swelled out, Wally & Co. appeared.

They took up their stand a few yards away, and produced their instruments.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Gore. "What's that?"

"A rival band!" grinned Pratt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kerr waved his baton to Wally, rather interrupting the time of the band he was conducting.

"Cut off, you young villains!" he shouted.

Wally did not reply.

He was conducting.

Two tin-whistles, bones, castanets, and mouth-organ, crashed out and shrieked out together.

What tune they were playing, if they were playing at all, was not easily recognisable.

The shrieking of tin-whistles and the braying of the mouth-organ jarred upon the sweet strains that were proceeding from Tom Merry's Melody Makers, and the result was a most terrific cacophony.

But the spectators did not seem to mind. They laughed.

A number of St. Jim's fellows in the crowd cheered on the fags to greater efforts, for no other reason than for the fun of seeing the genuine orchestra growing more crimson with fury.

Kerr set his teeth, and conducted grimly. The Tannhauser march crashed out, and the medley of sounds from the Third Form orchestra crashed out with it.

The crowd roared.

"Go it, Wally!"

"Play up, Tom Merry!"

"Two to one on the Third!"

"Hurrah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Grand March came to an end. Wally & Co. were still blaring away with all the force of their instruments. Kerr rushed over to them.

"You young villains!" he roared.

"Will you clear out?"

"No fear!" said Wally. "We're playing to entertain the people. It's a fellow's duty when he's got a musical gift to place it at the disposal of the poor. I read that in a book somewhere."

"Get out!"

"Rats!"

"We'll sling you out if you don't go!"
"You're liable to get your instruments damaged if you try it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kerr returned to his band, baffled. Certainly, violins, flutes, cellos, and clarinets were out of place in a rough-and-tumble scrimmage with reckless fags.

A crowd of Third Formers had arrived, and were evidently ready to take sides with Wally & Co. in case of need.

"Gussy does his solo next!" said Tom Merry.

Kerr nodded speechlessly.

The band struck up the opening strains of "Vesti la Giubba," and Arthur Augustus coughed a little preliminary cough and started.

Immediately Curly Gibson stepped forth from the ranks of the Third Form band, with a sheet of music in his hand, in an absurd imitation of Arthur Augustus.

As D'Arcy started "Vesti la Giubba," Curly started a song to the tune of "Sulle labbra," but with words in an Italian that had been invented in the Third Form Room at St. Jim's, and which would have puzzled an Italian very much. Instead of the words "Sulle, sulle labbra, sulle labbra, si potesse, dolce 'un bacio, ti darei, dolce 'un bacio, ti darei—" Curly Gibson sang:

"Candel-candelabra,
Candelabra, Saffronillo!
Greeko Streeto, Ice-creamo!
Organ-grindo, hip-hip-hurrah!"

(Continued on page 28.)

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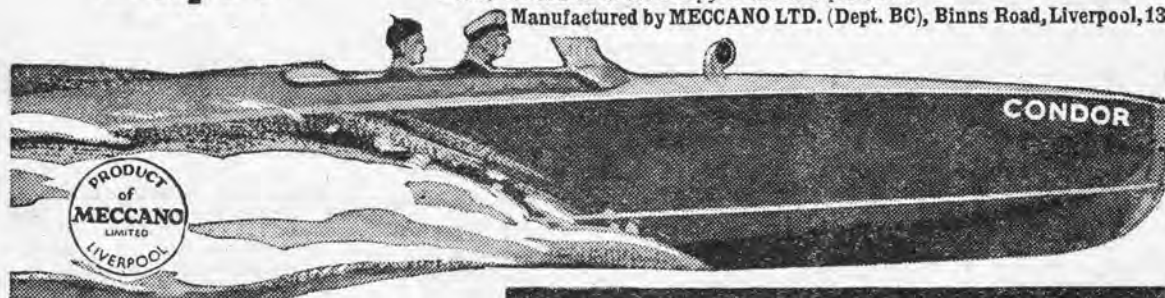
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A hand suddenly flashed out from the window and a finger and thumb fastened on Job's fat nose. "Oooohh!" gasped Job. "I've cinched the bird!" yelled Slick Poindexter. Elias Scadder came scudding across the playground to the rescue, but a beef-can whizzed from the window and met him in full career!

Dick Carr's Errand!

BILL SAMPSON, sitting in the saddle, girth-deep in the thick grass of the prairie, stared in blank astonishment.

The sun was coming up over the Rio Frio. Bill, riding herd over two hundred cows belonging to the Kicking Mule Ranch, had been up with the sun. In his red shirt, big cowman's boots, and ten-gallon hat, Bill looked just as he had looked when he was headmaster of Packsaddle School. But his bronzed, bearded face was not so cheery. He was glad to be riding again with the Kicking Mule outfit, but he missed the school, and he missed the bunch, and he was sorely troubled about the state of affairs at the cow town school since he had left.

In the bright sunlight of the Texas morning Bill had been looking in the direction of Packsaddle School, far out of sight across the rolling prairie. A tramping, weary figure came into his view, and it was then that Bill craned his neck to stare at that tramping figure, and he ejaculated:

"Jumping painters! It's sure young Carr!"

Six or seven miles, at least, from the cow town school, Dick Carr, the tenderfoot of Packsaddle, was tramping on foot across the rough and rugged prairie. Nobody in the cow country went on foot, if there was any kind of a cayuse to be had. Bill's keen eyes, as they picked up the tramping figure, could discern that the schoolboy was

weary, dusty, and worn, but he was tramping steadily on, with fixed determination. From the direction he was taking it looked as if he was heading for the Kicking Mule Ranch, a good many miles farther on.

Bill Sampson gave his bronco a touch of the quirt and galloped towards the still distant schoolboy.

Dick was tramping wearily, his eyes on the ground, and he did not observe the horseman till the thudding of the hoofs caught his ears, and he looked up. Then, as he recognised Bill, his face brightened. He waved his hand to the former schoolmaster of Packsaddle.

Bill came up with a clatter of hoofs and a jingle of bridle and spurs, and

By FRANK RICHARDS.

drew rein. Dick Carr halted. He was glad to halt. He was so tired that he could hardly drag one weary leg after the other.

"You pesky young piecan!" said Bill, staring down at him. "What's this game? Why ain't you in school? I guess you must have hit the trail in the middle of the night to get as far as this on the hoof."

Dick Carr leaned on Bill's bronco. It was a relief to rest on anything. Bill regarded him with concern.

"More trouble at the school?" he demanded. "I guess I heard from Barney Bailey that you young guys was giving

Mr. Scadder a rough house. What you breaking herd for this-a-way?"

"Jolly glad to see you again, Bill!" said Dick, with a faint grin. "I wish you were back at Packsaddle."

Bill grunted.

"Aw, can it, you young gink!" he said. "Ain't I been fired by Mr. Wash and the school committee, and ain't Mr. Elias Scadder your noo headmaster, and ain't I gone back to punching cows? I guess you ain't hoofed it across the prairie to tell me that."

"Give me a lift to Kicking Mule, Bill."

"What you aiming to do at the ranch?"

"Ask Barney Bailey for some grub to take back to the school!" answered Dick. "Look here, Bill, the bunch is standing for you, and we won't have Scadder at any price. We're fixed up in the schoolhouse, and holding out, and Job Wash has got a gang of the toughest roughnecks in the county to help him; add we've got no food. They're going to starve us out—if they can!"

"Howling coyotes!" exclaimed Bill.

"I can tell you, Bill, all the bunch are hungry," said Dick Carr. "But we're not giving in. I know you can't chip in, Bill, but we're not going to give in till they send for you to come back—"

"Carry me home to die!" said Bill.

"They're besieging us in the schoolhouse, waiting for us to chuck it, because we've got no grub," said Dick Carr. "I got out last night and dodged them. I'm going to ask Barney Bailey to help. I'm going to get some

—FEATURING THE PALS OF THE TEXAS COW TOWN SCHOOL!

grub in somehow. Give me a lift to the ranch, old man. I'm not asking you to do anything more than that."

Bill eyed him.

"I guess," said Bill, "that I've got a big bunch to ride into Packsaddle School and give them hambres some gun-play. But"—he shook his head—"I guess that wouldn't do, young Carr. Nope! I'll say that your best guess is to forget that I ever was your headmaster, and make the best of Scadder."

"Nothing doing!"

"Git on!" said Bill.

He grasped Dick Carr with a brawny hand and hooked him up on the bronco. Double-loaded, the horse trotted through the thick grass towards the distant ranch.

Dick Carr was more than glad of the lift. His legs ached from the long tramp on the rugged plains.

Bill's bronzed face was grim and thoughtful as he rode for the ranch. At the Kicking Mule they knew all about the schoolboys' rebellion, and there was not a man in the outfit who did not wish the rebels luck—except Bill himself, who was rather a grim disciplinarian. Bill would have handled a rebellion in the school with a hard and heavy hand. Still, Bill knew that Elias Scadder was not the man to handle the Packsaddle bunch; and Job Wash's stunt of starving out the rebels made him snort with anger and disgust. The idea of the schoolboys barred in the schoolhouse with nothing to eat got his goat sorely.

He said nothing as he rode for the ranch.

Not till he dropped Dick Carr at the gate did Bill speak.

"Thanks, Bill!" said the tenderfoot of Packsaddle as he slid from the bronco's back.

"I guess," said Bill, "that if you want advice from me you'll toe the line, young Carr, and tell the other young guys to do the same. The school committee have sure played it low down on me, I allow, and I don't think a whole lot of that galoot, Scadder, but he's your headmaster, and there ain't no two ways about that. You get me?"

Dick grinned.

"I get you, Bill. That's what I expected you to say. But I didn't come here for advice, old man; I came for grub. So-long, Bill!"

Bill Sampson grunted, and wheeled his horse to ride back to his herd. But his bearded face was sorely perplexed and troubled as he rode.

"Hallo, young Carr!" sang out Barney Bailey, the foreman of Kicking Mule, as Dick came in at the gate. "What's blowed you in?"

Dick explained. Half a dozen of the Kicking Mule punchers gathered round to listen as he told Barney.

"By the great horned toad!" exclaimed Barney. "I guess you've hit the right spot, young Carr! I'll say that if Bill would give the word we'd saddle up and ride for Packsaddle and wipe out that crowd and ride Mr. Wash home on a rail, and Scadder arter. But if it's eats you want, there ain't a guy in this outfit wouldn't hand you his last boiled bean."

"You said it, Barney!" exclaimed Mustang Sam.

"I knew you'd stand by me, Barney!" said Dick gratefully. "We can't get anything in Packsaddle town, but here, if you'll lend me a horse—"

"I guess you can pick out the best cayuse in the corral," said Barney, "and we'll load him up with eats sky-high. S'long as you're standing for old Bill, you bet this outfit is standing for you."

An hour later Bill Sampson had another view of Dick Carr—this time riding back to Packsaddle on a loaded horse. And Bill watched him with a worried brow, wondering how the jamboree at the cow town school was going to end.

"Eats" for the Rebels!

"A NY guy here hungry?" asked Slick Poindexter.

"Aw, can it!" groaned Pie Sanders. "I could sure chew

boot-leather!"

"And then some!" mumbled Mick Kavanagh.

"The jig's up!" said Poker Parker. "That young guy Carr got through last night, but he'll never horn in with the eats. I'll say they've done got us by the short hairs."

"Pack it up!" snapped Slick. But even Slick and Mick were getting a little dubious now.

Another day had dawned on the cow town school, and as the sun rose higher and higher, the Packsaddle bunch grew more serious and solemn.

Looking from the windows of the timber schoolhouse they could see the enemy watching! Job Wash, chairman of the Packsaddle school committee, and Mr. Scadder, his pet new headmaster, had taken possession of Small Brown's cabin. Hair-Trigger Pete and his gang were camped in the bunkhouse. Every now and then, fat Job

could be seen with a grim expression on his podgy face. The longer the rebellion lasted, the more grimly determined Job grew; and all the cards were in his fat hands. A whole day without a morsel to eat, Job figured, would bring the young guys to their senses—and now a new day was drawing towards noon, and any minute Job expected to see the bunch come trooping out to surrender. And Elias Scadder was ready with his cane to put them through it as soon as they dropped like ripe apples into Job's fat hands.

Slick Poindexter shook a fist at the fat storekeeper. He would have been glad to land it on Job's nose.

"We ain't beat yet!" said Slick savagely. "Young Carr done got through last night, and we got a chance yet."

"Ain't they watching for him?" groaned Poker Parker. "You figure they'll let him get in with any eats? Forget it!"

Slick growled. He could see that the enemy were on the watch. They knew why Dick Carr had got out the night before, and they were taking care that he did not succeed in smuggling food in to the besieged bunch. Hair-Trigger Pete was sitting on the gate by the school trail, which was closed and barred. Yuma Dave was leaning on the gate by the river. The rest of the roughneck crew lounged about smoking, every now and then casting grinning glances towards the schoolhouse. They were not in a hurry for the trouble to end; they were getting five dollars a day each so long as it lasted. They had earned it, too, when it was a matter of

attacking the rebels in the schoolhouse. But now it was only a question of lounging about watching, to make sure that no help came, and waiting for the bunch to talk turkey. They were earning their dollars easily now.

"Say, there's Slim!" said Mick. Some of the bunch grinned at the sight of Slim Dixon.

He was the only one who had scuttled out and surrendered. He had taken a terrific thrashing from Scadder, and now he was doing the "chores" for the rough crew of bullwhackers.

Tin Tung and Hank, the hired man, had cleared off, and Slim had plenty to do. Now he was coming out of the cookhouse with plates of beans and bacon for the roughnecks.

The sight of the beans and bacon made the rebels' mouths water. But the sight of Slim made them grin. Tanglefoot, one of the gang, did not seem pleased with the provender Slim brought out to him as he sat on a bench by the bunkhouse. Having looked at it and sniffed, Tanglefoot took the platter and banged it on Slim's head, smothering him with hot beans. Slim's yell reached the rebels in the schoolhouse. Tanglefoot's angry roar reached them also.

"You young geek, you figure you can give me burnt beans!" he roared. "I'll say nope! I'll say I'll earn you not to burn the beans!"

And Tanglefoot proceeded to bang the platter again and again, following Slim as he fled wildly back to the cookhouse.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Slick.

"I'll say that guy Slim is sorry he quitted!" grinned Mick Kavanagh.

"He's getting the eats!" groaned Poker.

"I guess you can go and get the eats if you want!" snorted Slick. "I'm sure tired of hearing you grouse. You beat it and get along to Slim."

But Poker did not beat it. He was sorely in want of "eats"—but the idea of sharing Slim's fate was not attractive. In fact, what had happened to the only guy who had quitted was an encouragement to the bunch to hold on as long as they possibly could.

"Look here, if we all go together—" said Poker.

Slick Poindexter picked up a quirt.

"You asking this bunch to quit, you doggoned coyote?" he snapped. "And young Carr, mebbe, jest round the corner with the eats!"

"You piefaced gink!" howled Poker. "Even if he's got the eats, how come he'll get them along to us? Think they'll let him? Look here, you uns, the jig's up, and if we all go out together, we'll get off easier. We ain't got a dog's chance, and I'll say—Yooop! Let up, you doggoned guy."

Slick lashed with the quirt, and it rang round Poker Parker's legs. The quitter dodged away, yelling.

"I guess," said Pie Sanders, "that we're holding on to give young Carr a chance! Mebbe he'll get through come dark."

Pie spoke with heroic hopefulness. He was the hungriest of the hungry bunch. But it was barely noon, and the idea of waiting till dark made the bunch groan. Yet, in the daylight, what hope was there of Dick Carr getting through? Even after dark the prospects were not rosy, for there were a dozen of the roughneck crowd all certain to be watching like cats. Even the most hopeful of the bunch realised that, difficult as it had been for Dick to get away,

it was a much more difficult proposition for him to get back with a supply of food. And their hapless insides were quaking for eats.

Bang!

Slick Poindexter jumped.

"What the great horned toad!" he ejaculated.

That sudden bang startled the whole bunch. It was a heavy knock of some hard object striking timber.

"Them galoots heaving rocks!" exclaimed Mick.

"What the Jehosaphat!" exclaimed Hunky Tutt.

The schoolboys crowded to the window and stared through the spaces between the planks nailed across. They could not guess what had caused that loud knock on the timber, unless the enemy were heaving rocks.

But there was no sign of activity among the enemy. Hair-Trigger, sitting on the gate, was smoking a pipe after his beans. Yuma, at the other gate, was eating from a platter brought to him by Slim. The rest of the gang lounged or sprawled about. Mr. Wash could be seen sitting outside Small Brown's cabin, talking to the long, thin Scadder. Nothing was going on, and yet—

Bang!

It was another loud knock.

This time the bunch spotted whence the sound came. It was from the roof overhead.

Slick stared up blankly.

"It's sure some guy heaving rocks!" said Mick. "But what's the game?"

Nobody was to be seen near the schoolhouse. Whenever the enemy came near, the bunch pelted them from the windows, and they had learned to keep at a respectful distance. There were windows on both sides of the timber schoolhouse. In front was the playground; behind was a space of twenty feet or so that separated the building from the high school fence. And nobody was to be seen at hand.

Bang!

Another knock on the roof.

Mick gave a sudden yell.

"Aw! I guess it's young Carr come back!"

"Carr!" exclaimed Slick.

"Sure! I'll tell a man he's outside the fence, pitching rocks on to the roof to tell us he's there!"

"You've got it!" exclaimed Slick.

There was a rush to the back windows of the building. Beyond the open space there rose the ten-foot fence. As they stared they saw a small object suddenly whiz over the fence and sail through the air swift as an arrow. There was a bang as it dropped on the roof. Pie Sanders gave a howl of delight. He had caught a gleam of a red label on the object that whizzed through the air.

"Say!" yelled Pie. "He ain't heaving rocks—he's heaving cans of beef! He's got back with the eats!"

Slick gasped.

"Didn't I tell you guys that tenderfoot was a whole team and a cross-dog under a wagon!" he howled. "He sure has pulled it off! He sure has worked the rifle! I'll tell a man!"

There was a large trapdoor in the schoolhouse roof, in case of fire—an ever-present danger in the wooden buildings of the West. The ladder to reach it was kept in a corner. Slick rushed for the ladder, and five or six fellows rushed after him.

Almost in a twinkling, it was planted at the trap. Pie Sanders was the first to rush up. Canned beef was dropping on the roof, and Pie was feverishly

anxious to get to it. He wrenched at the trapdoor, and dragged it open. He put his head out.

At the same moment another can of beef, sailing through the air, dropped just over the open trap.

Thud!

There was a fearful yell from Pie as the can of beef dropped fairly on his head! He came slithering down the ladder, the can rattling and crashing after him. He landed on Slick and Mick, sending them spinning.

"Aw, wake snakes!" yelled Slick.

"Say, you pesky boob!" roared Mick.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!" spluttered Pie, scrambling up dizzily. "I'll say—wow! Ow! I guess my cabeza's cracked a few—wow!"

Pie clapped his hand to his damaged head. But only for a moment! Then he pounced on the can of beef!

No Joke for Job!

DICK CARR rode back to Packsaddle School as fast as his well-laden horse could cover the ground. But within sight of the cow town school he halted in a clump of timber. To ride on was to fall into the hands of the roughneck crew; it was only by strategy that he could hope to get in the sorely-needed supplies to the besieged bunch.

He unpacked the innumerable bags loaded on the bronco, and stacked them away out of sight in a thicket. The bronco he started back towards the ranch, leaving it to find its way home. He had no further use for the horse.

Then he climbed into the branches of a tall cotton-wood, and surveyed the school. He could make out the buildings within the high fence, and the burly figure of Hair-Trigger Pete sitting on the gate, smoking, toy-like in the distance. His face was very thoughtful as he descended from the tree.

To wait for sundown was safest, but the thought of the hungry bunch, waiting anxiously for supplies, decided him to try his luck without delay.

He packed one bag with as many cans of beef as he could carry, and started on foot towards the school—keeping low in the grass, and taking advantage of every bush or bit of timber for cover. Keeping well away from the gate, where the red-bearded roughneck was watching the trail, he reached the school fence at the back of the schoolhouse.

There he dumped down his bag of provisions. The next step required thinking out. To clamber over the fence, draw up the bag with a rope, and take his chance of getting into the schoolhouse with it, had been his idea, but he had to abandon it now.

From where he sat, Hair-Trigger could see along the fence, and though he had not spotted the schoolboy outside beyond the turn of the fence, he was certain to spot him if he appeared on the summit. And once he was seen, there was no chance of getting through.

Dick Carr did some hard thinking for long minutes. Through the chinks of the fence he could see the windows at the back of the schoolhouse—only twenty feet away! But it might have been twenty miles, for all the chance he had of getting there. Then the recollection of the trap in the schoolhouse roof flashed into his mind. It was easy to toss an object the distance. If the bunch caught on—

Carefully calculating the direction and the distance, he stepped back from the fence, and swung a can of beef through the air.

It whizzed over the top, and he heard a distant bang as it landed on the extensive roof. If it reached the ears of Hair-Trigger, he did not heed it. There was plenty of noise from the schoolhouse most times—especially when the bunch were breaking up furniture to strengthen the barricade at the door. Dick grinned with satisfaction, and heaved another can.

Can after can flew over the fence, described an arc in the air, and dropped on the schoolhouse.

The bag was emptied at last, and there had come no interruption from the enemy. Evidently Job Wash and his men were in happy ignorance of what was going on.

Dick peered through a chink. There were faces at the boarded windows now, looking out. They could not see him, but they knew he was there. He could see the happy grins on the faces that showed through the planks. The bunch were getting the "eats."

He had landed the first lot safely. Leaving the fence, he dropped on hands and knees to crawl away, rising to his feet as soon as he reached safe cover, and returning to the clump where he had left the rest of the cargo from Kicking Mule.

In the besieged schoolhouse there was rejoicing.

Pie Sanders was the first to get his teeth into beef—heedless of a bump on his cabeza. Slick Poindexter crawled out on the roof from the trap door. The roof was spotted with cans of beef—more than a dozen of them.

Slick gathered them in and tossed them down into the schoolhouse, where they dropped into eager hands. The roof was high, and surrounded by a wooden parapet, and he was not spotted by the roughnecks in the playground. In a few minutes he descended again, and the trap was closed.

Mick Kavanagh greeted him with a slice of beef. The cans had been opened as fast as they dropped in.

"I'll say this is good!" grinned Mick. "Good!" repeated Pie Sanders.

"Yep—and then some!"

Slick grinned and chewed beef.

"Ain't that tenderfoot Carr a great guy!" he chuckled.

"You said it!" agreed Mick. "Say, you, Piker, you honing to quit now?"

"Quit nothing!" grunted Piker Parker, with his mouth full. "I'll tell all Texas, I never knowed canned beef was so good."

Slick glanced from the window over the playground.

"Them guys ain't wise to it," he remarked. "They figure we're still honing for the eats! I guess it would surprise Mr. Wash a few if he could see us chewing beef."

"You said it!" chuckled Mick.

"And there's more to come!" said Slick confidently. "That tenderfoot Carr ain't through yet, not by long chalks he ain't."

It was a cheery bunch now.

There was plenty of water in the big cistern, and plenty of beef and beans, and more to come! The Packsaddle bunch were rough and tough, and they could do without the "trimmings."

They grinned as they saw Job Wash, with a perplexed face, come along several times that afternoon to stare at the schoolhouse.

From Dick Carr there was no sign. But they guessed that he was waiting for sundown before he came again.

They had got Job guessing!

Job had counted on hunger driving the bunch to surrender. As the sun dipped towards Squaw Mountain in the west, Job became more perplexed.



At the moment that Pie put his head out of the trapdoor, a can of beef whizzed in at the opening. Thud! Pie gave a fearful yell as it hit him on the head, and he slithered down the ladder, crashing into Slick and Mick. Dick Carr was getting food in to the rebels, but in a way that was painful to Pie!

So far as he knew, there had been no food in the besieged schoolhouse for forty-eight hours or more. He had no suspicion that the Packsaddle bunch had been enjoying the feast of their lives that afternoon.

He came within speaking distance at last.

"Say, you young goobs!" he shouted. "I'm telling you it's time you moseyed out of that shebang! How long you figure you can live without eats?"

Slick winked at his comrades.

"Keep it canned!" he whispered. "I reckon Job figures that we're down to bedrock! Don't spill a word."

He watched from a slit in the planks across the window.

"Say, you young ginks gone deaf?" shouted Job.

No reply.

Job came a little nearer. He was clearly puzzled. Perhaps he had a mental picture of the bunch lying about in a state of exhaustion. If that was the case, a rush of his gang of rough-necks would finish the struggle.

Job wanted to know.

He approached the window cautiously, watchful for a whizzing missile. But no missile came. There was no sound, no sign of life, from the schoolhouse.

Mr. Wash drew nearer and nearer. His intention was to peer in at the window, through the spaces between the planks nailed across and ascertain how matters stood. If, as he began to believe, the famished bunch were at the end of their tether, it would not take long to finish!

He stood at the window at last, and peered in between two planks.

As he did so, a hand suddenly flashed out of the aperture, and a finger and thumb fastened on Job's fat nose. They fastened like a vice.

Job Wash jumped almost clear of the ground, letting out a wild yell that was muffled by the grip on his nose.

"Oooooogh!"

"I guess I've cinched this bird!" yelled Slick Poindexter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Urrrrgh!" spluttered Job wildly. "Wurrgh! Led go by dose—wurrgh! I'll say—gooooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the bunch.

Slick Poindexter had a grip like iron on the fat storekeeper's nose. It did not relax for a moment.

He dragged Job's crimson and furious face close to the planks, with that grip on his nose. Job Wash struggled and wriggled frantically. He knew now that the bunch were not at the end of their tether! But that knowledge came too late. He clutched frantically at Slick's gripping hand. Both his fat fists came through the aperture between the planks, and his wrists were promptly grasped by Mick and Pie.

"Wurrgh!" spluttered Job.

He jerked wildly at his head. But Slick held on to his nose. Job felt as if that organ was being pulled off, and he ceased to jerk.

"Oooooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Goooooogh!"

Elias Scadder came scudding across the playground, his long legs whisking. But a beef can, whizzing from the window, met him in full career, and caught him under the chin. Elias sat down suddenly with a fearful yell.

"Urrgh!" spluttered Job Wash. "Yurgh! Aw, wake snakes! Gurrgh!"

Hair-Trigger Pete came speeding up, roaring with laughter. Job's painful predicament seemed to strike the red-bearded roughneck as funny! But he came to his help, and grasped him to drag him away from the window.

Job fairly shrieked.

With the burly bullwhacker dragging him away, and Slick holding on to his nose from within, the hapless Job felt as if he was parting company with his suffering proboscis.

Slick, doubled up with laughter, let go at last, and Hair-Trigger dragged the chairman of the school committee out of reach.

Job Wash clasped his nose in anguish. With both hands to his nose, he tottered away, gurgling horribly. A yell of merriment from the Packsaddle bunch followed him. Only too clearly, the rebel bunch were not at the end of their tether.

Caught!

BANG! Job Wash jumped clear of the ground.

Then he sat down. Never had the chairman of the Packsaddle school committee been so utterly surprised.

Something had fallen on his head from the open spaces, and landed there with a hard knock.

It was night, and darkness lay like a cloak on Packsaddle School and the prairie.

Some of the roughneck gang were at supper in the chuckhouse, waited on by the hapless Slim. But the rest were on the watch, patrolling the school fence—and the keenest and most watchful of all was Job himself!

Job had a pain in his nose, and his temper was in a volcanic state. How the rebel bunch were holding out so long without "eats" was a mystery to Job—and he could only conclude that they were banking on getting a supply somehow from Dick Carr—little guessing that the tenderfoot had already landed some of that supply.

Job was grimly determined that if the tenderfoot came back with eats, he should have no chance of introducing the same into the besieged schoolhouse. Job was on the watch. The gates were guarded, and if the tenderfoot came, he could only come by clambering over a ten-foot fence. Within that fence Job made his rounds, keeping his men up to the mark.

He had no doubt that Dick Carr would make some attempt to get in, under cover of darkness, with all the

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food he could carry, and if he did, Job was ready to put paid to that attempt.

But he was not ready for what happened.

Pacing in the space that separated the schoolhouse from the fence, he was taken utterly by surprise by some heavy object dropping on his head as if it had come from the sky of Texas.

He sat in utter astonishment, wondering what the great horned toad it could possibly be. And as he sat he heard a whizzing sound, and then a "plop" from the direction of the building.

Dick Carr was busy!

Dick had yet to solve the problem of rejoining his comrades. But the problem of getting in the eats was already solved!

After the sun had set behind Squaw Mountain, Dick had lost no time. Tramping through the darkness, which hid him from all watchful eyes, he carried bag after bag, bundle after bundle, from the clump of timber, stacking them under the school fence, till the whole supply from Kicking Mule was piled there. It was a good horse-load, and made quite a stack.

From the windows of the schoolhouse there came a gleam of light—a kerosene lamp was burning. It was sufficient to guide his aim.

Standing clear of the fence, Dick tossed over can after can of beef or beans or biscuits. He judged the distance well, and most of the missiles dropped right on the roof of the schoolhouse. But it was inevitable that every now and then one dropped short.

It was tiring work, but Dick stuck to it, steadily working through the pile. Can after can, packet after packet, circled over the high fence and dropped—eagerly gathered in by the watching and waiting bunch. The few that dropped short would not be missed from among so many. Unluckily, one dropped short as Job Wash was rolling by—and it was a one-pound tin of canned beef that landed on Job's head and caused him to sit down so suddenly.

Job sat and wondered. He rubbed his

head and blinked round him. It was not a missile from the rebels that had knocked him over—they could not see him out there in the dark! What was it?

Another and another can whizzed through the air, and dropped, plopping, on the schoolhouse roof. Job groped round him in the gloom, and his fat hands came in contact with the object that had landed on his head. He grabbed it up, and felt it over, and peered at it. And no words could have expressed his feelings when he discovered that it was a can of beef!

He staggered to his feet.

Wrath choked him.

He got it now!

Last night, one of the bunch had got out, obviously to smuggle in eats. But he had not come back with his pockets full and tried to get in. He was standing outside the school fence, slinging over cans of beef, landing them on the schoolhouse roof! And the besieged bunch were getting them! Job gurgled with fury. This was the end of his scheme for starving out the rebels of Packsaddle!

Another can whizzed over, and another. Dick Carr was getting to the end—but he had not finished yet! With gleaming eyes, Job trod away softly to the gate.

"Say, boss, what's got you?" Hair-Trigger Pete, sitting on the gate, chewing tobacco, peered at the fat storekeeper's infuriated face as it loomed up in the shadows of the playground.

"You pesky goob!" hissed Job. "You figure that I'm paying you five dollars a day to sit on a gate and chew, like you was a Mexican monkey chewing nuts, with that young geek Carr getting in the eats for the bunch. Say—"

"Aw, can it, boss!" drawled Hair-Trigger. "I'll tell a man, we're all watching, and if that young guy comes moseying along, we'll cinch him!"

"You boneheaded stiff!" hissed Job. "I'm telling you that young guy is just outside the fence now, slinging over cans of beef like they was pebbles, and landing them on that shebang!"

Hair-Trigger whistled.

"I'll tell a man, that kid Carr sure is no slouch," he remarked. "How'd you get wise to it, boss?"

"I guessed a can of beef dropped on my cabeza!" Job snarled. "Aw, what you sniggering at, you big stiff? You figure that I'm paying you to snigger? Say, you mosey along outside and cinch that young guy, and go quiet, and don't give him a chance to vamoose. You got to get that young guy, and you got to get him pronto."

"Search me!" answered Hair-Trigger Pete.

He swung his burly limbs over the gate and dropped outside.

Job waited at the gate anxiously. And he grinned as there was a sudden, startled yell from the darkness.

Dick Carr was slinging over another can when a burly figure loomed out of the gloom, and a brawny hand clutched him.

"I'll say you're cinched!" chuckled the bullwhacker. "I'll say—Yoooop! Great gophers! Whoop!"

The can of beef in Dick Carr's hand crashed into the rugged face. Hair-Trigger gave a fearful yell and staggered. Dick wrenched desperately to free himself from the brawny grasp.

But the roughneck held on to him. A stream of crimson spouted from his nose, where the can had landed. But he held on, and Dick, sturdy as he was, crumpled in the powerful grasp.

Hair-Trigger fastened one hand in his collar and the other in the slack of his trousers, and jerked him from the ground.

Lifting him off his feet, the big bullwhacker carried him bodily away to the gate. Struggling wildly, his arms and legs thrashing in the air, Dick Carr went—a prisoner!

"Say, you Wash!" roared Hair-Trigger. "I sure cinched him, and hyer he is, if you want him."

With a heave of his brawny arms he tossed the tenderfoot over the gate, and Dick Carr crashed on the ground within. Job's grip was on his collar the next moment.

There was a shout and a trampling of feet, as half a dozen of the roughnecks came running up. Hair-Trigger clambered in over the gate, and stood dabbing his streaming nose.

Dick Carr, struggling in Job's grasp, was surrounded. Yuma Dave and Tanglefoot grasped him by either arm.

"Take him to Scadder!" snorted Job. "I guess Scadder is going to get busy with his cane on that young guy! I'll mention that he's going to have such a lambasting that he won't forget it for a month of Sundays."

"We got the eats!" said Slick Poin-dexter. "We sure got the eats! But I'd sure like to know where young Carr is!"

As if in answer, there came a sound of yelling across the dusky playground. Slick rushed to the window. Mick rushed after him; then the whole bunch.

They listened breathlessly. They could see nothing but they could hear!

And what they heard was the yelling of a fellow who was getting such a lambasting that he was not likely to forget it for a month of Sundays!

"They got Dick!" exclaimed Mick.

The silence of dismay fell on the bunch. Dick Carr had succeeded in his mission. But he had fallen into the hands of the enemy. There were gloomy faces that night in the Packsaddle bunch.

(Can the rebels rescue Dick from the hands of the enemy? Read the next thrilling yarn in this great series: "HOLDING THE FORT!")

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The SECRET WORLD!



"They're coming!" yelled De Valerie. "The seaplanes! Look! Lights in the sky!" The St. Frank's boys were wild with excitement as they stared at the approaching planes. Help was coming at last to the adventurers marooned in the Arctic!

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.

Tired Out!

LORD DORRIMORE brought the motor-boat close alongside the main ship, and the searchlight was kept going all the time, pointing upwards into the sky. The idea was obvious. The searchlight was a guide to the rescuing planes, should they come. But there was scarcely one chance in a thousand in such weather as this.

The boys of St. Frank's, after many adventures in Northestria, a secret world in the Arctic, had succeeded in escaping from the almost impenetrable land, and the whole party, including Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrimore, and others, were now waiting for the seaplanes sent out by the naval authorities to rescue them.

"All you young people had better get some sleep," said Nelson Lee, addressing the St. Frank's fellows and Irene & Co. "There's accommodation for you below, so take my advice—"

"But we can't sleep, sir!" protested Handforth.

"I know differently," replied Nelson Lee dryly. "You think you won't be able to, but you will. After our recent experience, we all need a rest, and there's no hope of help coming yet. Even if the seaplanes started they must have turned back, for they could never hope to find us in a snowstorm like this. So get below, and turn in."

"The guy'nor's right," said Nipper, looking at the others. "We're all fagged out. A good sleep will do us no

harm, even if it's only for three or four hours."

The other fellows realised the truth of Nipper's words, and they soon began to discover that they were tired.

The tension was over now, and a reaction set in. As there was no prospect of rescue until the snowstorm abated, there was no reason for remaining awake.

And before half an hour had elapsed, nine-tenths of the party was slumbering heavily. Even Lee consented to take a nap. A few men were left on the watch, with orders to give a general call at the first sign of anything hopeful.

Nelson Lee only had an hour, and then he sent Lord Dorrimore down. He stood on deck, well wrapped up, more anxious than he knew. There could be no return now, for the pack-ice had probably jammed in the tunnel, and the entrance to the little lost world was sealed. The adventurers had escaped, but there was no certainty of real freedom. Their fate would be appalling indeed if they were left here, in the grip of the unknown polar regions.

Nipper was the first of the juniors to awaken. All the fellows were sleeping in a kind of general dormitory, a part of the vessel's hold which had been rigged up for them by the Northestrian carpenters. There were bunks all round, and every one was fagged.

Nipper sat up and listened. Everything was still, except for the occasional

tramp of feet overhead on deck. Nipper was heavy-eyed, an unusual condition for him, for he was generally very wide awake at once. He yawned, and got out of his bunk. Like all the others, he was fully dressed.

"Watch stopped," he muttered, as he pulled it out. "How long have we slept, I wonder? Feels like an hour or two, at the most. Perhaps I'd better turn in again—Why, hallo, Dorrie!"

His lordship had appeared in the doorway.

"Oh, you're not all dead, then?" asked Dorrie.

"Dead?"

"Well, you've slept long enough, you young sluggards," said his lordship, with a grin. "I've been down several times to have a look at you, but I was too soft-hearted to shake you up."

"How long have we been sleeping, then?" asked Nipper, staring.

"Oh, not long! Only about twenty-eight hours!"

"Twenty-eight hours!" yelled Nipper.

"You're joking."

"Honest fact," said Dorrie. "Of course, I'm not surprised, after all you went through. There you are—that yell of yours has awakened the others now. That means good-bye to our peace and quietness."

"Twenty-eight hours!" ejaculated Nipper. "Over a day and a night! But—hasn't anything happened?"

"Nothin'—if you're referin' to our

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bein' rescued," replied Lord Dorrimore. "But we're still livin' in hopes—an' the prospects are getting brighter every minute."

Suspense!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH sat up and blinked.

"I say, it's a pity you fellows can't go and jaw somewhere else!" he complained. "I haven't been to sleep for more than half an hour—"

"You fathead, we've all slept the clock round!" interrupted Nipper.

The juniors were startled into full wakefulness when they heard the surprising truth. Many thought that Lord Dorrimore was pulling their leg, but practically all of them discovered that their watches had stopped—a sure proof that they had slept the clock right round.

"What do you mean, Dorrie, about the prospects getting brighter?" asked Nipper eagerly.

"Well, the weather's cleared, for one thing—"

His lordship wasn't allowed to get any further. There was a rush, and everybody crowded up on deck. Shouts of excitement went up, for there was now a vast change. The air was crystal clear, and, as bad as the visibility had been before, it was now good. It was not light—only a kind of semi-twilight pervaded the whole region.

Overhead the sky was dazzlingly brilliant, with many stars twinkling like miniature searchlights. One could see into the distance for miles, and on every hand there was a great, rolling vista of ice and snow. All round the ship, however, the surface was different.

The effect of the submarine geyser was still apparent, although it was quite obvious that it was losing power. The water was covered with thin ice, but so thin that a stone thrown upon it would have broken through. The air was freezing, but the water itself was still warmed by the hot flow from far beneath.

"My hat!" exclaimed Tommy Watson. "It's all clear now—not a breath of wind, or anything! But what about the seaplanes?"

"Any news, sir?" shouted several voices.

Nelson Lee was on deck, and the boys surged round him.

"Yes, there is some news," he replied. "Good news, on the whole."

"Oh!"

"Good news?" repeated Dorrie. "First I've heard—"

"It's only just come through," broke in Nelson Lee. "We've got the wireless going, boys, and, although we've had some difficulty in getting messages over, we succeeded at last. The naval seaplanes have started out to our rescue."

"Hurrah!"

"Then everything's all right, sir?"

"No. I won't say that," replied Nelson Lee. "We shall still be in a state of uncertainty and suspense, for there can be no guarantee that this weather will last, or that the pilots will get to us. As before, we can only wait."

"But did the seaplanes set out when they promised, sir?"

"They set out, but turned back," replied Nelson Lee. "Blizzards were encountered, and two of the machines were disabled, although, fortunately, not until they got back to their base. The rest waited for clear weather, and have now started out on a second attempt."

"Three—four—hours!"

"Three—four—hours!"

"Three—four—hours!"

"Three—four—hours!"

"Three—four—hours!"

"Three—four—hours!"

"Three—four—hours!"

"Three—four—hours!"

"Three—four—hours!"

"Oh, good egg!"

"How long will they take to get here, sir?"

"It is a great distance—not less than 600 miles," replied Nelson Lee. "The naval authorities have established a hasty kind of a base at the farthest possible point north—not far distant from Spitsbergen, I believe. The aeroplanes set out from this base an hour ago, and they are fast machines, capable of nearly 200 miles an hour."

"So they'll be here in about three hours."

"Oh, my goodness! Is it possible?"

"Possible!" roared Handforth. "Of course it is. Six hundred miles is nothing to a modern aeroplane. What about the great world fights that have been made? We're as good as saved!"

"Let's give three cheers—"

"One moment, boys," said Nelson Lee quietly. "I hate to throw cold water on your enthusiasm, but you must not take too much notice of Handforth. A 600 mile flight would be nothing in Europe—but this is a very different proposition. These regions are treacherous, and we must not be too certain. Quite apart from the weather, we must remember that the pilots of these seaplanes are flying in semi-darkness. Our single searchlight is the only beacon we can supply."

Nelson Lee's words had a very sobering effect. It seemed very easy to assume that rescue would come—but cold fact is a different thing from theory. It was quite on the cards that the searchers would encounter thick weather, would be taken from their course, and compelled to abandon the venture.

So it can be easily understood that those anxious watchers on the Spitfire kept their eyes turned to the sky—not seeking the coming aeroplanes, but looking for the first sign of a change in the clear weather. The weather, in all truth, would settle their fate. For even if it kept fine, and the aeroplanes arrived, the dash back to civilisation would in itself be fraught with doubt.

The vast barrier range could be seen now, several miles distant. The glaciers rose upwards into the night sky like towering sentinels. Their summits were invisible, and in many places the mountains were like sheer precipices, rising for thousands of feet. What would be the fate of an aeroplane flying into them during thick weather?

The girls were out now, too, and they were equally amazed to find that they had slept for over twenty-four hours. And everybody was ravenously hungry. Their long sleep and the cold air were twin causes of this healthy appetite.

Although there was no possibility of the seaplanes appearing for several hours, the fellows rushed over their food, and got up on deck again at the earliest possible moment. They wanted to be the first to see those machines coming out of the sky to rescue them.

Until now they had not appreciated what real suspense meant. The time dragged. It seemed that hours had passed, and yet only a bare twenty minutes, perhaps, had actually elapsed. And so they kept talking and watching the sky and consulting the time. And the weather, mercifully, remained clear.

There was not a breath of wind, and the visibility was of crystal clarity. The conditions, indeed, could not have been better for such a project. And hopes began to soar higher and higher as the hours dragged on.

Three—four—hours!

The suspense was becoming acute now. Those machines had been in the air for four hours—they were overdue! If they were coming, they might appear now at any moment. Every eye was watching.

But not a speck appeared in the dim sky. The scene was one of utter desolation, and as the hours had passed, so the cold had increased. Fellows spoke in hushed voices, as though afraid to talk aloud.

"They've missed us!" muttered Church, as he clutched at Handforth's arm. "Over five hours, and not a sign of them! They must have encountered a storm, and they've been blown out of their course!"

"Rats!" growled Handforth. "They'll come!"

"But they ought to have been here—"

"Never mind that—I tell you they'll come," insisted Handforth.

But although he spoke confidently, his heart was growing heavy. The others were all silent. Five and a half hours! And still no indication! The searchlight was piercing up into the sky as though mocking them. And the still, cold air was without a breath of wind. On every part of the deck the groups were standing, watching and waiting. The suspense was getting worse and worse every moment.

"Listen!" muttered Nipper suddenly.

"Oh, listen!"

"What do you mean?" whispered Tommy Watson.

"Can't you hear it?" said Nipper, clutching his arm. "A kind of throb on the air! Listen! There it is again!"

Out of the Sky!

EVERYBODY had heard Nipper's words, and all ears were strained.

"There's nothing!" said Church, with a w.p. "I can't hear a sound! It must have been your imagination. There's no throb—"

"There is—there is!" insisted Nipper tensely. "Can't you keep quiet? Listen, I tell you! I can hear it again—"

"By George!" gasped Handforth. "So can I!"

But the others listened in vain. They could hear one another's breathing, and an occasional creak from the old wooden ship. But out from the vast distances they heard nothing.

"Marvellous what the imagination can do!" muttered Dorrie.

"It was no imagination, old man!" breathed Nelson Lee.

"Good glory! You mean—"

"Nipper's right—I heard the throb myself, distinctly!" whispered Lee.

"Hush, Dorrie! Now! Do you hear?"

Lord Dorrimore caught his breath in. Faintly, vaguely, a throb came to his ears—so indistinct that it seemed unreal. It faded, and then came back again. And this time it seemed to beat on the air.

"They're coming!" yelled somebody hysterically.

"Hurrah!"

"It's the engines!"

A swift outburst, and then another tense silence. Nelson Lee, glancing at the faces round him, felt a little tug at his heart. What if the aeroplanes should miss them, after all? Such a thing was by no means impossible.

Lee had seldom seen such poignant anxiety as he saw now on these strained faces.

"It's getting louder, sir!" said one of the officers.

"Yes, but they're miles away yet—twenty or thirty miles, I should say," replied Lee softly. "Sound carries an immense distance in this clear air. But we've made no mistake—this sound is caused by aeroplane engines." "They're gettin' nearer, too," said Lord Dorrmore. "Just listen to that!"

Nobody answered him. The throbbing was now so pronounced that it filled the very air. It changed into a drone—a distant, continuous drone. It grew louder every second, but still there was no sight of anything in the sky.

Lord Dorrmore had leapt down into the motor-boat, and was flashing the searchlight to and fro. He kept up the movement continuously, signalling the position.

"They're coming!" shouted Handforth. "Oh, my goodness! They can't miss us now—it's impossible! Why can't we see 'em?"

"They're miles off yet," said Nipper. "And we can't see anything in this semi-twilight. Oh, for a sight of good old sunshine!"

"Oh, for a real, honest rainstorm!" sighed Tommy Watson. "If I ever get back to England, I'll never go abroad again as long as I live!"

"Look!" yelled De Valerie excitedly. "Look! There's a light!"

"Where?" "Over there—in the sky!" yelled Val. "Can't you see it? Two of them now! The seaplanes—"

"By jingo, yes!" "Look! Lights in the sky!" "Hurrah!"

"They've spotted our searchlight, and they're coming!"

"Three cheers for the Navy!" cried Irene.

Everybody felt like dancing madly. Indeed, many of the fellows capered round with frenzied joy.

"Thank Heaven, Dorrie!" said Nelson Lee fervently. "We're saved, old man—they'll be here in a minute."

"Good old Navy!" said Dorrie warmly.

Every doubt was set at rest. The lights in the sky were twinkling brightly now, and the drone from the engines of the seaplanes had turned into a low roar. They were less than a mile away, and not more than a thousand feet up. And then, all of a sudden, it seemed, the machines were overhead.

"Six of 'em!" gasped Church. "Look at 'em wheeling round! Six whacking great Service seaplanes! Oh, I've never seen anything so gorgeous in all my life!"

The six great seaplanes were flying in formation, and the leader wheeled round and shut off his engine. The others followed his example, and a moment later all the machines were planing gracefully down. Lord Dorrmore had turned his searchlight upon the great stretch of thin ice, for that open water had now frozen over.

The seaplanes were of the latest type—monster machines, each driven by two enormous engines. Their long, graceful bodies could distinctly be seen.

"This means England again!" shouted Handforth joyously. "England, you chaps—within a week, too!"

"Good old St. Frank's!"

"Oh, crumbs! What a thought!"

"And blow Northestria and the Gothlanders, and all their giddy works!" went on Handforth. "We had some fine times there, but I want to get back to

the old country! Look! They're coming down!"

Every eye watched with intense interest. The seaplane pilots were cautious. Before venturing to land, they skimmed over the surface of that thin ice, taking close observations. Five of them opened up their engines again and soared away in wide circles.

"They're careful, Dorrie, and I don't blame them," said Nelson Lee. "But they'll break through this ice easily and without damage. Once the leader has come down, the others'll soon follow."

Lord Dorrmore nodded. He had left his searchlight in charge of one of the other men, for he wanted to be on deck. And he gave a nod of satisfaction as the leading seaplane skimmed to the surface of the ice and touched.

There was a flying crackle of the ice, and the graceful boat broke through, and a surge of water hissed up on either side. A minute later the seaplane was swinging round and taxiing towards the Spitfire. The other seaplanes came

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down, and within five minutes all of them had alighted.

The tension was over.

Homeward Bound!

"GOOD old Navy!" A chorus went up as the first pilot came aboard. There had been considerable delay, but at last the motor-boat had forced itself free from the ice, and had fetched the pilot from the nearest seaplane.

"This is a happy moment for all of us, gentlemen," said the pilot, as he shook hands warmly with Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrmore. "All safe and sound, eh? Well, we've got plenty of room for you."

"If it's a joyous moment for you, old man, you can imagine what it is for us," said Lord Dorrmore genially. "We're just dyin' to know how you managed it. Are you in charge of this squadron, by the way?"

"Well, in a way," replied the other. "I'm Commander Stanton, and— By Jove, Waring! How are you, Waring? Haven't seen you for months! Good man!"

"Why, it's dear old Stanton!" shouted Captain Waring joyously.

They clasped hands. Commander Stanton was a youngish man—clean-shaven, with a broad, humorous face. He was well wrapped up to protect him

from the Arctic cold. As he looked round his eyes were filled with mild astonishment.

"What kind of an old tub do you call this?" he asked. "I've seen a few queer craft in my time, but this beats everything!"

"She's a Northestrian ship," explained Lord Dorrmore.

"Northestrian, eh? We've heard all about your marvellous little world, gentlemen," said the commander.

"Caused something of a sensation, too, I can assure you. I'd give anything to have a look into it."

"I'm afraid you're too late," said Nelson Lee. "The tunnel is sealed up again, and before long all this ice will be as thick and solid as the rest of the Arctic wastes. You might be able to get into the oasis at the end of another thirty years, but I even doubt that. Changes may occur in the glaciers by then, and I fear those lost races are eternally bottled up again."

"It seems like a yarn," declared Commander Stanton. "Too fantastic to be true, but I'm not presuming to doubt your word, to say nothing of the evidence of my own eyes. We're only too thankful to be here, and to carry you all back to safety. You'll leave all this stuff here, I suppose?"

"Well, I'm afraid we can't take it," replied Nelson Lee dryly. "Yes, we shall have to abandon everything—but that, after all, is a small matter. Our lives are safe and nothing else matters much."

"We had a deuce of a job to get here," said the pilot. "We struck a storm half-way along, and were blown pretty well fifty miles out of our course. In fact, we were thinking of turning back when the air cleared, so we pressed on. We saw your searchlight nearly twenty miles away."

"Let us be thankful that you saw it at all," said Waring.

"It was only by chance at that!" replied the commander. "As a matter of fact we were heading off in a westerly direction, and one of my pilots signalled. After that, of course, we came straight along. I don't like to hustle you, gentlemen, but the sooner we're off the better."

"We're entirely in your hands now, commander, and we'll obey any order," said Lee promptly. "I agree with you that there must be no delay. The Arctic weather is too uncertain."

"That's a fact!" agreed the pilot. "I've done some difficult flying in my time, but this has been the worst." He gazed at the newly disclosed water. "But this beats me!" he added. "I was wondering how on earth we could land; I didn't really believe that there could be water up here. What's the meaning of it? We're right in the ice zone."

"Submarine geyser," explained Dorrie. "The thing's cooling off, too, an' with the temperature somewhere near zero, your buses will all be frozen in unless you take off pretty quickly."

"We're going now, as soon as you're ready," said the commander.

And after that there was a great bustle for a full hour. The entire party was divided into six groups, and an equal number of passengers was placed on each seaplane. These giant flying-boats were provided with ample accommodation, and they were by no means overloaded.

The Spitfire, the gondolas, and the motor-boat were abandoned to freeze in, and to be smothered slowly in the eternal ice. More than one member of that party felt a little pang of regret.

but there was no help for it. Those craft had served them well, and their duty was done. To save them was out of the question.

But in the new excitement, the St. Frank's fellows soon forgot. On board the seaplanes they found new wonders. Every vessel was equipped with sleeping accommodation—not that it would be needed—and there was a plentiful supply of concentrated food, too. Handforth & Co. found themselves in one of the long cabins with Nipper and Tommy Watson and Archie Glenhorne. All the rest were distributed among the other machines—the girls having one which also accommodated Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore.

And in the crisp air the rescuing seaplanes took off—one after the other. The pilots knew only too well that any delay would be fatal. Once the ice formed again the aircraft would never be able to rise. Even as it was, they experienced difficulties.

Heavily laden, they skimmed over the ice-bestrewn water, and took off with only a meagre margin of safety. But as long as they got into the air nothing else really mattered.

And then off they went, climbing higher and higher, and getting into formation. Gazing down from the cabin windows, Nipper looked rather regretfully at the deserted Spitfire.

"Good old tub! She brought us out of the oasis, anyhow!" he said. "She's done her bit. One day, perhaps, ex-

plorers will find her and wonder how she got there—"

"Talking about explorers, what happened to the poor chap that Dorrie set out to rescue?" asked Tommy Watson.

"Why, didn't you hear?" said Nipper. "He was found weeks ago—soon after we got lost in the oasis. He's safe, and we're homeward bound! Almost before we know where we are we shall be back at St. Frank's!"

"Tea in Study D, eh?" said Handforth dreamily. "By George! And cricket! House rags, and all the rest of it! I haven't often longed to get back to school, but this time I'm just dying for it! Good old St. Frank's! Won't we have some fun this term?"

"Better than fighting the Gothlanders, eh?" said Church.

"I vote we forget the Gothlanders!" growled Handforth. "The oasis is sealed up now, and as far as the world's concerned it doesn't exist. Let's talk about St. Frank's."

And so they went on through the Arctic air—speeding homewards, with the throb of the giant engines sounding like music in their ears; and then, almost before they realised it, the base was reached. Real daylight came as they got farther southwards.

As for the journey back to England, little need be said. It was accomplished at Nelson Lee's wish by air, and well within a week the entire party had arrived home.

Then followed interviews with newspaper representatives, and hosts of other

people who wanted to know more about the strange inhabitants of the Arctic oasis.

Every newspaper was filled with the record of the amazing exploit, and there were many joyous reunions when the St. Frank's fellows were welcomed by their anxious parents.

As for Northestia and the hidden oasis, the whole affair began to seem like a dream. Before that week was out many of the juniors were dimly wondering if they had really passed through those stirring adventures. It seemed incredible that the medieval land could really exist.

But it did exist, and now it was hemmed in again by the endless blizzards and by the cruel ice of the Arctic. As far as the St. Frank's fellows were concerned, they were by no means anxious to make a return trip.

They were strong, healthy youngsters, and so were the Moor View girls. They all liked plenty of excitement and adventure, but it was the general opinion that they had had their full share of both.

And all their thoughts were now turned to St. Frank's again—to boxing and cricket, and similar matters of schoolboy importance!

THE END.

(A powerful yarn of mystery, school and detective adventure, starring the boys of St. Frank's, starts next week. Don't miss the opening chapters of "MYSTERY MILL!")

Tom Merry's Melody Makers!

(Continued from page 19.)

There was a yell of laughter. It drowned the voices of both the tenors.

Curly Gibson's humorous Italian quite cut out the real article as rendered by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The swell of St. Jim's stopped.

"Keep on!" yelled Kerr.

"Impossible, dear boy, in the circus!"

Tom Merry frowned.

"We shall have to clear those young rascals out!" he exclaimed. "Put the instruments down here, and Gussy can look after them. The rest of you fellows follow me."

"Good egg!"

And Tom Merry's Melody Makers rushed upon the rival band.

There was a shout of alarm from Wally.

"Look out! Rescue, Third!"

Then Tom Merry & Co. were upon them.

There was a wild and whirling scrimmage, and a crowd of Third Form fags rushed to the aid of Wally & Co.

But Tom Merry & Co. were the champion fighting men of the Lower School at St. Jim's, and worth any number of fags.

Wally and his band were knocked right and left, and their rescuers were whirled to and fro and put to flight amid roars of laughter from the spectators.

The breathless fags were chased out of the grounds, and saved themselves by scuttling up the road towards the school and then the orchestra returned.

Tom Merry & Co., in a very breathless state, resumed their instruments; but for a time the laughter of the crowd was so great that they found it difficult to get a hearing. And it could not be denied that the appearance of the band was somewhat marred by the liberal distribution of darkened eyes and swollen noses among them.

"Play up!" said Kerr. "Give 'em the

march from 'Carmen,' and they'll stop sniggering presently."

And the band played up!

Number after number was performed, and the crowd became quite enthusiastic and they clapped the items, and Tom Merry & Co. gradually found their good humour restored. True, there was a recurrence of sounds of laughter when Arthur Augustus delivered a tenor solo; but everything else went down in first-class style; and after the performance the party retired for refreshments, amid loud cheers.

Indeed, there were a good many fellows at the fete who declared that the great item of the day, the piece de resistance of the whole show, was the amateur band from St. Jim's. The fellows who held that opinion were all members, needless to say, of Tom Merry's Melody Makers!

(Next Wednesday: "THE STAGE-STRUCK SCHOOLBOY!"—an enthralling story of school adventure and life behind the footlights, featuring Monty Lowther of St. Jim's.)

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