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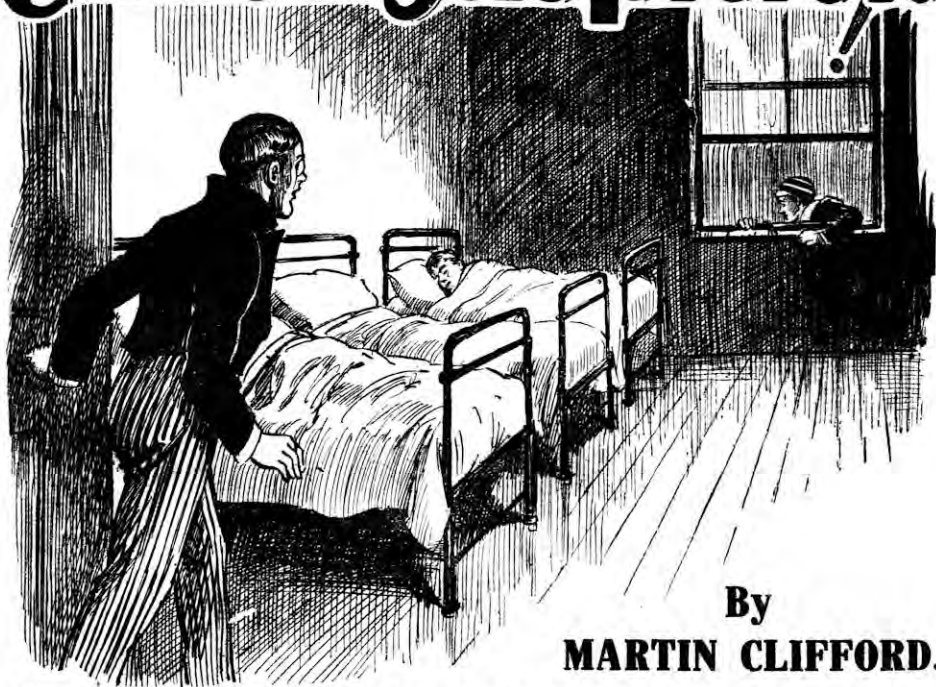
A DRAMATIC INCIDENT FROM THE POWERFUL ST. JIM'S STORY INSIDE.

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EVERY WEDNESDAY.

Week Ending November 23rd, 1935.

Under Suspicion



By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Arthur Augustus stared in astonishment as he quietly entered the Shell dormitory. He was just in time to catch sight of Tom Merry's head and shoulders disappearing below the window-sill! "Gwheat Scott!" he murmured.

"I wondah what Tom Mewwy is up to?"

CHAPTER 1.

Very Mysterious!

"**B**AI JOVE!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's uttered that exclamation. He was standing in the entrance hall of the School House, and he jammed his monocle into his right eye and surveyed the drenched form of Tom Merry of the Shell, who had just entered.

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy, you are frightfully wet, deah boy!" said D'Arcy.

Tom Merry wiped his feet vigorously. Outside, in the dark quadrangle, the rain was coming down in torrents. It had been drizzling all day, but at night-fall it had developed into a heavy downpour.

The juniors had wisely remained indoors, and Jack Blake, D'Arcy, Herries, and Digby of Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage, were considerably surprised to see Tom Merry come in. They stared at him wondering.

"You're wet!" said Blake. "Where the dickens have you been?"

Tom Merry took his cap off without replying, and waved it up and down energetically. The drops of water came from it in a shower, and splashed all

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over the elegant form of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Ow!" shrieked D'Arcy. "You uffah ass, Tom Mewwy!"

"Sorry!" grinned Tom Merry. "Did I splash you?"

"I'm simply drenched, you awful duffah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"My collah is woined!"

"Never mind, Gussy," said Blake.

"Plenty more!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"My hat," said Tom Merry. "it's coming down cats and dogs! Jolly glad I'm back!"

"Where have you been, you chump?" asked Digby.

"Oh, down the road!"

"Must have been something important to drag you down the road on a giddy night like this," remarked Jack Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It was!" said Tom Merry.

"I wogard Tom Mewwy as bein' a silly duffah," said D'Arcy. "To ventrah out on a wotten night like this is uttally widdiculous! I should even keep my tailah waitin' in the cires!"

"Of course, your tailor's of no importance at all!" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"What's the whooze, Tommy? Where have you been?" asked Blake.

"Oh, out!" said Tom Merry carelessly.

"We know that, fathead!" said Digby.

"You haven't been walking round the quad to try to see how wet you could get, have you?"

"No," said Tom Merry. "I had to go!"

"Bai Jove! An appointment, deah boy?"

"Something like that, Gussy!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I see no weason why you should be so secwative about it," said D'Arcy. "I wogard it as vevy swange that you should go out and get drenched through on a wotten night like this."

And Arthur Augustus adjusted his eyeglass, and surveyed Tom Merry with a frigid look. But Tom Merry merely grinned and passed on.

"I say," said Blake. "wait a tick till—"

"Can't stop!"

"Oh, all right!" said Blake. "If you want to make a secret of it, you can. Blessed if I want to stick my nose into somebody else's bisney. Gussy might be curious, but I'm not!"

D'Arcy turned his monode upon Blake.

"Weally, Blake, I considah that wemark wathah wotten!" he protested.

"You insinuate that I am in the habit of stickin' my nose into othah people's bisney. If you do not immediately wetwact that wemark, I shall feel compelled to give you a feafhul thwashin'!"

STIRRING LONG STORY OF THE POPULAR CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S.

"Go hon!" grinned Blake.
"And I can no longer regard you as a friend."

"Oh, Gussy!"
"I have no desire whatever to interfere with Tom Mewwys's concerns," went on D'Arcy warmly. "If you think I—"

"Dry up, Gussy!" said Blake. "If the weather won't dry up, you can!"
"I utterly refuse to dry up!" said Arthur Augustus excitedly. "You have passed certain aspersions upon my character, and I have no alternative but to administer a fearful thrashing!"
"Oh, gag him!" said Blake.
"I should utterly refuse to be gagged—"

"Order!"
"I refuse to ordah! I mean—"
"Oh, come on, Gussy—it's cold here!" said Digby. "We'll get upstairs and roast chestnuts before the fire!"

And Blake & Co. passed upstairs to Study No. 6, where D'Arcy soon forgot all about the fearful thrashing.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry had walked along the Shell passage to his own study. He opened the door and passed in. Manners and Lowther, Tom Merry's chums, looked up as he entered.

"Oh, here you are!" said Manners.
"And here's a lot of water, too!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "Why, you ass, you're soaked through!"

"Couldn't help it," said Tom Merry. "The rain pelted down all the time I was out. Left any tea for me?"

"Yes, you duffer," said Manners. "We waited about half an hour, then we got fed-up and started."

"Started and got fed-up, you mean," said Lowther.

"Oh, don't try to be funny," said Manners. "Where have you been, Tommy? What the dickens do you mean by clearing off immediately after lessons, missing tea, and stopping out until now?"

"Oh, nothing," said Tom Merry carelessly. "You might just get my tea poured out, and I'll buzz off upstairs to change my togs."

"Right-ho!" said Manners. "Where the dickens have you been, though?"
Tom Merry snorted.

"Can't I go out for five minutes without a crowd of fatheads asking me where I've been?" he growled. "I've been out, and now I'm back again!"

"You don't say so!" said Lowther.

"I've been down to Rylcombe."

"You look as if you've been down a well!" grinned Lowther.

"Can't you dry up, you ass?" roared Manners, glaring at Monty Lowther.

"No need for me to dry up," said the humorist of the Shell. "You ought to say that to Tom Merry; he's wet through."

"Well, I've got to change, anyhow," said Tom Merry. "It's all right, Manners, old man! I've only just been down the road. If you pour out my tea, I'll be back in two-twos."

"That's four," said Monty Lowther. "Now, if you'd said you'd be back in four-fours, that would mean—Ow! Yarooop!"

Manners was exasperated, and he picked up a jam tart and flung it at the humorous Lowther.

Lowther caught it on his nose, and it broke all over his face.

"You—you fathead!" he roared.

"Well, dry up!" snapped Manners. "I say, Tommy— Why, the ass has gone!"

"You shouldn't be so inquisitive," said Monty Lowther, wiping his jammy features. "Can't Tom Merry go out

now without your wanting to know where he's been? You ass, look at this handkerchief!"

"Serves you right!"
"Not a bit of it," said Lowther blandly. "It doesn't matter to me."

"Oh, of course, if you like your handkerchiefs covered in jam—"

"I don't," said Lowther. "This handkerchief is yours!"
Manners started.

"Mine!" he yelled. "Why, you burbling duffer, do you mean to say you've wiped that giddy jam off your chivvy on my handkerchief? I was using that to polish up my camera!"
"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther.

Manners glared at Monty Lowther in speechless indignation. For a second it looked as though there would be warfare, but Manners thought better of it and relapsed into silence.

When Tom Merry returned he was looking cheerful and hungry. Manners had poured the tea out, and it was steaming invitingly on the table.

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry. "Any sardines left?"

"Tons of them!" replied Manners. "Pile in! We shall have to do our prep soon, and we can't have you lumbering

When Tom Merry becomes mysterious, breaks bounds at night, and has dealings with a suspicious character, his chums find it hard to believe that he is taking the downward path. Yet what else are they to think?

up the table all the evening just because you choose to go gallivanting about in the rain and coming back after all respectable people have finished their tea."

"Well, I didn't know it was going to rain so fast," said Tom Merry. "I say, was there anything for me by this evening's post?"

"Yes, one letter," said Manners. "It's on the mantelpiece."

"Oh, good!" said Tom Merry. "Hand it over!"

Manners passed Tom Merry the letter, and he opened it and took out a postal order for a pound. His eyes sparkled with satisfaction, and he looked up at his chums.

"It's a tip!" he said.

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "How much?"

"A pound."

"Well, that's not so bad," said Manners. "I say, Tommy, you might lend me a couple of shillings, will you? I want another roll of films."

"I'm sorry, Manners, I can't."

Tom Merry had flushed, and he felt extremely uncomfortable under the surprised gaze of his chums as he placed the postal order in his pocket.

"You won't lend me anything?" asked Manners curiously.

"I can't spare it," said Tom Merry quietly.

Manners glanced across at Monty Lowther. For a moment there was silence in the study; then Manners rose to his feet and laid his hands upon the table.

Tom Merry knew what was coming, and he looked at Manners rather awkwardly.

"You've got a pound there?" said Manners deliberately.

"Yes," said Tom Merry.

"And you won't lend me two bob?"

"I'm sorry I can't, old man," said Tom Merry, looking distressed. "I'm—I'm sorry, but I want the tin for another purpose."

"Anything to do with this study?" asked Monty Lowther.

"No; it's a private affair."

"Too private to tell us about?" asked Manners warmly.

"Yes."

"Anything to do with your journey in the rain this evening?"

"Yes, something to do with it," said Tom Merry quietly. "I'm sorry, you chaps, but I don't want to discuss the subject any more."

"Oh, all right!" said Manners. "You can keep your tin. All I know is this—as long as we three have been together in this study we haven't had any secrets. If you're going to start being secretive now—"

"I'm not doing it deliberately, you ass!" exclaimed Tom Merry warmly. "I'd let you into it immediately if I could. I can't, and I want all this pound for a special purpose."

"Are you going to tell us where you went?" Manners demanded.

"No!"

"Right-ho! Keep your secret!"
And Manners and Monty Lowther walked out of the study.

It was very seldom that the Terrible Three had a disagreement, but they certainly had fallen out now. Manners especially was ruffled. He glared at Lowther angrily as they paused in the Shell passage.

"Nice thing!" he growled.

"Rotten!" said Monty Lowther.

"I don't want to know what the fathead's up to," went on Manners wrathfully. "but it's a bit too thick when he goes out on a night like this, gets wet through, and then comes back and won't tell us where he's been."

"Beastly!" said Monty Lowther.

"The silly ass ought to be bumped!"

"Then, to cap that, he gets a postal order for a pound, and refuses to lend me two bob," said Manners indignantly.

"I don't care so much about the two bob as I care about him. I don't like it, Monty. It looks jolly queer!"

Monty Lowther nodded.

"Yes," he admitted, "it's a bit thick. I wonder what game Tom Merry's up to. It's not like him to keep us in the dark about his affairs, either. Perhaps he'll come round soon, and tell us the giddy secret."

And Monty Lowther and Manners, looking somewhat serious, descended to the Junior Common-room.

CHAPTER 2.

Still Secretive!

TOM MERRY was looking rather worried when the Shell ascended to their dormitory to bed.

Manners and Monty Lowther had not referred to his visit to the village. Of course, there were a dozen likely explanations of Tom Merry's jaunt in the rain, but he did not offer to enlighten his chums.

He undressed in silence, and Manners and Lowther were inclined to be a little resentful.

"Still playing the giddy ox?" asked Manners.

"What do you mean?"

"Why aren't you going to tell us where you went to-night, and why you

refused to lend me two bob when I asked for it?"

"I'm sorry, old man—"

"Rats!" growled Manners. "You're not going to make any more excuses, are you?"

"Excuses be blowed!" said Tom Merry. "You know jolly well, Manners, that I wouldn't keep you in the dark about it unless I was compelled to. I simply can't tell you where I went."

"Why not?"

"Oh, dry up!" interrupted Monty Lowther. "If the silly ass wants to keep it to himself, let him!"

And Manners dried up. He was considerably ruffled, and got into bed without saying another word.

In the Fourth Form dormitory Blake & Co. were discussing Tom Merry's strange behaviour. His secrecy had raised much comment among the Fourth Formers. It was totally opposed to Tom Merry's nature to act in such a manner, and the juniors were making all sorts of conjectures.

"I wogard it as vewy stwange," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy thoughtfully. "Tom Mewwy is not playin' the game. If he is in any twouble of any sort he should have immediately come to us and woguested our assistance."

"Of course," agreed Blake. "It is a bit thick when the silly ass goes out in all that pouring rain, and then won't have the decency to tell us where he's been. We don't want to know—but that's not the point. The point is, why did he put us off?"

"Quite so, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "It weally appeahs as though Tom Mewwy has been up to somethin' he doesn't want us to know—some twick or othah. Of course, Tom Mewwy is perfectly at liberty to get up to twicks, but he should certainly have consulted us before doing so. It may be somethin' up against the Gwammawians."

Blake shook his head.

"No fear," he said. "Tom Merry wouldn't go out in all this blessed rain just for the sake of japing Gordon Gay & Co. It's something deeper than that. I don't know whether you fellows have noticed it, but Tom Merry was looking rather white about the gills at supper-time."

"Caught a cold, perhaps?" suggested Digby.

"Rats! It wasn't that," said Herries. "If you ask me, he's up to some giddy game against the New House. If so, he ought to be jolly well bumped for not letting us into the wheeze."

"It's not that," said Blake decidedly. "Why, he even wouldn't tell Manners and Lowther where he'd been. Manners told me all about it. Tom Merry had a postal order come, for a pound, and when Manners asked him for two bob he said he couldn't spare it."

"Bai Jovel! That's jolly quueeah," said D'Arcy. "I do not appwee of this behaviah of Tom Mewwy's. Of course, it is pwepestowus to suppose that Tom Mewwy is doin' anythin' undah-hand, but he is certainly not playin' the game."

"I think you're all on the wrong scent," said Mellish, the sneak of the Fourth, unpleasantly. "It looks jolly much as if Tom Merry had been up to some rotten game with a bookmaker down at the Green Man. That would account for his going out in the rain and refusing to say where he's been."

"Rats!"

"Piffle!"

"Shut up, Mellish!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wogard Mellish's wemarks as bein' witten bad taste."

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They are distinctly dispaawagin' to Tom Mewwy's chawactah, and there are uttahnly no gwounds for such an accusa-tion."

"Well, I'm only saying what I think," said Mellish sulkily. "If you'd got any sense you'd know that it's jolly near the truth. There's that affair of the pound, too. Why did Tom Merry refuse to let Manners have two bob?"

"Because he wants the money to shove on a horse, I expect," said Levison, with a grin.

D'Arcy walked up to Levison.

"Put up your hands, you wottah!" he exclaimed. "If you do not immediately wetwack your wemarks I shall give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"Rats!" said Levison coolly.

"You-you twightful boundah, I—!" Blake dragged the excited Gussy back. "No good making a row here, Gussy," he said. "We shall have a giddy prefect in here jolly soon."

"Weleese me, Blake!" said Arthur Augustus. "I'm goin' to give that feahful boundah a thwashin'!"

"Postpone it till the morning."

"Certainly not! I uttably wufese to postpone it, deah boy! Levison has acted like a cad, and it is necessary to—"

"Did you ever know Levison to act like anything else but a rotten cad?" asked Blake.

"Bai Jove, no!"

"Then let him alone. Nobody takes any notice of what he says!" exclaimed Lunley-Lunley. "The best thing you

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## The Greatest Combination!

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can do, Gussy, is to finish undressing and get into bed, I guess."

Arthur Augustus calmed down.

"Pewwaps you are wight, Lunley, deah boy," he said. "Levison is an uttah beast!"

And peace was restored in the dormitory.

But the juniors were certainly curious with regard to Tom Merry's strange secrecy concerning his journey in the pouring rain.

They could think of no reason for his reluctance to tell them where he had been, and anything in the nature of a mystery set them all agog.

Mellish's reference to a bookmaker had certainly some effect, although most of the juniors scouted the idea as ridiculous. The most likely explanation was that Tom Merry was up to some new jape against the New House, and he didn't wish to let the others into it until everything was prepared.

At last the Fourth Formers went off to sleep, and the dormitory was dark and still. Outside the rain pattered down as heavily as ever.

But in the morning, when the rising-bell clanged out, the juniors were surprised to find that the sun was shining and the rain had stopped. A few clouds

were racing across the sky, but there was every promise of the day being fine.

Manners and Monty Lowther were considerably surprised on getting up to find that Tom Merry was not in bed. Evidently he had risen before the rising-bell sounded.

"Blessed if I can make it out!" said Manners thoughtfully. "Tom is up to some dodge, and that's evident. Where's he gone now, I wonder? And if he wanted to get up early why couldn't he give us a call?"

Monty Lowther grinned.

"Because he knew we wouldn't get up, I expect," he said.

"Rats! It's because he didn't want us to know about it!"

"Well, I don't much trouble," said Monty. "If we wait long enough we shall see what we shall see."

Which was unquestionably a fact.

Tom Merry had been out, for when Manners and Lowther descended to the quad they met the captain of the Shell coming in from the gates.

He looked worried, and frowned when he saw his two chums.

"Where have you been?" demanded Manners.

"Out!"

"What the dickens is up with you?" "Nothing," said Tom Merry. "I'm all right."

"Aren't you going to tell us where you've been?" asked Manners.

"I can't!"

Manners snorted.

"You're a silly chump!" he exclaimed indignantly. "That's what you are, Tom Merry! What do you think of him, Monty? Won't tell his own giddy chums where he's been and what he's up to."

Monty Lowther grinned.

"No need to get excited," he said calmly. "I expect Tommy will let us into the deadly secret before long. If he doesn't I shall begin to think he's committed a gory murder, or something. If that's the case, we shall have to hush it up, and help him to dispose of the giddy remains—that is, if there are any remains to dispose of. He may have chucked somebody into the Rhyl, and then—"

"You burbling idiot!" said Manners wrathfully.

"Hear, hear!" said Monty Lowther.

"You—you frabjous lunatic!"

"You're feeling extra polite this morning, aren't you?" asked Lowther genially. "Of course, I'm just as curious as you are to know where Tom Merry has been, but it's no good getting excited about it."

"I'm sorry—" began Tom Merry.

"Sorry be blowed!" snorted Manners. "I thought Monty Lowther was with me in this affair, but since he's uphold-ing you against me, I'll clear off."

And Manners departed in high dudgeon.

"It's really too bad of you, Tommy," said Lowther reproachfully. "What the dickens are you making all this mystery for?"

"You're doing that, you ass!"

"Rot! Why can't you treat us as your chums instead of keeping us in the dark as if we were strangers?"

"Can't I go out for a walk before breakfast?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Certainly!" said Monty Lowther. "But you can't kid me you got up early just to have a walk! There's something else on, and I think it's rotten of you not to tell us!"

"You can think what you like!" exclaimed Tom Merry. And he walked into the School House with a frown.

The Terrible Three were divided, and during breakfast they hardly spoke a

word to one another. Many curious glances were cast in Tom Merry's direction, and the hero of the Shell was the subject of much whispered conversation.

After breakfast Levison and Mellish were lounging by the gates, looking down the lane towards Rylcombe, when a village boy, with an envelope in his hand, approached St. Jim's.

The youth came up to the gates and looked at the two Fourth Formers.

Levison and Mellish returned his gaze with interest.

"Well, what do you want?" demanded Levison.

"I've got a letter 'ere," said the village boy stolidly. "I don't know who you young gentlemen are, but it's for Master Merry."

Levison shot a glance at Mellish.

"Oh, that's all right!" he said carelessly. "Hand it over!"

"Be you Master Merry?" asked the village lad doubtfully.

"No," said Levison, "but I can take it to him."

The messenger hesitated.

"Well, I ain't sure. I was told to give the letter to Master Merry himself."

"Well, you can't give it to Master Merry himself!" exclaimed Levison.

"Master Merry himself isn't in at present. If you give it to me it'll be all right."

"Right you are, young gentlemen."

And the village youth handed over the letter and departed.

Levison turned over the missive curiously. It was addressed to Tom Merry in a sprawling hand, and Mellish looked over Levison's shoulder with interest.

"What are you going to do with it?" he asked.

"Open it!" said Levison coolly.

Mellish looked startled.

"I—I say," he muttered, "that's a bit thick, isn't it?"

"Thick, be blowed!" exclaimed Levison. "Why, the giddy flap's nearly open now. Besides, I expect it's something to do with this secret bisney of Tom Merry's. It's our duty to open it and see what game he's up to."

And Levison calmly inserted his thumb into the flap of the envelope and tore it open.

CHAPTER 3.

Levison Catches It!

LEVISON uttered an exclamation. He had taken the letter out of the envelope and had glanced through it.

He looked at Mellish with glittering eyes.

"What is it?" asked Mellish quickly.

"Read it!" said Levison significantly. The sneak of the School House did so.

"My—my hat!" he gasped, handing the letter back. "What's it mean?"

"It means that what you and I said last night was right," replied Levison with relish. "The manly and heroic Tom Merry is having dealings with some shady characters at the Green Man! My hat, this'll be an eye-opener for the fellows! I always had an idea that Merry was playing a double game!"

"What are you going to do?" asked Mellish excitedly.

"Take this letter and show it to the chaps in the Common-room," replied the cad of the Fourth coolly. "It won't be sneaking, anyhow. When it comes to a thing like this, it's our duty to bring it to light!"

"Rather!" agreed Mellish.

And the two cads hastened across the quad to the School House.

Most of the fellows were indoors, for

lessons would start before long, and the quad was muddy and wet.

Levison and Mellish went straight to the Common-room. A good crowd of juniors were there, including Blake & Co.

"Listen, you fellows!" exclaimed Mellish.

"Listen to you?" asked Blake. "Isn't it too much to ask of us, Mellish?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hold on," said Levison. "Mellish hasn't got anything to say."

"Then what do you mean by bursting in like a couple of lunatics?" demanded Digby of the Fourth. "If you've anything to say, Levison, you can go and say it in the middle of the quad!"

"That's a sensible idea!" grinned Kangaroo of the Shell.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Levison looked round coolly.

"I'm going to give you chaps an eye-opener," he said.

"Good!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "We'll give you an eye-shutter in return! There are plenty of fists here ready to do the trick!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Walk up," said Lowther. "No waiting!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You asses!" yelled Mellish excitedly.

"Levison's found out Tom Merry's rotten secret!"

"Eh?"

"What's that?"

There was a buzz.

"Is that right, Levison?" demanded Jack Blake.

"You'll see in a minute," said Levison coolly, producing the letter. "I've got a note here, and I consider it my duty to read it out."

"Go it!" shouted Gore.

"On the ball!" exclaimed Crooke of the Shell. "Let's have it, Levison."



Exasperated by the humorous Lowther, Manners picked up a jam-tart and flung it at him. It caught Lowther on the nose and burst all over his face. "Ow! Yarosp!" he roared. "You—you fathead!" "Now dry up!" snapped Manners. "I say, Tommy—why, the ass has gone!"

"Is it anything to do with Merry?"
"It's a jolly lot to do with Merry," said Levison. "The letter, gentlemen, is headed, the 'Green Man Inn,' and it begins like this—"

"Let's have a squint at it!" said Gore, pushing forward.

"All right, I'll pin it on the wall," said the cad of the Fourth, and he proceeded to pin the letter to a map over the fireplace. The fellows crowded round eagerly, Blake & Co. to the fore.

Levison stood by grinning sardonically. About a dozen juniors read the letter. It was quite short, and the writing was clear.

"I want to see you again about the matter in hand. You know the place, so don't fail to be there. If you can't give me a definite promise about the payment of the money, I shan't waste any more time. Personally, I believe you are fooling me, and if you can't promise an early date for payment, you know what will happen."

"Yours faithfully,
"SIMON TUTT."

For a moment after reading the letter the juniors were silent. They could not quite grasp the meaning of it. Then all the boys commenced talking together.

"My only hat!" gasped Herries.

"What on earth is Tom Merry up to?" said Kangaroo in amazement.

"It's—it's amazing!" exclaimed Jack Blake, with a worried frown. "My only Aunt Selina, no wonder Tom Merry's been acting strangely."

"Bai Jove, it is weally wemarkable!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, jamming his monocle into his eye and surveying the letter once again. "Do you weally think, deah boys, that Tom Mewwy has been up to some wotten twicks? I uttally wufuse to believe it! Tom Mewwy is as wight as wain, and it would be quite against his principles to act in a disgraceful mannah."

"But it's there, in black-and-white!" said Digby.

"Wats, deah boy!" said D'Arcy. "That lettah proves nothin'!"

"Oh, doesn't it?" said Levison unpleasantly. "It proves that Tom Merry is in trouble with some disgraceful bookie at the Green Man."

"Of course," agreed Mellish. "There's nothing else to make of it!"

"Nothing else at all!" said Levison. "Why, the letter's addressed from the Green Man, and this chap Tutt is writing to Tom Merry asking for tinf! The proof is absolutely self-evident!"

"Nothin' of the sort, deah boy—I mean, you wottah!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "I don't believe that lettah is for Tom Mewwy at all! His name isn't on it, and that cad Levison brought it in to

show us! Bai Jove, I believe it's anothah of his wotten forgewies!"

"You ass!" yelled Levison. "I've got the envelope addressed in the same handwriting."

"Course he has!" said Mellish. "The chap from the village gave it to us."

Blake frowned.

"Oh, did he?" he said. "Look here, Levison, do you mean to say that you took that letter from some chap and opened it?"

"Certainly!" said Levison coolly.

"And was it addressed to Tom Merry himself?"

"Yes."

"Then I think you're a rotten nose-parker!" exclaimed Blake indignantly. "My hat, I've never heard of such a thing! A letter comes for Tom Merry, and you deliberately open it and bring it here to show us! We don't want to know anything about Tom Merry's business."

"Of course not," said Kangaroo. "Levison ought to be ashamed of himself."

"Cad!"

"Shame!"

"Cad!"

"Yaas, wathah! Levison is a fwithful boundah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy excitedly. "I considah that he ought to be bumped for bein' such a wotten cad!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Bump him!"

"Bump the cad!"

Levison backed away in alarm.

"You silly asses!" he shouted. "I brought that letter so that you could see what underhand game Tom Merry is up to—pretending all the while that he's an honest and upright fellow. Why, the two-faced rotter ought to be hounded out of St. Jim's!"

"There was a roar."

"Bump him!"

"That's nothing to do with the case!" said Blake warmly. "You didn't know what was in the letter before you opened it. It might have been merely an account for a football, or something like that. I think it's simply rotten for another chap to interfere with Tom Merry's letters."

"But I told you what a cad he is!" said Levison desperately. "If I hadn't have brought that letter in you'd never have known—"

"And we didn't want to know, either!" shouted Manners angrily. "Do you think we're all dying to know Tom Merry's bisney? You're going to be bumped, Levison!"

"Yaas, wathah! Bump the wottah jolly hard!"

"Collar him!"

"You—you—"

But Levison was not given time to expostulate. The angry juniors grasped him firmly, and he rose in the air.

"Down with him!" roared Blake.

Bump!

"Ow!" he howled, as he smote the floor. "Owl Yow!"

Wow!"

"Give him another!" roared Digby.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boys!"

Levison was bumped again, and again after that. His yells made no difference, and when the juniors released him he staggered away, dusty, dishevelled, and sore. His collar was torn out, and his coat was split up the back.

"You—you rotten bullies!" he panted.

"Clear out!" said Blake sulphurously. "If you don't want another bumping, Levison, you'd better make yourself scarce! Where's Mellish?"

But Mellish had conveniently disappeared. The enraged juniors looked at one another breathlessly. They had bumped Levison for his caddishness; but there was no denying that the letter had raised suspicions in their minds.

"Well," said Blake, "I wonder what it means?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Monty Lowther, looking worried. "It can't possibly mean that Tommy is really in league with a giddy bookmaker! Yet—"

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus warmly. "Lowthah, I weward you as a twaitor! Tom Mewwy may have some wovwyin' bisney to attend to in connection with this affair, but I uttally wufuse to believe that he is in league with a wotten bookmakah!"

"I know it's jolly funny," said Blake thoughtfully. "But what can we think? The letter comes from some chap named Tutt at the Green Man, and he says that if Tom Merry can't pay up by a certain date, he'll do his worst. It seems proof positive that Tom Merry is in the hands of this chap Tutt."

"Tut-tut!" said Monty Lowther, unable to restrain himself, despite the gravity of the occasion.

"Oh, rats!" growled Blake. "Don't you start, Monty!"

"Well, I'm only tut-tutting the whole affair," grinned Monty Lowther. "Of course, I know that things look rather black against Tom Merry, but we don't know anything definite. Who is this chap Tutt, anyhow?"

"Bai Jove! I have an ideah!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, ring off, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake," said D'Arcy, "I uttally wufuse to wing off!"

"I wish you would wing off," said Monty Lowther innocently. "If you winged off, Gussy, there's no telling where you'd fly to."

"You—you uttah ass, Lowthah!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Well, if you ringed off—I mean, winged off—we should all be tremendously relieved, you see," said Lowther blandly. "This idea of yours—"

"Yaas, wathah! I suggest—"

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"I suggest we bury it," said Lowther.

"You fwithful duffah!" said D'Arcy. "It's a jolly good ideah! We have wead this lettah of Tom Mewwy's, and now we ought to take it to him and wequest him to explain. As mattahs have gone so far, it is only wight that he should put us in possession of the facts—othahwise a misunderstandin' might arise."

"Is that a tongue-twister?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah, it is witten had taste to joke on such a gwave mattah. We ought to treat it with wpwah and becomin' gwavity."

"You can't say that something is becoming gravity," said Monty Lowther. "You can say, for instance, that your face is becoming grave, but to say it's becoming gravity—"

"You ass!" shrieked D'Arcy. "I was speakin' in anothah sense."

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"Oh, I thought you weren't speaking sense at all!" grinned Lowther.

"You'll get bumped the same as Levison if you don't dry up," said Blake warmly. "I think you ought to be serious over a matter like this, Lowther."

"My dear chap," said Lowther, "I'm doing it just to show how much I believe in the rotten business. Do you think I believe that Tommy's got mixed up with a bookmaker? Why, the very idea is absurd!"

"Hear, hear! Bai Jove, Lowthah, I considah you have turned up twumps. If you were makin' those wotten jokes to show your indifference to this wotten lettah, I withdwaw my remarks."

"You're too good," murmured Lowther.

"Nothin' of the kind, deah boy! I—"

The door opened suddenly, and Tom Merry himself came into the Common-room. The juniors were silent immediately, and gazed at the captain of the Shell with curious looks.

Tom Merry approached to the centre of the room.

"Well," he demanded, "what are you all looking at me like stuffed owls for?"

There was dead silence in the Common-room.

CHAPTER 4.

Gussy on the Warpath!

"O FF your rockers?" asked Tom Merry pleasantly.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, you're not all dumb!"

said Tom Merry, looking round. "Blessed if I can understand what's the matter! The bell will go for lessons in a minute or two, and I wanted to speak to you about the match with the Grammar School."

"That'll do another time," said Blake.

"Why, anything more important on hand?"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!" said D'Arcy. "We want you to explain this lettah. I am quite sure, Tom Mewwy, you will be able to offah a satisfactory explanation."

"Explanation of what?" asked Tom Merry, puzzled.

"Bai Jove! Of course, you haven't seen the lettah!"

"You see, Tom Merry, it's this way," said Blake uncomfortably.

"You are intewwuptin' me, Blake!"

"Yes; I know that, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"What on earth are you jabbering about?" asked Tom Merry. "What's this rot about a letter? And what satisfactory explanations have I to make?"

"Well, you see," said Blake awkwardly, "there was a letter came for you a little while ago—"

"Hand it over, then!"

"And Mellish and Levison got hold of it," proceeded Blake. "Like the blessed cads they are, they opened it, brought it here, and stuck it up on the wall before we knew what they were up to!"

Tom Merry turned pale.

"You've—you've seen a letter that came for me?" he asked quickly. "Where is it? You're a set of beastly rotters if you've read it!"

"But, my dear chap," put in Manners, "we'd no idea what Levison was up to until it was too late. We've given him a fearful bumping, and chucked him out. Still, that doesn't alter the fact that we've seen your

giddy letter. It's from a chap named Tutt."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Tom Merry, aghast.

The juniors looked at him with a curious expression.

Tom Merry was certainly acting in a very peculiar manner. He didn't look exactly frightened, but he certainly appeared to be startled and annoyed. He looked round angrily.

"Where's the letter?" he demanded.

"Here it is, deah boy!" said D'Arcy, handing it to Tom Merry.

The Shell fellow took it, and read through its contents. Then he looked up, with a peculiar smile on his face.

"Well," he said, "what of it?"

"That's just it," said Blake. "What of it? We didn't want to see your letter, Tommy; but now that we have seen it, we expect you to explain it. You must admit it looks jolly funny."

"I don't admit anything of the sort," said Tom Merry. "After all, it's my letter, and nothing to do with you whatever! I feel like finding Levison and punching his nose! Of course, I don't blame you fellows in the least; but Levison's a cad!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Of course!"

"But that isn't what we want to know," said Manners, pushing forward.

"Look here, Tommy," it says in that letter that this chap, Tutt, wants some money from you. What for? Why are you in his debt?"

"I'm not," said Tom Merry calmly. "I don't owe him a farthing."

The juniors looked incredulous.

"But it says—"

"Blow what it says! I tell you I don't owe the man a farthing!" explained Tom Merry flatly. "If you don't like to believe it, you can disbelieve it! This letter is private, and it deals with a matter that has nothing to do with any of you chaps; so I shall be obliged if you'll dry up!"

"You're not going to tell us what it's about?" said Lumley-Lumley.

"No, I'm not!"

"Look here, Tom Merry, don't be so beastly obstinate!" said Blake. "To say the least, it looks jolly suspicious!"

This man Tutt's living at the Green Man, and he's writing to you for money. If you say you don't owe him any, I believe you. But—"

Blake paused significantly.

"But what?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Oh, nothing!"

"You're a nice chap!" said Crooke. "Why, the very fact of your refusing to explain this shows that there's something fishy about it! I don't like to call you a liar, Tom Merry."

"You won't like it if you do!" said the captain of the Shell ominously.

"This matter is a private one, and I'm not going to discuss it among all you chaps! You can think what you jolly well like, and go and eat cake!"

And Tom Merry, with flushed face, jammed the letter into his pocket and walked out of the room.

Crooke looked after him, with a sneering smile.

"Hasn't got a word to say!" he said unpleasantly. "It's as plain as anything that he's doing something underhand! If not, he would have spoken up immediately to save his own name."

Which seemed undoubtedly feasible. The juniors could hardly think anything else, in the circumstances, and they gathered together in groups, talking animatedly.

During lessons lines fell thickly, for the juniors could not refrain from talking over the strange occurrence.

They had ample time to think over it, however, and when dismissal came they crowded out into the quad, more firmly convinced than ever that Levison's construction of the case was correct.

A group of juniors gathered under the old elms after lessons.

"If you ask me—" began Crooke.

"Well, we don't ask you!" said Herries. "Shut up!"

"If you ask me," repeated Crooke, "Tom Merry ought to be shown up before the Head! I call it a bit too thick when chaps who try to swank to everybody they're goody-goodies go backing horses and visiting low-down pubs!"

"Shut up!" exclaimed Blake.

"We've got no proof that Tom Merry backs horses and visits the Green Man."

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"Haven't we?" said Crooke quickly. "Where had he been when he wouldn't say a word to us last night? Why did he go out in all that rain and miss tea?"

"Because he went to the Green Man, of course!" exclaimed Mellish. "And the fact that he owes this chap Tutt some money proves that he's been backing horses. Tom Merry was telling fibs when he said he didn't owe Tutt anything."

"You wottah!" shouted D'Arcy. "Do you mean to insinuate that Tom Mewwy was tellin' us delibewate woppahs?"

"Of course." "Bai Jove! You wouldn't say that if Tom Mewwy was here himself! I considah it is up to us, deah boys, to give Mellish and Cwooke a thorough bumpin'!"

And Arthur Augustus looked round excitedly.

But the juniors were strangely unresponsive to his appeal. They did not exactly believe that Tom Merry had been up to tricks, as Levison had described it, but there was no denying that there was something suspicious about the letter from Mr. Tutt.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "Bump the wottahs!"

"Yah!" shouted Mellish. "They know we're right!"

"Nothing of the sort!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I considah that you chaps are a set of wottahs! You don't believe that Tom Mewwy is guilty, but you uphold these cads in their beastly insinuations!"

"Sure, and it looks mighty suspicious," said Reilly doubtfully.

"Blessed if we know what to make of it," said Brooke.

"It's rotten," said Lumley-Lumley. "If Tom Merry had only explained it to us it would have been all right, but when he cuts up rusty, and refuses to say a word—well, I guess we've got some reason for disbelieving him."

"That's what I say," said Page of the Fourth.

"That makes no difference whatever, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "In the cires, we should take Tom Mewwy at his word and wally wound him. It's uttaly witten for ewerybody to make all sorts of accusations without pwoof."

"We've got proof!" yelled Mellish. "Tom Merry's a liar!"

"Rather!" agreed Crooke. "A twofaced swanker!"

"He ought to be kicked out!" growled Gore.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus was attired in his usual elegant style, but he was too excited to think about such a trivial matter as clothes. He removed his coat, placed it on a bench, and then pushed back his cuffs in a warlike attitude.

"Now, then, you wottahs!" he exclaimed. "I'll fight the first chap who calls Tom Mewwy a liar! Cwooke, come here, you frightful boundah! I'm goin' to give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"No, thanks!" grinned Crooke.

"Bai Jove, you're afraid!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "I considah that Tom Mewwy is a bwick! If you fellows are all down on him just because of that lettah, then you are a set of wotten cads! I uttaly wufuse to have anything more to do with you!"

"Oh, shut up, Gussy, you're off your rocker!" said Blake unasily.

"I uttaly wufuse to shut up, Blake, and I'm not off my wockah!" exclaimed D'Arcy defiantly. "If you chaps wufuse to back me up, then I shall cease

immediately to wegard you as my fwends."

"Don't be a fathead!" said Blake. "It's jolly decent of you to stand up for Tom Merry like this, but you must admit, Gussy, that he isn't playing the game."

"Nothin' of the kind, deah boy!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "Tom Mewwy has a perfect wight to keep his own secwets. It's only because of Levison that you know about the mattah at all. I do not believe for an instant that Tom Mewwy has done anythin' disgwaceful, and I considah you are judgin' him harshly because you have seen that lettah."

"Judging him harshly be blowed!" exclaimed Digby. "It's as plain as anything that he's in trouble."

"Yaas, deah boy, I admit that," said D'Arcy. "But there is uttaly no waison to suppose that it is a disgwaceful twouble. I considah that we ought to wally wound Tom Mewwy and say we'll help him if he gives us the chance!"

"How about the Green Man?" sneered Gore.

"Bai Jove, Gore, you are an uttaly ass!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus warmly. "The Gween Man is an inn, where anybody can stay, and it pwoves nothin' whatever. Why, my govannah might stop at the Gween Man in certain cires!"

Blake looked thoughtful.

"There's something in that," he admitted. "Of course, Gussy, we don't believe anything against Tom Merry—we only say it looks suspicious. When he proves that the thing's all right, we will rally round him. What are we to think, though, if he still persists in keeping us in the giddy dark?"

"You are a silly idiot, Blake!" said D'Arcy. "You admit that you have nothin' whatever against Tom Mewwy in the way of pwoof, yet you wufuse to bump Mellish and Cwooke for their beastly accusations. In future, deah boys—I mean, you wottahs—I shall esteem it a gweat favah if you wefvain fwom addvessin' me!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with his monocle jammed tightly into his eye, and his nose held high in the air, marched off towards the School House, utterly oblivious of the fact that his shirt-sleeves were pushed up and that his coat was still lying where he had placed it.

CHAPTER 5.

Suspicious!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY was very much on his dignity for the rest of the day. True to his word, he refused to have anything more to do with his chums for the time being.

They spoke to him on several occasions, but D'Arcy was very stiff, and refused to answer.

With Manners and Lowther, however, he was quite friendly. Tom Merry's chums had been thinking over the matter, and had frankly told their leader that they didn't believe his affair with Mr. Tutt was anything dishonourable.

Nevertheless, Manners and Lowther determined to find out, if possible, what Tom Merry was up to. They found a willing and eager helper in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The swell of the School House was very emphatic in his denunciation of the Fourth Formers. It was D'Arcy's influence, in fact, which had caused Manners and Lowther to believe in Tom Merry in spite of their own misgivings.

Even as it was, they each had a private feeling of doubt as to whether D'Arcy was right or not.

Figgins & Co. of the New House came across as soon as lessons were over, and asked to know what the trouble was.

Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen were also there, and the rival Co.'s of the New House were in possession of the facts. They didn't like the look of things at all; but Kerr, the canny Scots junior, shook his head doubtfully.

Ever since Tom Merry had come to St. Jim's he had proved himself to be true blue, and it would take more than the contents of Mr. Tutt's letter to convince Kerr. But the bulk of the New House juniors were of the same opinion as the School House contingent—that Tom Merry was playing some game which he was afraid to reveal.

Had he not feared the consequences why had he refused to speak?

Blake & Co. were taking tea that night with Bernard Glyn of the Shell. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of course, had been invited, but he had gracefully declined the invitation. Tea in Tom Merry's study was rather strained, for the Terrible Three refrained from any reference whatever to the matter which filled their minds. In consequence, hardly a word was spoken, and Manners and Monty Lowther took their departure as soon as they conveniently could.

"It's rotten!" said Manners miserably as they walked along the passage. "I think Tommy might confide in us, Monty. He's given us his word that he's doing nothing dishonourable, so, of course, we believe him. But it's jolly queer, all the same!"

"The silly ass ought to tell us all about it," said Monty Lowther. "I'm not curious, but I'm blessed if I like to see Tommy with such a beastly long chivvy! We've got to find out what Tom Merry's up to."

"That's all very well," said Manners. "It's easy enough to talk, but it's not so easy to do the finding-out bitney. Suppose we see if Gussy's still on his dig?"

And Manners and Lowther made their way to Study No. 6.

They opened the door and looked in. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was there, taking tea in solitary state. He looked up, as the door opened.

"Bai Jove, come in, deah boys!"

"Thought you were dining out tonight!" said Manners.

"It was awwanged that I should be a guest of Bernard Glyn's, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "But, owing to the widiculous suspicions against Tom Mewwy, I wufused to attend."

"Bravo, Gussy!" said Monty Lowther. "I am glad you approve, Lowthah, deah boy. In my opinion, Tom Mewwy is bein' vewy badly twated."

"Well, the silly ass brought it all on himself!" said Manners. "We've just left him in the study, and—My hat, there's his step!"

The juniors glanced at one another as a brisk step sounded in the passage.

"Bai Jove, I wondah if he is goin' out!"

Manners stepped to the door quickly, opened it, and glanced down the passage.

Tom Merry was just turning the corner, and Manners could see that he was wearing his cap.

"My only topper!" he said. "Gussy's right!"

"Is Tom Mewwy goin' out?"

"Yes, he's got his hat and coat on."

"Bai Jove, it's up to us to follow him, deah boys," said D'Arcy, jumping up. "Of course, I should not dream of pwyin' into his affairs, but there is

no harm in followin' him, and seein' where he goes to!"

"Come on, then!" said Monty Lowther.

Arthur Augustus grabbed his hat, and the three left the study. They hurried down the passage and emerged into the dusky quad. A dim form could be seen near the gates.

"There he is!"

"Bai Jove, yes!"

"You asses!" said Manners. "That's Taggy. He's closing the gate, too! Buck up!"

They raced across the quad.

"I say, Taggy!" panted Manners.

"Has Tom Merry just gone out?"

"I don't know whether it was Master Merry or not," growled Taggles, the school porter. "Somebody went hoot—youn'g rip! 'E slipped down afore I could find out 'is name. I'll 'ave 'im when 'e comes back!"

"You've locked the gates?" asked Manners.

"I 'ave, Master Manners," said Taggles firmly. "You ain't a-goin' hout no more to-night. It's past lockin'-up time now, and it's agin the rules to hopen 'em without you've got a pass!"

"Now, do be reasonable, Taggy—"

"It ain't no good!" grumbled Taggles. "The gates is locked, an' you ain't goin' hout!"

"Bai Jove, Taggy, pway listen for a moment!"

"It's no go," said Manners, moving away. "We shall have to give it up!"

"Nothin' of the sort!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "I uttably wufuse to give it up! I mean to find out where Tom Mewwy—"

"Come on, you ass!" whispered Manners. "We'll hop over the wall!"

"Bai Jove, that's not a bad ideah!"

The three juniors moved away from the gates. Taggles chuckled to himself, and entered his little lodge. He thought that the juniors were done.

"Taggy's gone in," murmured Monty Lowther.

"Good! Come on!" said Manners softly.

"Bai Jove! We shall get our twousahs in a fighwful mess, deah boys," said D'Arcy.

Monty Lowther chuckled.

"Well, you've got more than one pair," he grinned. "But we shall have to buck up, you know. If we're not jolly quick, we shan't catch up with Tom Merry before he gets to Rylcombe."

And they hastened to the spot where it was an easy matter to clamber over the wall into Rylcombe Lane. A big tree grew close to the wall, a bough jutting out over it. Climbing was an easy matter at this particular spot.

The wind whistled mournfully through the leafless branches, and drowned all other sounds in the near vicinity.

"You first," said Lowther to Manners.

"All serene!" said Manners.

He scrambled up, the other two watching from below. They could just see Manners in the dim light, and suddenly he jerked himself back and dropped to the ground. Monty Lowther gazed at him in astonishment.

"Well, you fathead, what have you dropped back for?" he said wrathfully.

"Yaas, what's the ideah, Mannaahs?" asked D'Arcy.

"Shush!" whispered Manners excitedly.

"What have we got to 'shush' for?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"Tom Merry's just over the other side of the wall, you ass!" murmured Manners. "I was just going to shin

down when I saw him. He's talking to some man—Mr. Tutt, I suppose."

"My hat!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Didn't they hear you?" asked Lowther.

"No; the wind was making too much row," said Manners. "I vote we all get up and see what sort of a chap this Tutt is. Now we know they're just on the other side, we can climb up without making any row."

"Good egg!" said Lowther. "Up you go!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

With extreme caution this time the three juniors climbed the tree and edged their way along the bough to the top of the wall. They crouched there in a row, and cautiously looked over.

Manners was right. Immediately below them could be seen the forms of Tom Merry and a short, stout man. In the gloom the three juniors could not catch sight of his features, although his voice, harsh and menacing, floated upwards with the wind.

"That's my last word on the matter," he said in final tones.

"But can't you give me longer than that, Mr. Tutt?" asked Tom Merry eagerly. "Can't you give me till Saturday?"

"No, I can't!" snapped Mr. Tutt. "To-day is Tuesday. If you can't let me have the money by Thursday afternoon—that's the day after to-morrow—you know what will happen. As I said in my note, I believe you're fooling me—"

"I'm not," said Tom Merry quickly. "I'll do my utmost to get the money. I promise you, Mr. Tutt, that I'll pay you every penny by Thursday."

"All right; you've got till Thursday afternoon," said Mr. Tutt. "I'm staying at the Green Man, and if you do get the money before the time arranged you can bring it down to me, and we'll settle the transaction then and there. I give you my word. I don't want to hang about this measly little village longer than I can help."

"Suppose I don't raise the money by Thursday?"

"Then it'll mean the sack—"

"I say," whispered Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "isn't this wathah like eaves-droppin', deah boys?"

"Yes, it's a bit rotten," said Manners softly. "We'll get down!"

And they cautiously lowered themselves to the ground.

CHAPTER 6.

Backing Up Tom Merry!

MONTY LOWTHER, Manners, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood at the foot of the wall and gazed at one another.

"Well?" said Manners.

"Well, deah boy?" repeated D'Arcy.

"What do you think of Tom Merry now?" asked Manners, with a note of misery in his voice. "I'd hoped and told myself that this bisney he's mixed up in was above board. But what we've just heard shows that Levison wasn't far wrong in his first guess. It's simply rotten to have to admit it, but Tommy's been getting into real trouble with a beastly, shady character."

"Looks like it," admitted Lowther gloomily.

"Bai Jove, you silly asses!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "You don't mean to say you think that Tom Mewwy has weally been havin' dealings with a

(Continued on the next page.)



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

Send your Joke to *The Gem Jester*,
1, Tallis House, John Carpenter Street,
London, E.C.4 (Comp.).

NOTHING DOING.

Book Agent: "Now your boy is going to school, you ought to buy him an encyclopedia."

Father: "Not on your life! Let him walk, the same as I did!"
Half-a-crown has been awarded to "A Reader," Southfield, Maple Road, Baguley, Altrincham.

COULDN'T "KID" HIMSELF.

A negro boxer was to fight a heavy-weight champion. When he reached the ring, it was noticed that he held back.

"It's all right, Sambo," said his second. "Just say to yourself: 'I'm going to beat him, and you'll win!'"
"Dat's no good!" replied Sambo. "I knows what a liar I am!"
Half-a-crown has been awarded to K. Tipton, 13, Dane Road, Sale, Manchester.

WITH HELPFUL INTENT.

Policeman: "What do you mean by loitering near a jeweller's shop with a brick in your hand?"

Loiterer: "I'm sorry, officer! I almost forgot—I promised to go to help a friend drown a cat to-night!"
Half-a-crown has been awarded to C. Gould, 1, Cedar Grove, South Ealing, London, W.5.

A BALD DIFFERENCE.

Lowther: "I say, Wynn, what's the difference between a bald Scotsman and a bald Englishman?"

Wynn: "I give it up, old chap."

Lowther: "When an Englishman goes bald, he spends money on hair restorer, but when a Scotsman goes bald, he sells his brush and comb!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Middleton, 1, Devonshire Villas, Garfield Road, Chingford, London, E.4.

NOT HIS FLAT.

Barber: "Haven't I seen you here before, sir?"

Customer: "No; I got these scars in a motor accident!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. van Onselen, 27, Fifth Street, Boksburg North, Transvaal, South Africa.

SEE SHARP OR BE FLAT!

Bill: "I say, Bob, what's the difference between C sharp and B flat in music?"

Bob: "Haven't the faintest idea."

Bill: "It's like a banana-skin on the pavement."

Bob: "How's that?"

Bill: "If you don't see sharp you'll be flat!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to John Upton, 11, Chapel Yard, Holkham, near Wells, Norfolk.

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bookmakah? Do you mean to suggest that Mr. Tutt is a bookie?"

"What else are we to think?"

"Anythin' but that, you burblin' duffahs!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus warmly. "Bai Jove, I'm surprised at you, Mannahs and Lowthah! You are Tom Mewwy's special chums, and yet you are ready to doubt his integrity before you know the facts."

"Why, you tailor's dummy," grunted Manners, "you couldn't have heard what that fat little chap said!"

"I heard ewewy word!"

"Then you're a silly chump for not looking the facts in the face!" declared Manners. "Mr. Tutt said, as plain as anything, that he's given Tommy up till Thursday to pay up. What does it look like. Pay up what?"

D'Arcy polished his eyeglasses.

"Pewwahs Tom Mewwy has been buyin' some footah boots, or somethin' like that," he suggested. "That would explain Mr. Tutt's demand for money."

"Quite likely!" said Manners, sarcastically. "You catch a man writing letters, and coming to St. Jim's after locking-up time, to speak to Tom Merry about the money for a pair of footer boots! Besides, it must be a pretty big amount, or Tom Merry would have paid up. That pound that came was evidently not enough by long chalks!"

"Bai Jove, no!"

"And Mr. Tutt's staying at the Green Man, and talked about settling the transaction," went on Manners. "And he said that if Tommy didn't pay up by Thursday it would mean the sack."

"It's wathah involved, deah boy, I'll admit," said D'Arcy.

"Personally, I think it's jolly plain," said Monty Lowther. "This Mr. Tutt is a bookmakah, and Tom Merry has, somehow, allowed himself to be drawn into his net. If it was anything else it couldn't possibly mean the sack. My hat, it's simply rotten! I'd no idea it was anything so bad as this. We can't say anything to him, either, or he'll know we were listening."

"You fwightful asses!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "You don't mean to say you think Tom Mewwy is a wottah?"

"Blessed if I know what to think," said Manners gloomily.

"I wegard you as a couple of wottahs!" said Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove, I should have thought that you would have believed in Tom Mewwy against all sorts of pwoof. Why, until last night, Tom Mewwy was as fwe from wowwy as any of us. He's nevah been out like this before, which pwactically pwoves that this bisney has been spwung upon him."

"Oh, rats!" said Manners. "I'm blessed if I can see why you should believe in him so much. It's perfectly rotten to think of Tommy getting into such trouble, but we must look the facts in the face."

"Exactly!" agreed Monty Lowther.

"Facts!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, with a sniff. "Bai Jove, we have no facts watevah to work on. We only heard a few words of the conversation, so we couldn't possibly judge what it was about. Suppose, for instance, Tom Mewwy is payin' this johhny for some othah juniah? Then it would althah wathahs vevy considevably."

"My hat, I should like to think that!" said Manners glumly. "But it's a bit too improvable. No, Gussy; if Tommy doesn't tell us about it now we shall have to let him go his own way till he comes round. If he doesn't like to confide in his chums, then I don't reckon he deserves any sympathy."

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And Manners and Lowther walked slowly across the dusky quad to the School House.

They disappeared inside, and D'Arcy sniffed audibly as he followed in their wake.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured. "I'm weally surprised at Mannahs and Lowthah! I admit that mattahs look vevy black, but it is uttally impos to think that Tom Mewwy is entanglin' himself with wotten bookmakahs."

And Arthur Augustus strolled up and down the dark quadrangle thinking out the problem.

The swell of St. Jim's was one of the most kind-hearted juniors in the school. In spite of all the evidence—or seeming evidence—he was still staunch to Tom Merry. D'Arcy simply refused to believe anything against the hero of the Shell, and would not listen to any amount of proof. Arthur Augustus could be very obstinate when he liked, and he chose to be obstinate now.

"I mean to find out what the secret is," he murmured to himself firmly. "If Tom Mewwy is ass enough to wefuse to take me into his confidence, then I shall have to get on the twack and fewwet out his giddy secwet. I wathah fancy myself in the detective line, and, after all, it needs a fellow of tact and judgment to deal with a mattah of this descwription."

Arthur Augustus paced up and down, very much taken up by his little scheme, and at first did not notice a form at the gates.

A low whistle reached him, however, and he looked up with a start.

"Bai Jove, is that you, Tom Mewwy?" he asked.

"Yes," said the captain of the Shell softly. "Who's locked this blessed gate?"

"Taggy, deah boy! He locked it sevoral minutes ago."

"Oh, blow!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "How am I to get in?"

"Wing the bell, deah boy!" said D'Arcy.

"You ass! I shall be reported for being out after lock-up."

Arthur Augustus walked up to the gates.

"I don't vevy well see how you can avoid that," he said. "Bai Jove, I've got an idea! Pway wait a minute, deah boy!"

And D'Arcy went to the little lodge and knocked Taggles up.

Tom Merry looked on in surprise. Then he heard a chink of money changing hands, and Taggles appeared with his bunch of keys.

"Young rips!" he grumbled. "I never see sich goings hon! Lucky for you, Master Merry as Master D'Arcy was about 'ere. An open-anded gent is Master D'Arcy."

The gates were unlocked, and Tom Merry came through, knowing that Taggles would not report him now that D'Arcy had ensured his silence.

The two juniors walked across the quad.

"Thanks for your help, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "But I didn't want you to tip old Taggy. It would only have meant fifty lines."

"Pway don't mention it, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "But, weally, I was just wondewin' where you have been. I saw you go out, but you haven't had time to get down to Wylcombe."

"No; I've just been down the road," said Tom Merry carelessly.

"Bai Jove, watevah for?"

"Oh, you wouldn't understand, Gussy!"

"Anythin' to do with that beastly lettah?" asked D'Arcy.

"Well, yes," admitted Tom Merry, "it was something to do with it. I shouldn't let that thing worry you. It's nothing much, Gussy. It's jolly decent of you to act like a brick, while all the other fellows are suspecting me."

A glow of satisfaction filled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's breast. Tom Merry had told the truth with regard to all his questions, and D'Arcy reckoned that if he was bad enough to have dealings with bookmakahs he wouldn't hesitate to tell a lie. Therefore, Arthur Augustus told himself that he wasn't far off the track in believing the Shell fellow to be innocent of any wrongdoing.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, there is no need to say anythin' about the mattah," said the swell of St. Jim's easily. "I wegard the othah fellows as lackin' in common-sense. They considah that that lettah is pwof against you, but, of course, it is widge, deah boy!"

"Thanks, Gussy!" said Tom Merry quietly.

D'Arcy hesitated.

"I was just wondewin'—" he began.

"Well, what were you wondewin'?" asked Tom Merry, with a smile.

"Well, fwom what Mannahs tells me, I gathah you are wathah in need of tin, deah boy," said D'Arcy.

"Pway accept a loan fwom me until a wemmance comes to hand."

"No, Gussy; I couldn't take anything," said Tom Merry, slapping D'Arcy on the back. "You're a real brick to offer it, but I'm afraid I shall have to refuse."

"But—but, deah boy—"

"There are no 'buts' about it, Gussy. I simply cannot accept anything. Thank you all the same, you know," said Tom Merry feelingly. "I don't mind admitting to you, Gussy, that I'm in a difficult fix; but, honestly, I can't tell you anything about it. If you don't ask any questions, you'll be doing me a favour."

"Vevy well, deah boy, I will wewain," said Arthur Augustus readily. "Although I must say, Tom Mewwy, that you are wathah an ass. When a fellow is in a fix, I considah it the duty of his chums to wally wound him."

"Well, that's impossible in my case, Gussy, old man," said Tom Merry. "You let me go my own way, and I'll get out of it all right."

"I sincerely twust so, deah boy."

And Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy ascended the steps and entered the School House.

CHAPTER 7.

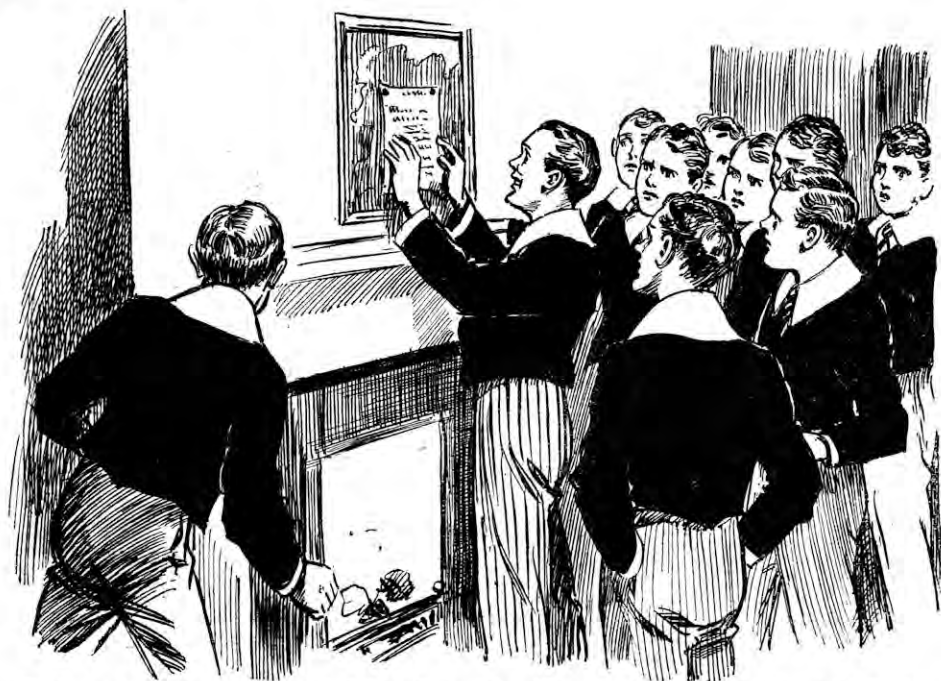
Tom Merry's Find!

WHEN Tom Merry entered his study in the Shell passage he was looking somewhat thoughtful. He was thinking of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's staunchness and refusal to believe anything against him. And although Tom Merry did not show much sign of it, he was really affected by D'Arcy's true friendship.

Manners and Lowther were in the study, having arrived there a few minutes before. Tom Merry's chums had decided to question him about his absence as though they knew nothing of his meeting with Mr. Tutt.

Manners and Lowther were very grave; they had very serious doubts about their chum.

"You been out?" asked Manners carelessly.



The juniors crowded round to read the letter as Levison pinned it up over the fireplace. "... If you can't give me a definite promise about payment of the money," the letter ran, "I shan't waste any more time ... and you know what will happen.—Yours faithfully, Simon Tutt." "My only aunt!" exclaimed Blake. "No wonder Tom Merry's been acting strangely!"

"Yes," said Tom Merry, flinging his cap in a corner. "I'm going to do my prep. Chuck over that Latin dictionary, will you, Monty?"

"Hold on a minute!" said Manners. "No need to be in such a giddy hurry, Tommy. Where have you been to?"

"Oh, nowhere in particular!"

"Funny place to go to, isn't it?" said Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry looked at his chums steadily.

"What's the game?" he asked. "Why this cross-examination? Can't I go out for five minutes now without your demanding to know where I've been?"

"No; you jolly well can't!" said Manners warmly. "Look here, Tom Merry! We want to know what game you're up to. We've had enough of this blessed mystery. Why can't you tell us what you're doing?"

"I can't tell you because it's private," said Tom Merry.

"You mean you don't want it to get about the school?" asked Lowther. "Exactly!"

"Well, if you confess it all to us, Tommy, we'll say nothing." Tom Merry burst into a roar.

"Confess!" he yelled. "Confess what, you asses?"

"It's all very well for you to cackle," said Manners hotly; "but it won't work, my son! If you think you're going to deceive us like that, you're jolly well mistaken!"

"I've not the least desire to deceive you," said Tom Merry, grinning. "My dear kids, you speak as if I've committed a murder, or something of that sort. I assure you that I've done nothing that I'm ashamed of."

Manners and Lowther snorted.

"Do you owe that chap Tutt some money?" demanded Manners.

"Not a penny," replied Tom Merry. Manners and Lowther gasped.

"You stand there and deliberately say you don't owe him a penny?" said Manners faintly.

"Not a penny—not a farthing!"

"You—your awful crammer!" panted Manners.

"I suppose you're thinking of that fat-headed letter?" said Tom Merry easily. "I'm not going to tell you a blessed word about it, and you can think what you like!"

"We think something, anyhow," said Lowther significantly.

"That I am telling whoppers?"

"Yes!" exclaimed Manners hotly.

"And rotten big whoppers at that!"

"Well, I've only told the truth—"

"The truth!" howled Manners.

"You stand there and say you don't owe Tutt a farthing! Why, you—"

Manners choked, at a loss for words. After what he had just heard pass between Mr. Tutt and Tom Merry, he could be excused somewhat for his outburst. But Tom Merry knew nothing of it, and he looked at Manners in surprise.

"I'm sorry," he said. "If you chaps think I'm trying to deceive you, I can't help it!"

"Rats!" retorted Manners. "You can jolly well go and eat coke!"

"And many of 'em!" added Lowther heatedly.

And the pair of them marched angrily out of the study. Both Manners and Lowther were absolutely positive in their own minds that Tom Merry was telling deliberate lies, and for the rest of the evening they took

care that they did not come in contact with the captain of the Shell.

In the dormitory that night their silence was ominous, and the other Shell fellows could not help noticing it. If Tom Merry's own personal chums had turned against him, it was pretty evident that there was something very much amiss. So Tom Merry undressed and went to bed with hardly a word being spoken to him.

In the Fourth Form dormitory Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had retained a stony silence.

Blake, Herries, and Digby had chipped him unmercifully in an effort to get him to speak, but D'Arcy would not be drawn. He undressed and went to bed, much the same as Tom Merry, without having said a word.

But the others weren't so silent. The conjectures that were raised concerning Tom Merry's secret were many and varied, Levison and Mellish openly sticking to their original explanation of his conduct.

Blake & Co., however, did not go so far as that; they had their doubts, certainly, but they did not air them.

At last all the juniors were asleep, and eleven o'clock boomed out from the clock tower. Its brazen tones caused one of the Fourth Formers to start up out of a doze.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I was very nearly asleep. Eleven o'clock! I should imagine that all the Shell fellows have dropped off by this time."

D'Arcy sat up.

"Any of you chaps awake?" he asked softly.

No answer.

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"It's all wight!" murmured D'Arcy to himself, with satisfaction. "Bai Jove, I weally think I shall be able to do the twick without anyone bein' the wisah!"

Arthur Augustus silently crept out of bed and slipped into his trousers. Then, with cautious tread, he moved across to the door and slipped out into the passage. In a few moments he had reached the Shell dormitory, and he opened the door with extreme caution.

For a moment he paused on the threshold, looking in. All the Shell fellows were asleep, as an assortment of snores told the visitor.

Arthur Augustus stepped lightly up the dormitory between the double row of beds. He knew which one was occupied by Tom Merry, and he immediately made for the Shell captain's clothes beside the bed.

For a moment or two he stood there, fumbling with them.

"I wathah think that will do," he murmured.

And Arthur Augustus crept towards the door again and closed it to behind him.

In a few moments he was back in bed, and he laid his head upon the pillow with a murmur of contentment. The next thing he remembered was the clanging of the rising-bell, and he proceeded to dress himself for another day.

In the Shell dormitory Tom Merry dressed himself without a word to those around him. They had not addressed him, so he preserved a stony silence.

Tom Merry did not seem in the least perturbed regarding the juniors' suspicions, and he descended to the lower regions with a smile on his face.

He strolled out into the quad to have

a breath of fresh air before breakfast, and walked under the old elms with his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets.

Suddenly his thoughts were turned in a different direction by his fingers coming in contact with something crisp. It was a note, and Tom Merry wondered what it could be. He withdrew his hand with a feeling of curiosity.

It was a pound note!

"A pound!" gasped Tom Merry, staring at the note as though he could not realise the evidence of his eyes.

"My only summer hat, how on earth did that get into my pocket? A pound! Why, I haven't—"

Another thought came into Tom Merry's mind, and he started. He looked at the pound note again, and then set his lips.

"I've got it!" he murmured. "I wouldn't mind betting a shilling that Gussy put the giddy thing in my pocket! Good old Gussy! Just like him to go and shove it in my pocket because I refused to take anything of him! My hat, what a chap he is!"

Tom Merry walked towards the School House, and as he did so an elegant figure lounged out on to the steps.

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and he turned abruptly as he caught sight of Tom Merry.

"I say, Gussy!" shouted the captain of the Shell.

D'Arcy turned.

"Did you call me, deah boy?" he asked.

"Yes, I want you for a tick."

"Vewy well," said Arthur Augustus carelessly. "Bai Jove, it's a wippin' mornin', you know!"

"Vewy likely; but I want to ask you a question," said Tom Merry.

"Last night, Gussy, I went to bed without anything in my pockets, and this morning I've found a pound note in one of them!"

"Bai Jove, how vewy remarkable!"

"A pound, Gussy, that I know nothing about!"

"I wonderah who put it there?" said Gussy, looking surprised.

"I wegard that as vewy stvange, you know. Do you think it's possible that somebody put it there undah the impres-

sion that it was his own pocket? How-

evah, I should not mention the mat-

tah until somebody asks about it."

Tom Merry smiled.

"Did you put it there, Gussy?" he smiled.

"I?" ejaculated D'Arcy. "Are you off your wockah, Tom Mewwy?"

"No. Did you put the note in my pocket?"

"Pway don't be

so widiculous!" said Arthur Augustus. "It is uttably absurd to suppose I've put the note in your pocket, deah boy! I sleep in anothah dormitory, for one thing—"

"Is the note yours, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry.

"Certainly not!"

"Was it yours, then?"

"I uttally wufuse to answah!"

"Good old Gussy! Then you put it in my pocket because I said I wouldn't borrow anything from you? You're a good-hearted ass, but—"

Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle into his eye, and surveyed Tom Merry with a stony stare.

"Bai Jove, do you mean to insinuate that I put the wotten pound note in your beastly pocket?" he said frigidly.

"You are goin' pottay, deah boy! The pound note is not mine—"

"It was last night, though!" smiled Tom Merry.

"You are an uttah ass, Tom Mewwy! I wufuse to discuss the matiah futhah!" said D'Arcy stiffly.

And Arthur Augustus walked away rather hurriedly.

Tom Merry looked after him with a smile. The swell of St. Jim's had told him quite plainly that it was he who had placed the pound in the pocket of his trousers.

The hero of the Shell turned into the School House feeling extremely grateful towards the kind-hearted D'Arcy.

CHAPTER 8.

Levison in the Wars!

"I SAY, Monty!"

Monty Lowther turned, and he looked at Tom Merry rather coldly.

The humorist of the Shell had just descended from the study. Breakfast bell would ring in a few minutes, and most of the fellows were hanging about the passages.

"Did you speak to me, Tom Merry?" asked Lowther.

"Yes. I just want to ask you about the footer match with the Grammar School next week—"

"Sorry," said Monty Lowther shortly.

"I can't stop!"

And Monty Lowther deliberately turned his back and engaged himself in conversation with Kangaroo.

Tom Merry bit his lip, and for a moment a frown appeared upon his brow. Then the wrinkles disappeared, and he grinned.

"What are you grinning about, ass?" demanded Glyn.

"I'm not grinning at anything," said Tom Merry. "I'm simply smiling because Monty Lowther's being funnier than I ever thought he could be! My only Sunday topper, you fellows seem to be all off your rockers!"

"I don't know so much about that!" said Clifton Dane, in a curious voice.

"It seems to me it's you who's off your rocker, Merry. It's not my way to put into other people's affairs, but it strikes me you're acting the giddy ox like this to put us off the scent. You've been up to some rotten game, and now you're trying to kid us!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

"You ass!" shouted Monty Lowther, unable to restrain himself. "What's up with you?"

"Nothing—nothing at all!"

And Tom Merry went down the passage, still laughing.

The fellows regarded him strangely. It didn't seem in keeping with his guilty secret for him to be laughing so heartily.



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But Crooke sneered openly and pointed down the passage.

"Nice chap, if you like," he jeered. "He's treating it as a joke just to make us think there's nothing really the matter. But he won't deceive me! Why, the chap's a bigger rotter than I ever suspected!"

Monty Lowther frowned. "Oh, is he?" he said warmly. "Look here, Crooke, if you want a thick ear, just repeat what you've said, and I'll see if I can oblige you!"

Crooke stared at Lowther in surprise. "Why, you ass!" he exclaimed. "You're as much against Tom Merry as any of us! A minute ago you deliberately snubbed him!"

"Well, that's no bisney of yours!" said Monty Lowther darkly. "I'll do what I jolly well like, but I'm not going to quietly stand here and listen to you calling the 'Norm captain a rotter'!"

Crooke sneered. "Nice kind of captain!" he said, looking round for approval. "Why, he ought to be clucked out of his position before another hour's passed! Tom Merry's an underhand, rotten outsider!"

Biff! Monty Lowther's fist came round like lightning, and Crooke caught it on his nose. He sat down with surprising suddenness in the passage.

"Ow!" he howled. "Ow! Yow!" "You'll get some more if you don't dry up!" said Monty Lowther fiercely.

"Ow! You beastly rotter!" growled Crooke. "Oh, you've broken my nose!" "I'll knock it right off if you say much more!" growled Lowther.

Crooke got up and slunk away. Monty Lowther didn't know exactly why he had let himself go, but he had hit out before he realised what he was doing.

The action meant that he was sticking up for Tom Merry, which, after all, was just what Monty Lowther had decided not to do!

After breakfast Tom Merry strolled out into the quad, and he was left strictly to himself, although many juniors passed up and down quite near to him. Tom Merry, however, did not look like a boy who had a guilty secret on his mind. His face was as sunny as ever, except for a worried little pucker on his brow.

At the other side of the quad a group of Fourth Formers were discussing the question of Tom Merry's secret.

Anything in the nature of a mystery always excited the juniors, and this mystery concerning Tom Merry's dealings with Mr. Tutt had now been unexplained for two days. Curiosity was at fever heat, and some of the boys were seriously thinking of organising a carefully prepared rag to force Tom Merry to speak.

They very much wanted to know what was in the wind, for, although they all had unpleasant doubts, their doubts were only based on suspicions.

Tom Merry was extremely popular at St. Jim's, and this affair had come almost as a shock to his staunch supporters. The fact that even Manners and Lowther had gone against him weighed heavily with the majority of the juniors.

They did not know that Manners and Lowther were taking up their truculent attitude chiefly because their leader would not confide in them.

The crowd of Fourth Formers were very excited, and Levison's voice could be heard above all. Levison was evidently the speaker.

"Gentlemen," he shouted, "this bisney has gone about far enough! We've got

JUST MY FUN



Monty Lowther Calling!

Hallo, everybody! I saw an odd thing the other day. What was it? A single shoe.

"What sort of thing are you best at telling?" asks a reader. Money. "Bank" on it!

A Wayland firm has a crane which lifts eighty tons in safety. A safety-raiser. Too sharp?

"Travel" broadens one," observes Mr. Railton. But not one's bank balance. Short after-the-holidays story: Landlord: "Rent!" Tenant: "Spent!"

What is it has no teeth, eats coal, and runs very fast, but not on a football field? Answer: A train. Did I hear you ask where that comes in? At the station, of course.

Redfern says Cornishmen are strapping fellows. Funny—we thought the Cornish coast was noted for little "coves."

Told to write an essay on Scandinavia, Jameson wrote: "Scanty Navia is so called because it has a small navy."

"What is the best thing to do if you split your sides laughing?" asks Figgins. Run until you get a stitch.

Reflection: We are all from the same

to think seriously of the honour of the school——

"Rats!" shouted Jack Blake warmly. "You're a nice chap to talk about the honour of the school! You'd better dry up, Levison, if you don't want to get jolly well bumped again!"

"Hear, hear!" "I don't see why I should dry up!" shouted Levison. "It's jolly evident that Tom Merry is playing a double game, and I propose we rag him until he owns up!"

"I fail to see, Levison, what bisney it is of yours," said Arthur Augustus. "Tom Mewwy can do as he likes, I should imagine!"

"Rather not!" said Levison warmly. "Why, I shouldn't be surprised if he's been visiting the Green Man for months!"

"Perhaps you've seen him there!" exclaimed Lumley-Lumley.

"Ha, ha, ha!" Levison turned red.

"I call it rotten to bring up old things like that in my face!" he said. "You were enough against me at one time, and I consider I've got a perfect right to be up against Tom Merry in similar circumstances!"

"Piffle!" "Rats!" "Tosh!"

"Yaas, wathah!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "We had proof against you, Levison, you wotah, and there's nothin' but a wotten lettah to bring against Tom Mewwy! It's nothin' but a mere suspish. I veward it as caddish that Tom Mewwy should be persecuted without any pwoof of his guilt."

"Well, I think it's jolly good proof!" said Mellish.

"Looks like it, anyhow," said Pratt of the New House.

mould, but some of us are mouldier than others.

Post Office work requires concentration, we are told. It leaves its "stamp" on you!

London offices lose a large amount of sunshine owing to smoke. A black "look-out"!

Figgins says he dislikes chaps who argue during a match. More "foot" and less "bawl"?

Gore is getting up a holly-picking competition. Most of the entrants will probably be "scratched."

Blake says slackers like Mellish dawdle through their daily dozen. Mellish has a "dally" dozen!

"Yes, I went to Eton, I did!" said the braggart. "Cheap excursion?" inquired one of his listeners.

D'Arcy is suffering from the strain of cooking at a study spread. He has tin-opener's wrist.

Herries asks: "Do they have any taxes in Texas?" This "taxes" me too much!

A reader says he cannot always get the station he wants on the wireless. He should like Gore's set—it gets them all at once!

"My whole family went sunbathing last vac," says Gibson. Sort of mixed grill?

The pretty employee arrived late, as usual. "Sorry I'm late, sir," she murmured. "Oh, well," said her employer, "I suppose I can't grumble. You usually get the day and the month right!"

Flying shot: "I like that parrot, but can it talk?" asked the customer. "Talk!" echoed the dealer. "Why, that parrot flew from Paraguay, asking its way all the time!" Chin-chin, boys!

"Of course it does," said Levison. "D'Arcy doesn't know what he's really talking about! If you want my plain opinion——"

"We don't!" exclaimed Blake.

"Well, you're going to have it whether you want it or not," shouted Levison. "I think Tom Merry's a complete outsider! He's been here all this time, and made everybody think that he's a model of goodness—and now it comes out that he's been leading a double life like a giddy criminal. Why, the chap's simply a rotter to the core, and ought to be bounded out of St. Jim's!"

Levison looked round with a flushed face, and for a moment there was silence. Then Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a pale face and gleaming eyes, pushed through the crowd and faced Levison.

"Put up your hands, you frightful boundah," he said quietly. "I'm goin' to give you the thwashin' of your life!"

"Rats!" said Levison coolly.

Without a second's hesitation D'Arcy leaped forward and gave Levison a resounding smack on the side of his face.

Levison staggered back, his cheek burning.

"You fathead!" he yelled. "You'd better mind what you're doing, D'Arcy!"

"You've insulted Tom Mewwy in a disgwaceful mannah," said Arthur Augustus quietly. "If you don't put up your hands, Levison, I shall give you a fearful thwashin'!"

Usually D'Arcy got into a tremendous state of excitement when he went for anybody. But on this occasion he was perfectly cool. With his monocle dangling from the end of its cord, he went for Levison with a keen look of determination in his eyes.

D'Arcy could fight—and fight well. Before Levison could have time to defend

himself, he leaned forward, and caught him a terrific thump on the chest.

"Now will you fight, you wottah?" he asked.

"Yes," snarled Levison, "I will!"

And, without hesitation, the cad of the Fourth sprang forward and lunged out.

In a second the pair were at it hammer and tongs, and the crowd of juniors looked on excitedly.

"You asses!" exclaimed Blake.

"You'll be seen by one of the masters."

"Wats!" gasped D'Arcy. "I'm givin' Levison a fearful thwashin'!"

And Arthur Augustus went into the fight more heartily than ever. He displayed considerable science, and before a minute had passed Levison's nose was streaming red, and one of his eyes was fast closing.

As the battle proceeded D'Arcy became excited, and he simply let himself go, careless of all consequences. Both he and Levison were hemmed in by the crowd, and much as Levison would have liked to back out, he could not do so.

But suddenly there was an interruption.

"What the dickens is all this row here?" demanded Tom Merry's voice.

He burst through the crowd, and stepped between D'Arcy and Levison just as the former was hitting out. The blow caught Tom Merry fairly in the chest, and he staggered back with a gasp.

"You ass!" he ejaculated faintly.

"Pwaw don't intewwupt, Tom Mewwy!" gasped D'Arcy. "There is weally no weason for your intawfence! It is necessary for Levison to have a fearful thwashin', and I'm just administering it!"

"Well, you'd better finish administering it," said Tom Merry firmly. "You ass, you'll be taken before the Head if you're seen! I can guess what the fight's about, and if Levison likes to say anything against me, let him! I don't care a jot!"

"But he—he used the most feaful expwssions, deah boy, and I simply couldn't remain within heawin' and let him go on."

"I'll say 'em all again, too!" snarled Levison hotly. "I said that you're a sneaking rotter, Tom Merry, and I say it again to your face! You ought to be handed out of St. Jim's, and—"

Tom Merry smiled.

"You don't know what you're talking about," he said quietly. "I'm not going to say anything to you, Levison, because I've got something better to do! And, in any case, even if I was the rotter you say I am, it wouldn't be your place to tell me about it. Your own record's pretty black, and I'm not going to let D'Arcy fight you because you choose to talk like a fool!"

"Bai Jove, I—"

"You're coming with me, Gussy," said Tom Merry firmly. "I'm not going to stand here and see you fight this rotter for my sake!"

"But he deserves a thwashin', deah boy!" protested D'Arcy.

"Well, he's received one, by all appearances," said the captain of the Shell. "His nose is about twice its usual size, and one of his eyes is bunged up till he can't see. You'd better leave him alone now, Gussy."

Tom Merry turned to the others.

"And you're a set of silly asses to let them fight," he said angrily. "You might have realised that a master or a prefect would come upon the scene."

"Rats!" said Blake. "We didn't interfere because we were sure about the thing."

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"You mean that you thought Levison was right?" said Tom Merry quietly.

Jack Blake flushed uncomfortably.

"Well, not exactly that," he said.

"The fact is, Tom Merry, you're acting jolly strangely, and we don't like it. We consider that you ought to own up and make a clean breast of the giddy thing. We know you're a decent chap at heart, and if you've made one slip—well, it doesn't amount to much."

"That's it!" said Herries stolidly. "If you own up, Tommy, we're willing to let bygones be bygones and have done with it. It's this rotten mystery that gets on our nerves."

Tom Merry looked at the Fourth Formers and chuckled.

"You are off the track," he said calmly. "You don't know what you're talking about. Perhaps before long you'll realise what a set of burbling idiots you've been!"

And Tom Merry walked off with Arthur Augustus—leaving the crowd of juniors staring after them with an uncomfortable feeling that they looked extremely small.

"I can't make it out!" growled Blake. "Tom Merry seems to be as right as anything. I believe we're really off the track somewhere."

"Oh, so he's taken you in?" sneered Levison darkly. "I'm jolly glad I'm not such an ass! I'm going to make it my duty to find out his secret, and get him sacked from the school!"

"And we'll make it our duty to scrag you!" roared Blake hotly. "If you say another word, Levison, we'll jolly well frog-march you across the quad!"

You're the cause of all the disturbance, and if you don't shut up we'll make you sit up!"

"I vote we frog-march him, in any case!" said Lumley-Lumley.

But Levison had received enough punishment, and he pushed his way through the crowd and scuttled into the School House with more haste than dignity.

CHAPTER 9.

Figgins & Co.'s Little Raid!

TOM MERRY walked into the Common-room immediately after dinner, and looked round.

The room was fairly full, for most of the School House juniors were discussing a practice match which was to take place that afternoon—a half-holiday—between the Fourth and the Shell.

Tom Merry was to captain the Shell team, and when he entered the Common-room all eyes were turned upon him.

"I say, you chaps," said Tom Merry, "I'm sorry, but I find I can't play this afternoon. It's only a practice match, anyhow, and you won't miss me much."

"You can't play?" asked Manners curiously.

"I can play, but I'd rather not," said Tom Merry quietly. "I've got something else on hand—"

"More important?" asked Dan.

"Yes."

"An appointment at the Green Man, perhaps?" suggested Crooke.

Tom Merry smiled.

"My hat!" he said. "You chaps seem to have the Green Man on the brain! I want to go out, but I don't see why I should tell you my bisney! If we were playing a proper match, I shouldn't go; but as it's only a practice you'll have to get on without me."

"Nothing easier!" said Manners warmly.

"In fact, we shall be intensely relieved!" said another Shell fellow. "If you'd rather meet shady characters than play for your Form you're welcome to, Tom Merry!"

Tom Merry grinned exasperatingly and left the room.

Twenty minutes later he passed out of the gates, attired in overcoat and cap.

Levison was hanging about with the evident intention of following him. But Manners and Lowther guessed his intention, and forcibly engaged him in conversation until it would be out of the question for Levison to follow.

Manners and Lowther didn't approve of Tom Merry's conduct at all; but they weren't going to stand by and see Levison play the spy.

Tom Merry didn't return until nearly tea-time. The practice match was over by that time, and several juniors looked at Tom Merry with curiosity as he came in. But he didn't speak to them, and they let him go past in silence.

When Tom Merry arrived at his study he found that Manners and Lowther were not there. As a matter of fact, they had arranged to have tea with



Fatty Wynn shone the torch into Tom Merry's cupboard, but gasped Fatty. "The grub's not here!" "You fatheaded for nothing. We'd better get clear—!" Suddenly the door

Blake & Co. in Study No. 6, and Tom Merry was left to have his meal in solitude. He did not mind much, as, otherwise, relations would have been strained.

After tea he sat in his study before the fire, deep in thought. Suddenly he glanced at his watch, and then rose to his feet.

"By Jove!" he murmured. "If I buck up I may be able to get the grub across without Manners and Lowther knowing anything about it. I'd rather they remained in ignorance, otherwise they might draw unpleasant conclusions."

And Tom Merry left the study and hastened down the Shell passage, which was deserted and cold.

Nearly all the juniors were in their studies, and Tom Merry left the House and crossed to the little tuckshop kept by Dame Taggles at the corner of the quad.

He remained in the establishment for some little time, and when he emerged he carried a huge parcel.

He crossed the quad quickly; but he didn't notice a fat form standing at the gates. After he had disappeared into the School House, however, the fat form hastened over to the New House.

It was Fatty Wynn, and he was looking excited.

He burst into Figgins' study excitedly. The long-legged chief of the New House juniors was there, together with Kerr, and they looked up as their plump chum burst in.

"What's up with you?" demanded

Figgins. "Can't you come in like a human being instead of a tornado?"

"I've got a wheeze!" gasped Fatty Wynn excitedly.

"What is it?" asked Figgins.

"I just spotted Tom Merry going into the School House with a whacking great parcel of grub!" said Fatty Wynn, with sparkling eyes. "I know it was grub, because he came out of Dame Taggles' shop with it!"

"My hat!" said Figgins. "Do you think there's any possibility of raiding it? We're jolly low just at present."

"It'll be as easy as winking!" said Fatty Wynn eagerly. "We can get Redfern & Co. into the wheeze, and go across to the School House in a body. Just at present they're not very hostile, and if we're spotted we can say we came over to talk about a House match, or something. That won't be telling a whopper, because if we are spotted we can talk about it."

"I'm not so sure about that," said Kerr. "I expect the Terrible Three are at home, and if we burst into their study they'll guess what we've come for, and won't listen to reason."

Fatty Wynn crossed to the window and looked out.

"They're not there."

"Who are not there?"

"The Terrible Three!" said Wynn excitedly. "Their study's all dark."

"My hat!" ejaculated Figgins.

"Now's our very chance!" said the Falstaff of the New House. "It's jolly plain that Tom Merry's taken that grub in, and then buzzed off to somebody else's study, or else the Common-room."

Why, it's on the cards that we can get in and out again before they have time to wink."

"It's rather risky," began Kerr.

"Risky be jiggered!" said Fatty Wynn, who had visions of a steak-and-kidney pie and jam tarts before his eyes. "If you don't jolly well make up your mind jolly quick, I shall jolly well go over myself!"

"Oh, we'll come!" said Figgins. "After all, nothing venture, nothing win, you know. If we're copped, it'll simply be the misfortune of war."

"Perhaps, on second thoughts," said Fatty Wynn, "we'd better not take Redfern & Co. into the wheeze. They'd only want half the grub."

"Very probably!" grinned Kerr.

"Besides, three of us can do the trick better than six. We shall be quicker, and shan't make so much noise."

"Right-ho!" said Figgins. "We'll chance it."

And Figgins & Co. left their study and sallied out into the dusky quad.

It was deserted, and, after spying out the lie of the land for a moment, they made a dash for the School House steps and slipped along the lighted passages.

More by luck than anything else, they succeeded in reaching Tom Merry's study without discovery, and, with fast-beating hearts, the raiders opened the door. The study was dark and silent.

"Good!" murmured Figgins. "The coast's all clear!"

"Ripping!"

"Got your electric lamp, Wynn?" asked Kerr.

"Rather!" said Fatty Wynn.

Figgins & Co. entered the study and closed the door softly behind them. Then they crossed the room to the cupboard.

Fatty Wynn flashed his electric torch on to the door. In a trice it was opened.

"Now for the grub!" murmured Wynn eagerly.

Figgins & Co. stared into the cupboard. There was nothing there but an old boot! Of Fatty Wynn's gorgeous vision of a tremendous spread there was not the least sign.

"My—my hat!" gasped Wynn. "Not here! The grub's not here!"

"You fatheaded ass!" murmured Figgins wrathfully. "You've made us come into the lion's den, only to find we've risked our giddy lives for nothing!"

"But—but the feed must be here!" gasped Wynn. "I tell you I saw Tom Merry bring it in—a whacking great parcel!"

"You were dreaming!" said Kerr.

"I reckon I know grub when I see it!" said Fatty Wynn, with a sniff. "Do you think Tom Merry would come out of Dame Taggles' shop with a parcel of laundry or—or old boots? It was grub and plenty of it. I expect he stowed it under the table!"

And Fatty Wynn flashed his light round anxiously. The space under the table was quite bare. Upon the table itself were a few books, down by the fireside stood an old cricket-bag, and opposite to it the coal-box. There was certainly no sign of a terrific feed.

"I've a good mind to bump you!" said Figgins warmly.

"But—but—"

"But rats! The feed's not here!" growled Figgins. "The best thing we can do is to clear off before we're copped!"

"Nothing else for it," said Kerr.

"I—I can't understand it!" gasped Fatty Wynn, looking round in a vain hope of spotting the missing feed. "Tom Merry must have been getting the stuff for somebody else. I—I say, now we are here, we couldn't raid Blake's study, I suppose? Very likely Tom Merry took the grub there."

"Very likely he did," said Figgins. "But if you think I'm going to be as enough to risk a ragging, you're jolly well mistaken! We'd better clear out before—"

The door opened suddenly as Figgins was talking.

Tom Merry stood there, and he looked at the raiders in amazement. Then he grasped the situation.

"My hat!" he exclaimed.

And before Figgins & Co. could realise what Tom Merry was doing, he had backed out of the study, slammed the door to, and turned the key.

"Rescue, School House!" shouted Tom Merry. "New House rotters!"

The cry rang along the passage, and doors opened on all sides. In a moment a crowd of Shell fellows were gathering round Tom Merry, and they all demanded to know what was the matter.

"I've got Figgins & Co. bottled up in my study!" said Tom Merry, grinning.

"My only aunt! Do you mean to say they had the cheek to walk right in here?" exclaimed Bernard Glyn.

"Yes. They're in there now," said Tom Merry. "I vote we drag them out and teach them a lesson!"

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except for an old boot, it was empty. "My—my hat!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "We've risked a ragging and Tom Merry stood there, staring at the raiders."

"Good egg!" said Glyn.

Tom Merry turned the key in the lock and opened the door. As he did so Figgins & Co. dashed out pell-mell, with the evident intention of escaping before the School House juniors could realise what they were up to.

Fatty Wynn came first. By sheer weight he burst through the crowd and raced down the passage. Kerr and Figgins were not so fortunate, and in a moment they were grasped firmly.

"Here, I say!" gasped Figgins.

"Pax, you know!"

"Pax be blowed!" said Dane wrathfully. "Likely we're going to make it pax when you come in here to raid Tom Merry's study!"

"You ass!" yelled Figgins. "There's nothing in there to raid, except an old boot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

"Bump 'em for their cheek!" exclaimed Glyn.

"No! We'll frog's-march 'em!" suggested Tom Merry.

"All serene!"

"Pile in!"

Figgins and Kerr were handled rather roughly by the laughing Shell fellows, and by the time they reached the School House door they were feeling mere wrecks. Their collars were torn off, their coats split, and their trousers smothered with dust.

"Now for the final send-off!" grinned Tom Merry.

And Figgins and Kerr were hurled forth. They landed in the muddy quad, accompanied by a roar of laughter from the School House juniors. From the opposite side of the quadrangle, in the doorway of the New House, a fat form watched the scene rather apprehensively.

"My hat!" gasped Figgins, picking himself up. "This is all that ass Fatty Wynn's doings! He's led us into this, and then escaped it all himself! We'll murder him!"

"And boil him in oil!" said Kerr fiercely.

And the two New House juniors limped across the quad with threats of vengeance. By all appearances, Fatty Wynn was in for a high old time—and we will draw a veil over the scene which followed!

CHAPTER 10.

After Lights-out!

TOM MERRY was in his study alone after the ragging of Figgins and Kerr. Manners and Lowther were still guests of Blake & Co.

The captain of the Shell was bending over the old cricket-bag which stood beside the fireplace. Figgins & Co. had not given it a second glance, but it was packed almost to bursting point with the supplies which Tom Merry had purchased from Dame Taggles.

If the New House raiders had only jumped to it, they would have been able to get clear away with the spoils.

"Well, I'm jolly glad they didn't spot it!" thought Tom Merry. "There's the whole of that pound of Gussy's represented there, and it would have been rotten to lose it all!"

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy, are you here, deah boy?"

"Just thinking about you, Gussy!" said Tom Merry. "Come in, old son!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stepped into the study.

"I wotired fwm Study No. 6 in stwong pwotest," he said.

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"Why? Were you chucked out?" inquired Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove, no, deah boy! I wotired because Blake commenced makin' dispaagin' remarks concernin' yourself. I wewget to add, Tom Mewwy, that Mannahs and Lowthah backed him up. I was extremely indignant, and thwateened to wotiah!"

"Well, didn't they stop you?"

"No, they were vewy wude, and actually told me that the meetin' would get on bettah if I did wotiah! Therefore, deah boy, I gwacefully took my departure. I think it is uttally wiculous of the fellows to be down on you. Of course, Tom Mewwy, I do not appwove of this mystewy, and it would be much bettah if you put me in possession of the facts."

"I am sorry, Gussy—"

"Pwaw do not be obstinate," said Arthur Augustus. "If you confide in me, deah boy, you can wely upon my being extremely tactful. I shall weward your information as strictly pwivate, and will keep it a secwet. In my own mind I have an idea that you are doin' a good turn to someone or othah—p'waps it is a convict who has escaped fwm pwison. I have wead of such things, deah boy, and I wewally think that I've hit upon the twuth!"

"Oh, Gussy, you will be the death of me!" chuckled Tom Merry.

"I wewally fail to see, Tom Mewwy, why you should take my wemarks in a wibad spiwit," said D'Arcy. "Pwaw confide in me—"

"Really, Gussy, I can't!" said Tom Merry seriously.

"You uttah ass!"

"Utter ass or not, I can't do it!"

"Then I can only conclude that you have been tied in some way," said Arthur Augustus shrewdly.

"Bai Jove, I wewally believe that is the secwet of your silence! If so, I will immediately wewain fwm pwessin' you upon the mattah."

"You're a good kid, Gussy!" said Tom Merry heartily.

"I uttally wufuse to be designated as a good kid!" said D'Arcy. "Howevah, if a fivah would be of any use to you, deah boy, you are quite welcome to it. I was goin' to send a fivah to my tailah to-night but I considahed that it would be of more use to you. My tailah can wait."

And Arthur Augustus felt in his pocket for the fiver.

Tom Merry looked on in surprise at first, then laid a hand quickly upon D'Arcy's elegant sleeve.

"It's awfully good of you, Gussy!" he said. "But I can't accept it—really, I can't! You're a brick to offer it!"

"There is nothin' whatevah in offewin' to lend a fellah a little tin. You can pay me back when you like—"

"No, Gussy, I really can't take it," said Tom Merry firmly. "I want some money, but I—I gave my word to somebody that I wouldn't bring anybody else into the matter. If I borrowed that from you, I should be breaking my word."

Arthur Augustus stowed his pocket-book away.

"Of course, that altahs mattahs!" he said. "If you have given your word, deah boy, I should not dwream of askin' you to bwreak it. Pwaw accept my sincere sympathy, howevah, and do not wowwy yourself!"

"Oh, I'm not worryin' much, Gussy; it's the other fellows who are worryin'. I really believe that if I were at liberty to tell all about it, I shouldn't say a

word except to you. You've been really decent over the whole affair, and you're a good sort!"

"I twust so, deah boy! I'm sowwy you are unable to accept a loan, but in the cires, I gwasp the natuah of your delicate posish."

And Arthur Augustus departed gracefully from the room. He passed out in the passage, however, with a very thoughtful expression upon his aristocratic brow.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured to himself. "I wewally think I shall wepeat my performance of last night. Tom Mewwy says he is unable to accept the fivah as a loan; but if I put it into his clobber after lights out, he wewally will have to accept it, for I shall deny all knowledge of the beastly thing!"

And D'Arcy went his way, feeling contented.

Tom Merry went to bed that night with very few words being spoken to him by the fellows. The hero of the Shell was not sent to Coventry, but the juniors certainly refrained from talking to him as freely as they had been accustomed to.

Until the mystery had been explained they couldn't be so free and easy.

But after all the Shell fellows had dropped off to sleep, Tom Merry still lay awake, and when ten-thirty chimed on from the clock tower he quietly rose and slipped into his clothes.

He dressed completely, and then knelt down beside his bed.

For a second he fumbled about in the dark underneath, then drew out the old cricket-bag which had been in his study earlier in the evening. Tom Merry had smuggled it up into the dormitory just before supper. He moved across to the window with a soft tread, the bag, heavily laden, in his hand.

"Now for it!" he murmured. "By Jove! What would the fellows think if they saw me now?"

And Tom Merry chuckled to himself. He had brought a long coil of thick rope with him, and the end of it was tied round the handle of the cricket-bag. Having opened the window, Tom Merry proceeded to lower the bag, hand over hand, to the ground beneath. It touched the muddy ground below.

"Good!" muttered Tom Merry. "Now I'll lower myself."

He securely tied the rope to a strong iron hook, which he had had the forethought to bring with him. The hook he jammed under the woodwork of the window-ledge, and he knew that it would be strong enough to bear his weight.

As silently as possible he clambered on to the window-sill, and sat on the sill for a moment before descending.

As he sat there the dormitory door softly opened. A few moments before D'Arcy had quietly slipped out of bed and donned his clothes, intending to carry out his plan of placing the five-pound note in Tom Merry's pocket.

As he quietly opened the door of the Shell dormitory he was immediately struck by the unusual draught, and he gave an involuntary glance at the window. Then he started.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured in amazement.

He had just caught sight of a head and shoulders disappearing below the sill, and instinctively he glanced towards Tom Merry's bed. It was empty. And Arthur Augustus stood there for a moment in sheer astonishment.

"Gwreat Scott!" he murmured. "I wondah what Tom Mewwy is up to!"

(Continued on page 18.)



**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! Christmas isn't far off, and the festive season means parties and party games. I mention this because I have just been examining the many new and attractive games that are appearing in the big shops, and I have found three that are "going over big," as they say in the film world. Since I expect that you will be buying at least one game during the next few weeks, I'm passing the tip on to you.

I award first prize to "Mappa Mundi," a game which includes the biggest jigsaw puzzle I have ever seen, and costs only 3s. 6d. The other outstanding ones are "Bob's Y'r Uncle," a one-and-sixpenny card game with a little something others haven't got, and "Alfa Kubes," which costs a shilling. I haven't space to describe them in detail, but you will find all three at your local games' shop or stationer's, and the shopkeeper will no doubt be pleased to show them to you.

"THE MASKED TRIO!"

This is the title of the lively long St. Jim's yarn which you will find in next Wednesday's number. It's a story of the full-of-fun adventures of rival ragers of St. Jim's, and it is one of Martin Clifford's best efforts.

Cutts & Co., of the Fifth Form, decide to run an entertainment to swell their football club's funds. They engage three masked pierrots, who have been appearing with great success at the local theatre. But Tom Merry & Co., to get their own back for a ragging from the Fifth Formers, manage to make some startling changes in the programme—changes which are not at all to the taste of Cutts & Co.! Unfortunately for the Terrible Three, however, Figgins & Co. also take a hand, and the fun that follows simply brings the house down!

"WHO WRECKED DALTON'S STUDY?"

How do you like the first story of Owen Conquest's ripping new Rookwood series? Great, isn't it? Next week's yarn, I promise you, is even better. There is a big sensation at Rookwood when the study of Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth, is wrecked one night. But even more sensational is the fact that Lovell is caught in the study by the master. It seems fairly obvious to most juniors that he is the culprit; but Arthur Edward strongly protests his innocence, and his chums believe him. The evidence against him, however, is overwhelming, and unless the real culprit can be discovered, Lovell is booked for the "sack." Who is the guilty fellow? Don't miss reading this gripping yarn of mystery and school adventure at Rookwood. Order your GEM early.

IN A CRIPPLED PLANE!

Piloting a plane with damaged undercarriage, unable to land without danger of death or serious injury! This must be one of the worst experiences any airman could have. Not so long ago a French Air Force pilot was faced with this problem. The undercarriage of his machine crumpled up when the wheels touched the ground. He promptly revved up the engine and zoomed away into the air again. But he couldn't bring the machine safely to earth without endangering his life, and he certainly couldn't stay up in the air. What was to be done? Luckily for the pilot there was a parachute in the plane. Donning this he jumped for it, after first directing the machine earthwards for it to crash in a safe place. Thus he probably saved his own life.

A DRAMA OF THE AIR!

That was a pretty uncomfortable experience, but even worse was the plight of an American pilot who, when he was on the point of landing with three passengers, discovered that one of his wheels was hanging loose! It meant a certain crash to land—and four lives were at stake. Quickly the pilot made up his mind. He must try to fix the wheel into position while the crippled plane circled over the aerodrome.

But another problem arose. Who could pilot the plane while he did it? None of the passengers knew the first thing about flying a machine. But one of them—a man—was persuaded to take over the controls, and the pilot carefully gave him a lesson on what he had to do to keep the plane circling on an even keel.

Then the plucky pilot, wearing a safety-belt, the rope from which was attached to the machine, climbed out on to the wing and so down to the undercarriage. Hanging from a precarious position, he gripped the wheel to fix it into place—and then discovered that the earth was rushing up to meet him at an alarming rate! The newly taught pilot must have lost control. It looked like the end of all things. But just when the pilot thought he was booked for a front seat at a funeral, the machine flattened out and started climbing again. He thanked his lucky stars, and got to work feverishly, fixing on that wheel. After forty minutes' struggle he at last succeeded. Then he was hauled back into the plane, and eventually brought it safely to earth.

BABOONS ON PARADE!

All is not so grim on the war front in Abyssinia. An amusing story is told of an incident which occurred in a forest clearing near Addis Ababa. The

clearing was the spot chosen for training Abyssinian recruits, and every morning they were put through their paces by a sergeant. Interested spectators of the drilling were baboons perched in the trees. For a fortnight the baboons watched the daily performance. Then one morning when the sergeant and the recruits marched up to the clearing, they were astonished to see a number of baboons aping the military exercises that they had seen! They were all lined up with tree branches sloped across their shoulders for rifles. And in front of them was a bigger baboon, giving orders like the drill sergeant. But none of them waited for orders when they saw the soldiers. They beat a hasty retreat into the trees.

WEALTH FROM WATER!

How much is 14,000 lb. of sea-water worth? Not much, you may think. But do you know that it would be cheap at the price of ten shillings? Actually, there's a pound's worth of value in that quantity of sea-water. A big plant for extracting the minerals in sea-water began operating in North Carolina last year. Since then a fortune in the region of £10,000,000 has been amassed from products taken from the sea-water! One hundred and forty thousand million pounds of water passed through the plant, and from it was extracted 750,000 tons of salt, 450,000 tons of Epsom salts, and many tons of magnesium. In addition, it yielded eight tons of copper and a four-inch-square block of gold!

GOAL-GETTERS!

Changing the subject from gold-getting to goal-getting, I am asked by a reader: "Who holds the record for the most goals scored in a match?" In first-class football, the record is held by John Petrie, who in a Scottish cup-tie in 1885, popped thirteen past the Bon-Accord goalie when playing at outside-right for Arbroath.

The feat, too, of James Dyet is well worthy of mention. He went to see King's Park play Forfar Athletic one day. The former team's centre-forward failed to turn up, and Dyet, who had never before played in such high-grade football, was asked to play. He did—and didn't the Forfar goalie know it! He crashed the ball past him eight times in the match, and Forfar lost 12-2.

I don't suppose, however, there's another player in England who could equal the experience of Minter, who was the St. Albans centre-forward. In an Amateur cup-tie he scored seven goals against Dulwich Hamlet, and yet he was on the losing side—St. Albans lost 8-7!

PEN PALS.

Arthur Barton, Redrock 12, Wilmot Way, Banstead, Surrey; cricket: France, America.

Donald L. J. Corner, 23, Gloucester Road, Hampton, Middlesex; age 12-5; overseas; Jubilee stamps.

Miss Betty Allison, 8, Battlefield Avenue, Langside, Glasgow, S.2; age 14-16; overseas; sports, scouting; girl correspondents.

Miss May Grainger, 53, Cransader Avenue, Knightswood, Glasgow, W.3; girl correspondents; age 19-21; tennis, films; India, Australia, China, Russia.

TAILPIECE.

Jack: "Do you believe that big ears are a sign of generosity?"

Jim: "Yes—generosity of Nature!"

THE EDITOR.

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CHAPTER 11.

D'Arcy's Discovery!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY stood staring at the window of the Shell dormitory for a few moments, thinking what to do. Then he made up his mind quickly, and swiftly crossed the long room, being fearful lest some of the boys should awake and see him.

They slept peacefully, however, and he arrived at the window without a mishap. Then he cautiously projected his head over the sill and looked down.

Tom Merry had just untied the cricket bag from the end of the rope, and was making his way towards the tree in the quad where it was possible to scale the wall.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "This is weally remarkable! I think I had better follow Tom Mewwy and see where he is goin'." I wathah fancy myself in the Fewvers Locke line of bisney. It won't be spying, but weal detective work!"

D'Arcy considered that Tom Merry was in some deep trouble, and therefore wanted somebody to look after him and lend a helping hand, if necessary. And the swell of St. Jim's proceeded to lower himself from the Shell dormitory window. He reached the quad safely and moved silently across to the shadow of an old elm-tree.

D'Arcy's heart was beating fast as he crouched behind it and watched Tom Merry scramble up the tree by the wall, with the cricket-bag in his hand.

It was a difficult task to climb a tree and carry the bag at the same time. But Tom Merry was on top of the wall at last. And as he dropped down the other side D'Arcy crept from his place of concealment and sped across the quad.

The elegant junior was hot on the scent now, and, from the best motives, he meant to follow Tom Merry to his destination, wherever that might be. If Tom Merry wouldn't tell him what game he was up to, then it remained for D'Arcy to find out for himself.

When Arthur Augustus had clambered to the top of the wall he looked down the lane and saw Tom Merry striding along towards Rylcombe, with never a suspicion that somebody was following him.

D'Arcy dropped to the ground.

He set off in pursuit of Tom Merry, keeping as close to the hedge as he could, for, of course, it was possible that Tom Merry might glance round, for some reason. The captain of the Shell, however, did not trouble himself. He walked straight on until he came within a quarter of a mile of Rylcombe.

Then he turned abruptly from the road and mounted a stile.

"Bai Jove, he's not goin' to Wylcombe!" said D'Arcy to himself. "He has taken the footpath leadin' round to the Wayland Wood. I wondah where he is goin'!"

D'Arcy arrived at the stile himself in less than a minute, and in the gloom he could see Tom Merry walking ahead.

"I wathah think I shall awivah at the bottom of this mattah to-night," murmured D'Arcy to himself. "Tom Mewwy has no ideah that he is bein' followed, and I shall be able to ferret out the secwet. Whatever it is, I am convinced that Tom Mewwy is not guilty of any wotten conduct!"

D'Arcy followed the captain of the Shell. Tom Merry kept straight on.

When he had reached a spot nearly half-way to the Wayland Road, he left the main footpath and followed the course of another path.

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"Bai Jove, that leads to the old gamekeeper's cottage," muttered D'Arcy.

He followed Tom Merry with a feeling of growing surprise. D'Arcy had often followed the main footpath during junior paper-chases, and he knew that this smaller path led only to a small cottage, occupied by a gamekeeper. It was on the edge of Rylcombe Woods, almost at the back of the wood which faced the gates of St. Jim's. The cottage stood in a narrow, little-frequented lane, and the footpath led to a little gate at the back, at the bottom of the garden.

"I wondah what Tom Mewwy is goin' there for!" D'Arcy murmured.

He walked on quickly, for Tom Merry had disappeared into the little garden.

D'Arcy arrived at the gate and crouched down behind a hedge. A bright light glowed in the lower window of the cottage, and D'Arcy saw Tom Merry's shadow as he passed the window.

A sound of tapping reached the watching junior's ears, and almost immediately the door was opened.

Tom Merry walked in, carrying the bag.

"Gweat Scott!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "How vewy swangie!"

For a moment he stood at the gates, too surprised to make a move. He had been imagining all sorts of dreadful things in connection with Tom Merry, and to find him calmly walking into the old gamekeeper's cottage came something like a shock to D'Arcy.

Then he recovered his wits, and he determined to investigate matters more thoroughly. He opened the gate, crept into the little garden, and made his way down the path to the cottage. He could see that the window was curtained, but that it possessed no blinds. Therefore, he would be able to see into the room without those inside knowing of his presence.

D'Arcy moved silently up to the window and looked in.

Then he uttered a low ejaculation of amazement, for what he saw was so unexpected that for a time he could only stand there in open-eyed astonishment.

CHAPTER 12.

Tom Merry's Secret!

"GWEAT Scott!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy murmured the ejaculation, and it was some time before he could control himself.

The scene within the little cottage had taken him quite by surprise. It was a well-furnished room, and looked extremely cosy, with a bright fire burning in the grate. The furniture was very different from that seen in a small cottage. It was modern, and looked quite new.

Tom Merry was standing beside the table, and his occupation, more than anything else, had caused D'Arcy to utter his exclamation of surprise.

For Tom Merry was bending over the cricket-bag which he had brought with him. It was on the floor, and from it he was producing all sorts of provisions. Already the table was piled high with pots of jam, tins of condensed milk, tinned meats, and other articles of a like nature.

The light from a lamp on the table shed a ruddy glow over the good things. Sitting beside the fire in an easy-chair, with a kindly look upon her

face, was an old woman, and D'Arcy could see that her eyes were dimmed with tears. A shawl was over her shoulders, and she held in her hand a handkerchief, with which she had evidently been wiping her eyes.

Standing by her side, with one hand on her shoulder, stood her husband, old Griggs, the gamekeeper. He was looking at Tom Merry with a very serious expression.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "Well, I never!"

So this was the deadly secret which Tom Merry had refused to reveal to his chums—or, at least, something in connection with it.

Tom Merry was evidently befriending this old couple, who were plainly in need of food. Otherwise, why should Tom Merry bring it to them?

"I'm bothered if I can make it out!" murmured Arthur Augustus, very much puzzled. "I wondah why Tom Mewwy has brought all that gwub? I fail to see how old Gwiggs is in need of it. Apparently he is in flowishish' cires, for all this furniture seems to be quite new."

D'Arcy was plainly at a loss. As he stood there he could see that Tom Merry was talking. But, owing to the wind in the surrounding trees, D'Arcy could hear nothing but a slight murmur. Not that he wanted to hear. Arthur Augustus was by no means an eavesdropper, and already he had made up his mind what to do.

"I'll wait for Tom Mewwy up the path," he decided, "and then reveal myself to him. In the cires he can do nothin' but tell me the plain truth. I think it is wotten of him not to allow me to be of assistance."

And D'Arcy remained looking on at the scene with growing curiosity.

Inside the cottage Tom Merry was smiling with satisfaction. He laid the last package on the table, and then looked up.

"There you are, Mrs. Griggs," he said genially. "It's not much, I know, but it'll do to be going on with."

The old gamekeeper stepped forward.

"I don't know how to thank you, Master Merry," he said earnestly. "I never dreamed as there was a young gentleman as could be so generous as you."

"He's too good, John," sobbed Mrs. Griggs. "We'll never be able to repay him—never!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Nonsense!" he said easily. "What is it, after all? If a chap can't help somebody out of a hole, it's a pity. You're not earning much now, Mr. Griggs, but what you do earn in future you will be able to devote to living purposes."

"But what about Mr. Tutt?" asked Griggs anxiously. "You've been having some trouble with him, haven't you? He came here this morning, and said you were attending to the matter."

"Quite right," said Tom Merry; "I am."

"But 'e spoke as though 'e didn't believe it, Master Merry," went on the gamekeeper. "He said that if you didn't let 'im 'ave the money by to-morrow afternoon he'd do his worst."

"Oh, it mustn't come to that, John!" said Mrs. Griggs, looking up with red eyes. "After all this time it would be dreadful to lose everything. And we've paid over three parts. Oh, I wish we'd never had the things! I wish with all my heart we'd never had 'em!"

"But how was I to know, Mary?" protested Griggs. "I never knewed as I'd be out o' work for so long. It's been terribly hard, as you know, Master Merry, and my wife doesn't seem to be able to stand the worry like I do. It wouldn't seem much to some folks, I expect, but we ain't built to make light of big debts. I'll be heartily glad when the whole business is done with—that's what I'll be!"

"Of course you will," said Tom Merry. "And I'll promise you this, Mr. Griggs—your furniture won't be touched. I'll see Mr. Tutt to-morrow afternoon and pay him every penny that's owing. Then the furniture will be yours."

"That it won't, Master Merry!" said Griggs quickly. "I shall owe you nigh on twelve pounds."

Tom Merry laughed lightly. "Oh, that's nothing!" he said. "You can pay that back at your own convenience—when you've got regular work again. You can rely on me not to take the blessed furniture away in lieu of payment."

Griggs smiled half-heartedly. "But it don't seem right to me that you should go to all this trouble and risk," he said. "Why, you'd get into a pretty fix if Dr. Holmes got to know of your being out so late as this." "It's not the first time," grinned Tom Merry. "I've been out after lights out before now, Mr. Griggs."

"I dare say you have, Master Merry." "Well, I shall have to be going," said Tom Merry, glancing at the clock on the mantelpiece. "It's past eleven already, and if I don't buck up I shall lose my beauty sleep. Good-night, Mrs. Griggs!"

Mrs. Griggs looked up with tear-stained eyes. "Good-night, young sir, and good luck!" she said fervently.

Tom Merry walked to the door. "See you again to-morrow, Griggs, old chap!" he said cheerfully. "So long until then!"

"Good-night, Master Merry!" Tom Merry passed out into the windy night with the empty cricket-bag in his hand. He walked along the path briskly, and soon arrived at the little gate.

"Poor old Griggs!" he muttered. "He and his wife are in a proper old stew. That beastly furnishing firm ought to be smashed up, and old Tutt with them! My hat! I wonder what the fellows would say if they really knew what was happening? Poor old Manners and Monty! They think I'm up to all sorts of dark deeds."

And Tom Merry chuckled at the recollection.

He walked along the path briskly. "Bai Jove! Tom Mewwy, is that you, deah boy?"

CHAPTER 13.

The Explanation!

A DARK form loomed up in the darkness.

Tom Merry started back with an exclamation.

"Gussy!" he ejaculated blankly. "Yaas, wathah! It's me, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, coming forward. "I've been waitin' for you, you know."

Tom Merry recovered his breath. "You silly ass!" he said. "Have you been watching me?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy, with a fatherly air. "I considered that it was necessary for somebody to investigate your strange behavior. I came to the Shell dorm, deah boy, to place that fivah in your—or wathah," he added, in confusion. "I should say—Bai Jove!"

"You blessed fraud!" said Tom

Merry. "Then it was you who put that pound-note in my pocket last night?"

"Yaas, deah boy," D'Arcy admitted, seeing that he had given the game away.

"And were you going to shove a fiver in my fogs?"

"Yaas, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "I may as well tell you that I have few-fewed out your secret. I was watchin' at the window while you put that collection of gwub on the table. Weally, Tom Mewwy, I fail to undahstand what the reason for this is."

"Did you hear anything that was said?"

"I trust you do not take me for an eavesdwoopah?" said D'Arcy indignantly. "I heard nothin', though if your voice had been audible, I should certainly have wathahed from the window."

"Good old Gussy!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Well, as you know so much, I'll tell you the lot, provided you treat it in a confidential manner."

"That remark is totally unnecessary. Anythin' you say to me, deah boy, will be tweeked as confidential. Pway proceed!"

"Right-ho!"

Tom Merry and D'Arcy advanced along the footpath, and as they walked Tom Merry told D'Arcy what the whole business meant.

"You see, Gussy, I found out a few days ago that old Griggs was in a dickens of a hole," explained Tom Merry. "Griggs is a jolly decent chap, and has often done us a good turn, as you know."

"Yaas, wathah! Gwigis is a sport, deah boy!"

"Well, it seems that about eighteen months ago he purchased a lot of furniture from a shady furniture firm in London. You see, he wanted furniture badly, because about two years ago most

(Continued on the next page.)

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of his old furniture was burnt up in a fire."

"Bai Jove! I wemembah the occu-wence!"

"He didn't like to get any locally on the giddy instalment plan, so he went to London for it," went on Tom Merry. "Well, the furniture's all right, but, of course, Griggs is paying about twice its worth for the stuff. But that alone wouldn't matter. The rub is this: About two months ago there was a poacher collared in Wayland, and he gave evidence that Griggs had been in league with him. It ended in Griggs getting the sack, though I consider that he was innocent. He couldn't get another job, and since then he's been out of work. And what do you think the silly ass has been doing?"

"I have no ideah."

"He's been paying almost every penny he's earned—by doing odd jobs—to the rotten furnishing firm. He and his wife have been practically starving themselves for the sake of keeping up the giddy payments for the furniture. Well, that couldn't go on for ever, and just lately he's been getting behind with his payments, so the firm sent their representative down."

"Bai Jove! Mr. Tutt?"

"Exactly! Mr. Tutt," said Tom Merry. "You can guess what sort of a chap he is—an ill-mannered, bluffing sort of beast. According to the agreement that Griggs signed, if he got behind in his payments, and couldn't pay up, the firm were at liberty to claim all the goods. Well, Mr. Tutt came down and threatened to clear out everything within a week."

"Gweat Scott!"

"Of course, it was genuine enough. Mr. Tutt, as the representative of the firm, has the law on his side, and can do as he threatens if the money isn't forthcoming. It's perfectly rotten, of course, but Griggs shouldn't have let himself into it. When I saw him the other day he was nearly off his head with worry, for to have lost the furniture after nearly paying double the amount, would just about have finished his wife. I bucked him up, and told him I'd see Mr. Tutt and make some arrangement. I did so and arranged that I'd pay up all that was owing. I'd been to see him, as a matter of fact, that night I was out in the rain."

"Bai Jove! I undahstand now!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "But, you silly ass, why couldn't you have told us about it? We would have wallied would you, and made up the amount in no time."

"I don't doubt that for a minute, Gussy, but you know what these old country people are," said Tom Merry. "Both Griggs and his wife were simply horrified at the thought of everybody knowing that they were getting their furniture on instalments. I can't see anything in it myself, but there you are. I promised them that I'd keep the thing absolutely to myself, and that I wouldn't borrow any money from a St. Jim's chap to pay up with. That's why I've been in such a hole. If I'd been able to explain, matters would have been different. I was a bit startled when I found that Levison had read that giddy letter out, but as Mr. Tutt had said nothing definite in it I didn't mind much."

"Bai Jove! And the fellows think that you have dealings with a book-makah!"

"Yes, the silly asses!" grinned Tom Merry. "I can hardly blame them, though, for everything looked very much against me. You're a brick, you

know, Gussy, for standing up for me. I saw Mr. Tutt last night outside the gates, and I have arranged to pay him the remaining money by to-morrow afternoon—eleven pounds five! You see, I've written to my old govern-ness—"

"Miss Pwiscillah Fawcett, deah boy?"

"Yes. At first I thought about raising the tin myself, but old Tutt was in too much of a hurry. So I've written to Miss Fawcett, and I expect the money will turn up by the afternoon post to-morrow."

"Bai Jove! That's wippin'!"

"Tutt says that if he doesn't get the money on Thursday afternoon he'll either have to clear the goods out or get the sack. He told me that last night."

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus uttered the exclamation involuntarily.

Manners, Lowther, and himself had heard Mr. Tutt mention something about the sack to Tom Merry, and they had taken it that Tom Merry himself would be expelled if he did not pay up. Yet the words had been said in such a manner that misunderstanding had been very simple.

Tom Merry didn't note the peculiar tone of D'Arcy's ejaculation, and they walked on in silence for a few moments.

They emerged into Rylcombe Lane.

"It's weally gweat of you, Tom Mewwy," said D'Arcy thoughtfully.

"Pway let me shake your hand, deah boy! The mannah in which you have cavvied on this binsey reflects vewy gweat cweedit upon yourself."

"Oh, rot!" laughed Tom Merry.

But D'Arcy shook his head.

"It's all vewy well for you to scoff at it, deah boy," he said. "The mannah in which the fellows have been vun'nin' you down is disgweafull. They thought you were tellin' f'wightful whoppahs when you told them 'you didn't owe Tutt a farthin'. I admit that I was puzzled myself, but, of course, it was quite wight."

"It is quite wight, Gussy. I don't owe Tutt a farthing. Griggs owes it to him, but I'm going to pay it. You see, there's a difference. From Tutt's letter it seemed proved that I owe him a pile of money, and that I am in the habit of visiting the Green Man. My hat! If the matter wasn't serious it would be a first-rate jape!"

"Yaas, wathah! The chaps have been taken in completely. They are beginnin' to think that you are an awful boundah!" said Arthur Augustus. "And instead of that, you've p'vowed yourself to be the most decent fellow at the coll! I vewally think, Tom Mewwy, that you ought to have told me all this before."

"Rot!" laughed Tom Merry. "Do you think I care what the chaps imagine? It's a bit rotten of old Manners and Monty to doubt me, but I don't blame them. I dare say I should have been just the same myself. But I couldn't help laughing when they kept telling me to own up and confess my giddy sins!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed D'Arcy. "You must have regarded that as funny, deah boy. Considerin' the circs, you can afford to gwin at them. But here we are at the gates!"

And D'Arcy and Tom Merry assisted one another to the top of the wall. In two minutes they were within the school grounds, and lost no time in regaining the Shell dormitory and hauling up the rope. Then with a whispered good-night, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy departed to his own dormitory.

Ten minutes later the pair of them were sound asleep in their respective beds.

Tom Merry's secret was out; but instead of proving a guilty secret, it was one which reflected great credit upon the hero of the Shell.

And the last scene in the affair was to take place on the morrow; but neither Tom Merry nor Arthur Augustus D'Arcy were quite prepared for the turn which events would take.

CHAPTER 14.

Mr. Tutt Takes Action!

THE next morning, as soon as breakfast was over, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked across to Tom Merry, who was strolling under the old elms in the quad.

The juniors still retained the same attitude against him, and Tom Merry, far from feeling resentful, was almost amused. He intended to get permission from Mr. Griggs to take his own intimate chums into the secret. With that permission given, he would be able to tell Manners and Lowther and Blake & Co., whom he knew he could trust. The others would still have to let their curiosity go unsatisfied.

"Hallo, Gussy! What's the trouble?" asked Tom Merry.

"No twouble at all, as I know of, deah boy," said D'Arcy, coming up. "An ideah has just stuck me, howevah, and I thought I'd ask your opinion."

"Quite right. My opinion's vewy valuable!"

"Pway don't wot, Tom Mewwy," said D'Arcy. "I vewally think it is a good ideah. You wemembah that I told you I had a fivah?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry. "You said you were going to throw it away on your tailor."

"I said nothin' of the sort. The money is in no way thrown away, you ass. Howevah, that is beside the point. How much have you wequested Miss Pwiscillah to send?"

"Twelve pounds, Gussy."

"I thought so," said Arthur Augustus triumphantly. "That will leave no margin for old Gwiggs' immediate expenses. I pwopose we wun there immediately aftah mornin' lessons, and—"

"But, my dear kid, he mustn't know you're in the secret."

"You can tell him that," said D'Arcy complacently. "When he knows what a tactful chap I am he will be quite agreeable. Besides, it is my intention to advance him a fivah."

"You ass, Gussy!"

"I uttably wufuse to be called an ass for offewin' Gwiggy a fivah!" said D'Arcy indignantly. "The poor chap is weally in need of tin, and I vewally couldn't send it to my tailah in the circs. If you wufuse to accompany me, Tom Mewwy, I shall go to the old game-keepah myself."

"Then I'll come," said Tom Merry promptly. "But you really shouldn't do it, Gussy. You'll leave yourself without a penny."

"Wats! I shall get a wemittance before long f'rom my governah. This fivah was a pwesent f'rom my bwothah, Lord Conway, and is extwah. Therefore, I shall not miss it much."

So immediately after morning lessons Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Tom Merry set off down the road. Much against D'Arcy's will, Tom Merry forced him to trot, for there was not very much time before the dinner bell would ring. If possible, they wanted to get back before then.

They hastened along the footpath without speaking, and at last came within sight of the cottage. From the

footpath, of course, they had a back view of it. Nevertheless, Tom Merry caught sight of a horse's head as he and D'Arcy entered the little garden.

"There's a blessed cart or something round the front!" he said. "Suppose we buzz round and see what it is?"

"Wight-ho, deah boy!"

And, instead of going to the back door, they went to the front. They hastened round the cottage, and came in sight of the front strip of garden which bordered the weed-covered lane.

And as they did so they both stopped abruptly.

"My hat!"

"Gwreat Scott!"

There was certainly cause for the exclamations of astonishment. Instead of the quiet scene which they had expected, there was quite a busy one before their eyes. Out in the lane a large van stood,

"They're not going to take 'em!" exclaimed Tom Merry wrathfully. "Why, I've never heard of such rotten sharp practice!"

"It's feahful!" snorted D'Arcy indignantly. "You oughtn't to have let them take the furnituah, Mr. Gwiggis!"

"I couldn't help it, Master D'Arcy," said Griggs miserably. "I see as you've been let into the secret, but it don't matter now. That feller Tutt has got men from the village to take my goods away, and it's all over the village that I've got 'em on instalments."

"Bai Jove, deah boy, that's nothin'!" said D'Arcy. "What does it mattah if they do know? There is nothin' cwiminal in gettin' things by instalments. If you go to the wight people I considah it a wippin' ideah. But didn't you expostulate with Tutt?"

"'E said as 'e'd had orders to clear

"Yes, I don't think!" he sneered. "I got orders this morning from the firm to clear the goods out and take no notice of you. I'd wrote 'em saying that I was waiting for you to get the money, but they told me to take no notice of a junior schoolboy. They said that if the hiner couldn't pay up I was to claim the goods immediately."

"You're a contemptible humbug!" said Tom Merry disgustedly. "Just because your rotten firm said that, there was no need for you to carry it out to the letter. You might have waited till this afternoon and seen what I should do. You'll just have all that furniture put back into the house!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, shall I?" said Mr. Tutt furiously. "All that furniture is going away in half an hour, and don't you make any mistake!"



Arthur Augustus and Tom Merry stopped and stared when they reached the old cottage. Out in the lane a large van stood, piled up with the gamekeeper's furniture. Two men were moving out a bedstead, while the gamekeeper and his wife looked on sadly. Had the two juniors arrived too late to save the old couple's home?

and it was piled up with the old gamekeeper's furniture. Two men were walking down the path with a heavy bedstead, and at the gate stood the stout, truculent-looking figure of Mr. Simon Tutt. Near the cottage door, side by side, were the old gamekeeper and his wife, the latter crying bitterly.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

"The—the beastly cad!" shouted Tom Merry furiously. "He told me he'd wait until this afternoon for me to get the money. Instead of that, he's having all the stuff carted out hours before the time arranged."

Tom Merry raced round to the old couple, D'Arcy behind him, his monocle fluttering in the breeze.

"You see, Master Merry, it was no good," said Griggs gloomily. "They've got 'em. After all I paid and worked for, too. It's hard lines, young sir, but—"

the things out," said the old gamekeeper.

"Well, he's jolly well going to have orders to shove 'em all back!" said Tom Merry indignantly. "If the chap's got too much to say we'll bump him!"

"Yaas, wathah! I considah that if Mr. Tutt is bumped it will teach him a lesson."

"There's enough of him to bump, anyhow," said Tom Merry. He hurried to the gate. Mr. Tutt regarded him with a scowl.

"Well, what do you want here, young shaver?" he demanded.

"I want to know what you mean by clearing these goods out, you rotter?" asked Tom Merry. "You told me distinctly that you'd wait until this afternoon for the money. I wrote for it last night, and it'll be here by the afternoon post."

Mr. Tutt puffed at his cigar,

"You shan't take it!" exclaimed Tom Merry helplessly. "I—I—"

"I don't want nothing to do with you youngsters," said Mr. Tutt truculently. "You can clear off as soon as you like—understand?"

"Bai Jove, you uttah wottah!" gasped D'Arcy.

And before Tom Merry could prevent him, the swell of St. Jim's, regardless of the consequences, had rushed at the furnishing firm's representative. Mr. Tutt, taken completely by surprise, was bowled over like a ninepin, and lay on the ground with every ounce of breath knocked out of him.

"Now then, you insultin' boundah!" yelled D'Arcy. "If you do not immediately ordah those things to be taken back into the cottage we'll give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"You young scoundrel!" gasped Mr. Tutt.

"That's a good idea, Gussy," said Tom Merry quickly. "Look here, Tutt, you worm, if you promise to put those things back I'll promise I'll get the money here within half an hour! If you don't promise I'll get a crowd of fellows down here and we'll frog-march you to the duck pond and chuck you in!"

Mr. Tutt, all the bounce knocked out of him, rose slowly to his feet, with a beet-root face. He could tell by the tone of Tom Merry's voice that the junior was in earnest. He glared at Tom Merry in sullen fury.

"All right!" he said. "But I shan't give you half an hour. Twenty minutes is the most I'll allow you. I've got the law on my side."

"Hang the law!" roared Tom Merry. "D'Arcy, rush off and bring those twenty chaps here!"

Mr Tutt gasped.

"Hold on!" he said quickly. "We'll say half an hour."

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "I reckon you and your sort ought to be sent to prison!" he added disgustfully. "You wait until the payments are nearly all made, then you jump down on the goods and seize 'em!"

Tom Merry glanced at his watch.

"I say, Gussy," he said quickly, "would you mind doing me a favour?"

"Anythin' you like, deah boy," said D'Arcy readily.

"Good egg! Rush off to Rylcombe Lane and hurry towards the village. It's just about time for Blagg, the postman, to be coming up. He'll have a registered letter for me, I expect. If he has, bring it here as quickly as you can."

"Wight-ho, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus, without hesitation. "I'll wun like anythin'!"

And the swell of St. Jim's rushed off. He realised the seriousness of the position, and he put on an extra spurt. He arrived at the stile in record time, and took it in one leap. Unfortunately, he slipped on landing and sprawled on the grass. At any other time Arthur Augustus would have been greatly perturbed at the accident, but now he never noticed it.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured. "Blaggy isn't in sight!"

Therefore, D'Arcy set off towards Rylcombe, with his elbows tucked into his sides and his eyeglass streaming behind on its silken cord.

He was within sight of the first houses of Rylcombe before he met Blagg, and the old postman looked up at him in surprise.

"Bai Jove, here you are, deah boy!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's.

"Why, what do you want, Master D'Arcy?"

"Bai Jove, Blaggy, I'm puffed! I've been wunnin' like anythin'. Have you got a lettah there for Tom Mewwy?"

Blagg was expensively slow.

"Yes, Master D'Arcy, there is one—a registered letter," he said. "I'm going up to the school, and I'll take it."

"You won't, deah boy!" said D'Arcy quickly. "Pwray hand it over, Blaggy! It's impewative that I should have it at once! Tom Mewwy has requested me to fetch it for him!"

Blagg handed over the requested letter.

"Thanks!" exclaimed D'Arcy, and he rushed off without another word.

"Here, you've got to sign, Master D'Arcy," shouted Blagg.

"Latah, deah boy!" yelled Arthur Augustus, without stopping.

"But I shall get into a row!" bawled Blagg in alarm.

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"Wats?"

And Arthur Augustus rushed on without pausing. He had got the letter, and that was the main thing.

CHAPTER 15.

The Settlement!

TOM MERRY looked up quickly as he heard a patter of footsteps from behind the house.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rushed up with the registered letter.

"I've got it!" he shouted in triumph. "I've got the lettah!"

"Oh, good!" said Tom Merry. "You've been jolly quick, Gussy!"

"I wun like anythin'!" exclaimed D'Arcy pantingly. "I didn't sign the wotten receipt, but you can do that latah. I twust it is the lettah you expected."

Tom Merry tore open the registered letter.

"Yes, this is the one!" said Tom Merry, with sparkling eyes. "Here we are! Two fivahs and a couple of pound notes! My hat, my old governess is a brick!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry turned to the sullen Mr. Tutt.

"You'd better come inside, old Tutty frutty," he said genially. "We're going to pay you up every penny, and then we're going to kick you out!"

Mr Tutt blustered.

"How was I to know that you meant what you said?" he said, in a wheedling tone. "As you've got the money, of course that alters matters. I shall 'ave to accept it and leave the furniture here."

"You'll jolly well shove it all back in place before you go," said Tom Merry firmly. "But come on in!"

They entered the cottage. Griggs and his wife were in the front room, and they looked up gloomily as the two laughing juniors entered.

"It's all wight, Gwiggy, deah boy!" said D'Arcy. "We've got the tin, and Tom Mewwy is goin' to pay this beastly boundah up!"

"Is it true?" said Griggs eagerly.

"Every word of it," smiled Tom Merry. "I promised you I'd see you through this business, Mr. Griggs, and I meant it. If this silly fathead hadn't gone back on his word it would have been all right!"

"Thank Heaven!" said the old gamekeeper fervently.

"I don't know how I can ever thank you, Master Merry! Mary, it's all right! After we've given up hope, too!"

"He's a dear, kind young gentleman!" exclaimed Mrs. Griggs, with a smile of happiness.

Tom Merry handed over the money to Griggs, and in less than five minutes Mr. Simon Tutt had handed the gamekeeper a full receipt in exchange for the balance of the money.

"Of course," said Mr. Tutt, "I didn't know as 'ow things would turn out pleasant like this! If I've caused you any trouble—"

"Get out!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "And order your men to put all the furniture back in their right places!"

"They're doing that already!"

"Then you can buzz off!" said Tom Merry sternly.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Pwray wathah, you uttah worm!"

And Mr. Tutt retired, realising that the juniors would not stand any nonsense. Tom Merry looked at the happy old couple with a smile.

"Well, now the whole thing's out,"

said the hero of the Shell genially, "there's no reason why I shouldn't tell the chaps at St. Jim's what I've been up to. They've been thinking all sorts of things about me, Mr. Griggs, and I'd like to set their minds at rest!"

"You can do just what you like," said Griggs readily. "I expect the news is all through the village by now; and, anyhow, that man Tutt is sure to say as you've paid him off. So you might as well tell your schoolmates as anyone else!"

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "The fellows will get a bit of a surprise—"

There came a knock at the door, and Blagg, the postman, stood there. He handed a letter in for the old gamekeeper, and departed, not noticing that Tom Merry and D'Arcy were there.

Griggs tore the letter open, then uttered an exclamation of joy.

"I can't believe it, Mary!" he gasped excitedly.

"What is it, John?" asked Mrs. Griggs quickly.

"Why, the old master has taken me back!" said the gamekeeper, with shining eyes. "He says as the poacher has confessed that I never had anything to do with him, and only spoke against me for spite. I am going back to work on Monday!"

"Heaven be praised!" murmured Mrs. Griggs, bursting into tears.

"Bai Jove, I wogard that as wip-pin'!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Gwiggy, I congatulate you, deah boy! This weally has been a day of sorrow and joy for you—with joy triumphin' in the end!"

"It has, Master D'Arcy—it has!" said Griggs, in a shaking voice. "I don't seem to be able to realise it. It don't seem to be true!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"It's true enough," he said. "Look here, Mr. and Mrs. Griggs, I've got an idea! As things have turned out so rosy, suppose you both come to a feed in my study at St. Jim's this evening. I can promise you a high old time!"

"Master Merry, I—"

"That's all right! You're not going to refuse, I know!" said Tom Merry. "There'll be plenty to eat. We'll blow Gussy's fiver for the occasion!"

"Bai Jove," said D'Arcy, "I wogard that as a good idea! You are perfectly at liberty, Tom Mewwy, to blow my fivah for such an auspicious occasion!"

"All serene!" said Tom Merry. "We'll get back to the school now, Mr. Griggs. We'll expect you to be on hand at exactly half-past six!"

"We'll be at the gates waitin' for you, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus hospitably.

And, without giving the old couple time to think it over, the two juniors took their departure.

CHAPTER 16.

Reunited!

"HERE they are!" exclaimed Lovison. "Here's the giddy pair of them! Been making more bets, Tom Merry?"

Tom Merry and D'Arcy had just entered the Common-room in the School House. It was drizzling a trifle, and the juniors had all collected in the Common-room to wait for afternoon lessons to begin.

"Where the dickens have you been to?" demanded Jack Blake, pushing forward. "You've missed dinner, and—"

"Bai Jove, I'd forgotten all about

(Continued on page 23.)

HERE'S THE FIRST FULL-O'-PEP YARN OF OUR GREAT NEW ROOKWOOD SERIES!

Jimmy Silver & Co.'s NEW CHUM!

By OWEN CONQUEST.



Arthur Edward put all his beef into a terrific tug to pull the new fellow out of the armchair, but it was in vain. The new boy calmly sat tight in the chair, smiling at Lovell's efforts to shift him.

The Wrong Customer!

"KEEP quiet!" said Lovell. That was Arthur Edward Lovell all over! Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome were not making a sound. They were still as mice.

It was necessary to be quiet, in the circumstances. Fellows could not be too quiet when they were waiting on a landing, with a paper bag of flour lodged on the banister, ready to drop on the head of a fellow expected from below. Especially when they were Fourth Form juniors, and the expected victim was a prefect of the Sixth Form. Obviously, there would be trouble for the Fistical Four of Rookwood if Carthew of the Sixth discovered who had dropped that bag of flour on his head!

So Arthur Edward warned his comrades to be quiet, heedless of the fact that they were still as mice, with the cat at hand!

Lovell held the flour bag. It was Lovell's stunt. He had arranged it all—planned it and schemed it. Lovell was the man for planning!

Mornington of the Classical Fourth had lines to do for Carthew. He had not done them. Carthew had doubled them and warned Morny that if they weren't handed in by three o'clock that afternoon he would come up for them, and bring his asphalt with him. Still Morny had not done them. He had got busy with those lines, but rather too late. They were far from finished yet. And three o'clock had chimed out.

That was where Lovell came in. Lovell declared, and his friends agreed, that if Carthew got that bag of flour bursting on his head as he came up the staircase, he would forget all about Morny for a bit, and give the chap time to get through.

Now there was a sound of a tread on the lower stairs. Any instant now the

expected head might appear in the deep well of the staircase. Lovell was ready—peering over the banisters, ready to let fly. He was uneasy lest his friends should make a sound and warn Carthew. So he told them to be quiet.

"Dry up, you ass!" breathed Raby.

"He'll hear you!"

"Quiet!" hissed Lovell.

Jimmy Silver made a movement forward to peer over the banisters. He wanted to be sure it was Carthew coming. "Uncle James" of Rookwood was a wary youth, and in such a case it was impossible to be too careful.

"Keep back!" said Lovell.

In his anxiety he forgot to lower his voice. Arthur Edward was always anxious lest some other fellow should put his foot in it. Generally, it was his own foot that went in.

"But—" whispered Jimmy.

Lovell jabbed him with an elbow. "You fathead! Keep back! Do you want to warn him?"

Jimmy Silver breathed hard. It was no time for argument—that would have warned the fellow coming up.

"But look here," muttered Newcome, also making a forward movement.

Lovell jabbed him with his other elbow.

"Keep back!"

"Oh, you ass! Is—"

"If you fellows can't leave this to me—" breathed Lovell, with an indignant glare round at his comrades.

"But—"

"Shut up!"

Lovell turned back to the banister. Already a head loomed in the well of the stairs below. Whiz! The bag flew!

Squash!

It burst!

"Got him!" gasped Lovell.

He had got him! The paper bag, smiting the head below, burst on that head, shedding flour in smothering clouds. A startled howl followed. Then a fall, and a gurgle.

Lovell backed from the banister.

"He's got it! Cut!" he gasped.

"Oooogh!" came a wild, gurgling howl up the stairs. "What—what—

who—upon my word! Flour! What—what—what—"

Lovell stopped suddenly, as if rooted to the landing. He had expected to hear startled howls from Carthew of the Sixth. But it was not Carthew's voice that floated up the stairs. It was the voice of Mr. Richard Dalton, the master of the Fourth. Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome gave a gasp of horror.

"That's Dicky!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Dicky Dalton!" breathed Raby.

"Oh, you ass, Lovell!"

"You fathead!" hissed Newcome.

Jimmy Silver shot a hurried glance over the banister. He had a glimpse of Richard Dalton, M.A., sprawling on the stairs in a sea of flour. Then he jumped back.

"Cut, for goodness' sake!" he panted.

He grasped the petrified Lovell by the arm and dragged him away. The four juniors cut along the passage to the end study. They did the passage at about 50 m.p.h., bolted into the study, and shut the door.

Safe inside, they gazed at one another. Sounds could be heard from a distance—many footsteps and many voices. Fellows were gathering on the landing and the stairs to see what had happened. But Jimmy Silver & Co. did not think of joining them. They knew too much already.

Lovell was the first of the four to find his voice.

"You silly asses!" he exclaimed hotly.

"Wha-a-t?" gasped the three.

"If you hadn't jawed, and taken my attention off him, I should have seen that—"

"You—you—you—" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Another time," said Lovell, "leave it to me, and don't barge in with your silly jaw! Look what you've done now!"

"What we've done?" shrieked Newcome.

"Yes. Poor old Dicky's got the flour instead of that cad Carthew. You may think it funny to rag a decent man like Dicky. I don't!" said Lovell. "But you've done it now, and no mistake!"

"We—we—we've done it!" gurgled Raby.

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"Yes; I only hope we shan't be spotted. It will mean a Head's whopping—bouncing a bag of flour on a beak! I really think you fellows might have had a little more sense. I must say that!"

Lovell's pals gazed at him. Words failed them. But that did not matter, for all three of them felt that it was a time for action, not for words!

As if moved by the same spring, they jumped at Arthur Edward Lovell, grabbed him, and up-ended him.

Bump!

Lovell smote the carpet in the end study with a smite that made the dust rise from it. He roared with wrath and indignation.

"Yoop! You silly asses! What the thump—Leggo! I say—yaroop!"

"Give him another!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

Bump!

"And another!" howled Raby.

Bump!

"And another!" yelled Newcome.

Bump!

Jimmy Silver & Co. felt a little better. Lovell, not feeling a bit better, sprawled and spluttered. The door of the end study suddenly opened, and the podgy face of Tubby Muffin looked in. Tubby was grinning.

"You fellows heard?" he gasped.

Jimmy Silver gave his chums a warning look.

"Heard what?" he asked casually. "Anything happened?"

"Dicky Dalton!" gasped Tubby. "Somebody's buzzed a bag of flour at him on the stairs. He's smothered. Ha, ha, ha! Smothered from head to foot! Ha, ha, ha! Looks like a ghost! Ha, ha! Nobody knows who did it. I dare say it was Peele, or Cower—they're always up against Dicky. I say, you ought to have seen Dicky! He was a sight. Ha, ha!"

Lovell scrambled to his feet.

"You cheeky idiots! You silly idiots! I'll—"

"Oh, scissors!" howled Tubby. "You've got flour on your trousers, Lovell. How did you get flour on your bags? Ha, ha!"

"Oh!" gasped Lovell. "Keep it dark, Tubby, you ass!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

He slammed the door on the podgy nose of Cecil Adolphus Muffin. Tubby rolled away, gurgling with merriment. Lovell hurriedly sorted out a clothes brush and brushed spilt flour from his trousers. He glared indignantly at his comrades.

"You fellows might have tipped me that it was floury, instead of playing the giddy ox!" he snorted. "It's all right! We've only got to keep it dark."

"If Dicky bowls us out—" groaned Raby.

"He won't!" said Lovell.

They waited. In the circumstances they felt it wiser to remain in their own study, out of the public view, for a time. They waited anxiously—three of them, at all events. But Lovell was confident.

During the next half-hour he told his friends, several times, that it was all right. He was assuring them on that point once more when a tap came at the door. It opened, and Timothy Tupper, the House page, looked in.

"If you please, you're wanted in Mr. Dalton's study," said Tupper.

"Oh!" said Lovell.

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Not a Row!

M^{R.} RICHARD DALTON—generally called "Dicky" in the Rookwood Fourth—sat in his study. His face was a little flushed, and his hair a little untidy. He looked as if he had been doing a lot of rubbing and scrubbing recently—as indeed he had. But his voice was as pleasant as usual as he called out "Come in!" to four members of the Classical Fourth who presented themselves at his study door.

Jimmy Silver & Co. came in very quietly. They had no doubt why they had been sent for, and they were very serious. Dicky was a good-tempered man—famous for his cheery good temper—but they did not expect him to take a lenient view of what had happened.

They were doubtful whether it was going to be a caning from Dicky, or a report to Dr. Chisholm and a flogging from the Head. Neither had any attractions for them; but one or the other was inevitable. Lovell, certainly, had told them, on the way to the study, that he was going to own up to Dicky that it was his stunt, and that he was the responsible party. To which his friends had only replied by requesting him to shut up.

They were all in the soup together; that was their view!

"Come in, my boys!" said Mr. Dalton. "You may shut the door, Silver. I have sent for you four boys, because—"

"Yes, sir; we know," said Lovell dispiritedly.

Mr. Dalton raised his eyebrows.

"I do not see how you can know, Lovell, as I have not hitherto spoken to you on the subject. A short time ago I was coming up to speak to you in your study, but I was stopped by an extraordinary prank—an outrageous prank on the stairs—"

"We're awfully sorry, sir!" mumbled Lovell.

"I am glad to hear you say so, Lovell! I am afraid that a number of the boys regarded it as a joke," said Mr. Dalton. "It will prove far from a joke for the culprits! Silver—"

"It wasn't Silver, sir!" interposed Lovell.

"Eh! What was not Silver?" asked Mr. Dalton.

"I mean, it wasn't Jimmy who—"

Lovell broke off suddenly, staring at Jimmy, who was making an extraordinary face at him. It had dawned on Jimmy, from Mr. Dalton's words and looks, that it was not in connection with the floury episode that the four juniors had been sent for. It was something else. It had dawned on Raby and Newcome also. But Arthur Edward Lovell was not so quick on the uptake. It was far from dawn- ing on Arthur Edward.

The contortions on Jimmy's face were intended as a signal to Lovell to shut up. Lovell, not catching on, only stared at him. Mr. Dalton, following his startled glance, stared also.

"Silver, why are you making signs to Lovell?" he asked.

Jimmy crimsoned.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "I—I—"

"Please be serious!" said Mr. Dalton severely. "I have sent for you to speak about a serious matter."

"Not so serious as you think, sir!" said Lovell.

Mr. Dalton gazed at him. What Lovell meant was that it was not so serious as Dicky Dalton thought, because the flour had been meant for somebody else. But as Mr. Dalton was

thinking about an entirely different matter, he was naturally astonished.

"Lovell, you had better be silent!" he rapped.

"What I mean is, sir—"

"Silver, you are making signs at Lovell again! If you cannot be serious in your Form-master's study—"

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Jimmy.

"I will now tell you why I have sent for you, if Lovell will permit me to speak!" said Mr. Dalton, with sarcasm. "I want you to understand, sir, that I, and I alone, ought to have been sent for about this—"

"Upon my word! If you speak again, Lovell, I will cane you," exclaimed Mr. Dalton. "Silence!"

Now, Silver, I gather from what Lovell has said that you boys have heard something of the matter, though I do not know how. Are you already acquainted with Dudley Vane?"

"Dud-dud-dud-Dudley Vane?" stut-tered Lovell.

He wondered whether Mr. Dalton was wandering in his mind. Certainly, he seemed to Lovell—to be wandering from the subject!

"That is the name of the new boy who is coming to-morrow," said Mr. Dalton. "If you are already acquainted with him, so much the better."

Lovell gasped. What had long ago dawned on his three chums, dawned, at long last, on Lovell's rather solid brain. Dalton was not talking about the flour!

"Did-did-did you send for us to speak about a new man in the Fourth, sir?" he stammered.

"I did, Lovell; and you will kindly be silent while I speak to Silver!" snapped Mr. Dalton.

"Oh crickey!" murmured Lovell.

"I—I don't know the chap, sir!" stammered Jimmy. "I've never heard the name before. Is he coming into the Classical Fourth?"

"Yes, Silver, and I shall place him in your study," said Mr. Dalton.

"We've four already, sir," ventured Jimmy.

"Quite so; but it is a large study—the largest in the Fourth—and I have a particular reason for desiring to place this boy Vane with you. You are captain of the Form, Silver, and, from my observation of you, worthy of the position—"

"Thank you, sir!" murmured Jimmy.

This was very nice, of course, though it hardly consoled the captain of the Fourth for having a new fellow "bumped" into a study where there were already four.

"You are a thoughtful and responsible boy, Silver," went on Mr. Dalton kindly. "I can trust you to be kind and considerate towards the new boy—who may need it. I can trust your friends also. Raby and Newcome are sensible lads—and Lovell, though foolish and unthinking, has, I am sure, a kind heart."

Lovell blinked. He had always respected Dicky; but this was rather too thick! Foolish and unthinking! What could have put such an opinion into Dicky's head Lovell really did not know.

Jimmy and Raby and Newcome looked rather dismayed. What sort of a freak was this new fellow going to be that Dicky was so coolly landing on them? Obviously, he was something out of the usual run of new boys for Dicky to reel off all this jaw about him. They were kind-hearted fellows enough, always ready to help a lame dog over a stile. But really and truly they did not want a queer fish in the end study.

Mr. Dalton smiled faintly. It was not so very long since he had been a

schoolboy himself; and he could read the schoolboy mind.

"What's wrong with the chap, sir?" ventured Raby.

"Nothing at all, Raby. But he has been ill," explained Mr. Dalton. "He would have come to Rookwood at the beginning of the term, but was unfortunately suffering from the effects of an accident to a plane, which crashed while he was travelling in it. I understand that his nervous system was somewhat affected, which was very natural. He has, however, recovered his health and is coming to the school to-morrow. But—"

Mr. Dalton paused a moment; and Jimmy Silver & Co. looked as dutifully willing to oblige as they could!

"But," added Mr. Dalton, "after so trying an experience—after some months spent in a nursing-home—the boy may need to be treated with some little consideration—some little kindness. I think I can trust you, Silver, to see to that."

"Oh, quite, sir!" murmured Jimmy. "I suppose you mean that the kid may be a bit nervy, and that sort of thing. We'll make it all right for him in the end study, sir."

"Anything in the nature of ragging, for instance—"

"I quite understand, sir."

"I am sure you understand; and it is

right—and we are all right! Dicky Dalton hasn't the faintest idea that we mopped the flour over him on the stairs—"

Lovell broke off with a gasp, as the door behind him opened. Mr. Dalton stepped out into the passage.

There was an awful silence.

It had not occurred to Lovell that Mr. Dalton might be leaving the study after dismissing them. Things never did seem to occur to Lovell! Obviously, Richard Dalton had heard him as he opened the door.

"Oh!" gasped Lovell.

Dalton gazed at the juniors. They gazed at him. Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome were crimson; Lovell had his mouth open with dismay, and looked like

Goal!

"STOP that ball!" It was Lovell of the Classical Fourth who shouted.

The fellow whom he addressed must have heard, but he heeded not.

It was the following afternoon. A light drizzle was falling in the Rookwood quadrangle; the sky was misty, the trees damp and weeping. On such an afternoon, frowsters and slackers like Peele and Gower hugged the study fireside; but hardier fellows were punting a footer after class, heedless of inclement weather. The Fistical Four, and Mornington and Erroll, Conroy and Teddy Grace and Dick Oswald, and some other fellows were getting exercise and fresh air—and mud—especially mud. But they did not mind. Lovell had given the ball a



As a head appeared in the well of the stairs below, the flour bag flew from Lovell's hand. Squash! "Got him!" said Lovell. The bag, smiting the head below, burst, shedding smothering clouds of flour. A startled howl came from the victim. But it was not Carthew's voice. It was the voice of Mr. Dalton, master of the Fourth!

unnecessary for me to say more. I will take up no more of your time!" said Mr. Dalton kindly. "You may go, my boys."

They went.

Lovell grinned as the door of the study closed behind them. Having shut the door, he stood in the passage—grinning!

"Jolly narrow escape, old beans!" he murmured. "I say, it's lucky you fellows never let out anything about the flour."

"Us!" said Jimmy.

"Yes. He doesn't know, after all!" chuckled Lovell. "Only a jaw, after all, about some fatheaded freak of a new kid. Lucky you had sense enough to keep your mouths shut—you don't often have!"

"You silly owl—"

"We're all right now," said Lovell. "I told you in the end study we were all

a fish out of water. Jimmy found his voice:

"It—it wasn't meant for you, sir! A mistake—another chap—I mean a chap—we never knew you were coming up—we—we—we— Oh dear!"

Mr. Dalton spoke quietly—and unexpectedly:

"Please do not stand about in this passage!" he said. And he closed his study door and walked away.

Jimmy Silver & Co. gazed after him, dumbfounded. But they realised that Dicky Dalton was going to take no official note of the words overheard by chance, not intended for his ears. They waited till Dalton was gone. When he had turned the corner, Jimmy and Raby and Newcome turned to Lovell. Quietly and savagely they kicked him, and kicked him again, and yet again! Then they, too, walked away.

mighty lift, and it shot away towards the gates.

The gates stood wide open; in the gateway stood a fellow who was watching a taxi drive away. He had his back to the juniors. Had he heeded Lovell's yell, and been quick on the uptake, he could easily have stopped the ball and prevented it from whizzing out into the public road—where, of course, footers were not supposed to whiz. As he did not even turn his head, the muddy footer shot by, and went across the road—and it was rather fortunate that no car was passing at the time.

"You silly ass!" roared Lovell.

Still the fellow in the gateway did not heed. Obviously he did not know that he was being addressed. But he was left in no doubt on the subject when Arthur Edward Lovell rushed up, grabbed him by the shoulder and whirled him round.

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backwards under Lovell's tremendous tug.

It crashed on Lovell. He hurled him over and landed on him.

Hardly knowing what had happened, Arthur Edward Lovell lay sprawling on his back on the carpet, the armchair on his legs, blinking up dizzily at a handsome face that grinned down at him.

"Fine!" said the new fellow. "Topping! Do that again, old bean!"

"Oh!" spluttered Lovell. "Urrgh! Ah! Owl! Oh!"

"Doing it again?" smiled the new junior. "Or is it one performance only?"

Lovell did not answer. He couldn't. He hurled the armchair off his legs and scrambled furiously up. Instantly he was on his feet he hurled himself headlong at the smiling, exasperating new "tick."

Up went the new fellow's hands like lightning. But Lovell's wild rush drove him back. He bumped into the table, which went rocking. He gave a gasp as Lovell's fist caught his nose, and there was a spurt of red.

But he rallied in a moment and came back at Arthur Edward. A knock that seemed like the kick of a mule landed on Arthur Edward's chin, and jarred every tooth in his head.

Lovell panted, hurled himself forward again, and grasped the new fellow with both arms. He whirled him to the door.

"Out you go, you cheeky cad!" he gasped.

But the "tick" gave grasp for grasp! Lovell got him as far as the door, when they whirled back, knocking over chairs right and left. They reeled into the window curtains, struggled there, and dragged the curtains down in a heap. A foot was caught in the tangled curtains, and they rolled over together on the floor.

Lovell, crimson with fury, exerted every ounce of his strength. He was going to throw out that cheeky tick who had planted himself so coolly in the study, or he was going to know the reason why.

But the new fellow, it was clear, was as strong as Lovell—and he was a good deal more active and elastic. They rolled on the floor, struggling for the upper hand, but it was the new fellow who got it. Lovell, panting with rage, found himself extended on his back with the new fellow sitting on his chest and pinning him down to the study carpet.

He panted, he heaved, he rocked! But he was pinned! Quite a contrast to the infuriated Arthur Edward, the new fellow was still cool, and he smiled down at Lovell's almost frantic face.

"What about chucking it, old scout?" he asked a little breathlessly, but cheerfully and amicably.

"I'll smash you!" gasped Lovell.

"Make it pax old bean!"

Lovell rocked. He was not thinking of "pax." He was thinking of war and vengeance. But he rocked and heaved in vain. And as he gasped, and rocked, and heaved in the midst of overturned furniture, tangled curtains, and scattered books and papers, footsteps came up the Fourth Form passage and astonished faces looked in at the doorway of the end study.

Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome had come back to the Head's House after tea with Tommy Dodd of the Modern side. They were going up to the end study when Mr. Dalton called to Jimmy. They were not, as a matter of fact, thinking about Dudley Vane, having forgotten him. They were thinking about Arthur Edward and whether he had got over his temper yet.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Dalton. "I sent Vane up to your study some time ago, Silver."

"We've been teasing out, sir," said Jimmy. "We forgot—I mean, we'll go up at once and see the new kid, sir. I—I think Lovell's in the study."

"We didn't know the chap had come yet, sir," murmured Raby. "But Lovell's there."

"Lovell will be looking after him all right, sir," said Newcome.

Mr. Dalton smiled.

"Since I have seen Vane," he said. "I find that he shows no traces of impaired health—indeed, he looks remarkably strong and fit. Nevertheless, in view of his recent illness, Silver, you will remember what I said to you yesterday."

"Oh, certainly, sir!" answered Jimmy.

The three juniors went up to the Classical Fourth passage. Raby gave an expressive grunt as they went.

"All very well for Dicky to land his dashed invalid in our study!" he said. "I'm not going to dry-nurse him, I know that!"

"It won't be so bad as that!" said Jimmy, laughing. "From what Dicky said, he can't be quite a tottering invalid. Still, we've got to look after the poor chap a bit. Hallo, that sounds like a row!"

It did! It sounded very much indeed like a row, as the three juniors arrived at the open doorway of the end study.

They looked in, or, rather, they stared. They stared with popping eyes. "What the holy smoke—" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Great pip!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Urrgh!" came in gurgling tones from Arthur Edward Lovell. "Gerroff, you cheeky tick! Gerroff!"

He glimpsed his amazed chums at the door.

"You silly idiots! Dragginoff! Urrgh!"

For a moment or two they stood spellbound. Then they hurled themselves into the study, grasped the new fellow, and whirled him off Lovell.

"Here, hold on!" came a protesting yell. "Fair play's a jewel! Three to one—is that what you call cricket here?"

Lovell staggered up. He gasped and gurgled for breath, while his adversary wriggled in the grasp of the three.

"It's that new Modern tick!" gasped Jimmy. "What the thump are you doing on the Classical side, you boulder?"

"I'm going to boot him out!" gasped Lovell. "I found him here, sitting in the armchair, just as if the study belonged to him. The cheek of it! I'm going to smash him and boot him out!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Jimmy, struck by a new startling thought. "Dicky Dalton said that new chap was here—"

"I'm going to smash him into small pieces!" roared Lovell.

"Let him get on with it," said the new junior cheerfully. "He hasn't had a lot of luck, so far! But let him get on with it."

IN THE DAYS OF THE KNIGHTS

by

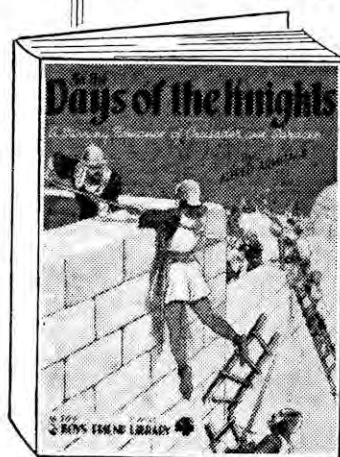
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The "Invalid"!

"SILVER!"

"Yes, sir!"

"You have seen the new boy, Vane?"

"Vane?"

"Oh, not yet, sir!" answered Jimmy.

Jimmy pushed him back, and stood between him and the enraged Lovell. Raby and Newcome let go the new fellow, staring. The three of them pushed Lovell back, and he spluttered wrath.

"Gerront of the way! I'm going—"

"But Dicky said—"

"Bother Dicky Dalton! I'm going to—"

"He said the new kid Vane was here. Is your name Vane, you young ass—Dudley Vane?"

"Yes!"

"Wha-a-a-t!" gasped Lovell. "The— the sick chap—the chap wha-a-t—"

"The giddy invalid!" grinned Raby.

"The peaky, piny hospital case!" chuckled Newcome. "He looks it—I don't think!"

The new fellow stared.

"Who said I was an invalid?" he demanded. "You silly asses! Can't a fellow be laid up for a few weeks without being an invalid? You cheeky fat-heads—"

"Then—then—then this is his study!" stuttered Lovell. "You blithering young ass, why didn't you tell me this was your study?"

"Why didn't you tell me it was yours?" asked Vane.

"Oh!" gasped Lovell.

Arthur Edward cooled down considerably. Even Arthur Edward realised that it had been rather a high-handed proceeding to start clucking a fellow out of his own study!

"Oh!" he repeated. "Oh!" Then Lovell made an effort. "Sorry!" he gasped.

"All serene!" said Dudley Vane.

They were all thoroughly ashamed of themselves, and tried to make it up to Tom Merry by giving him three hearty cheers and making his back sore by heavy slappings. All of them realised how hasty they had been in their conclusions, and they resolved to make it hot for Levison for starting the suspicions.

"Cheer him!" roared Blake. "He's a giddy hero!"

"Rather!" shouted Manners and Lowther together. "We've treated Tommy in a rotten style, and we all apologise."

"Shoulder him!" roared Kangaroo. And, while Tom Merry laughingly protested, Manners and Lowther grasped him and hoisted him on their shoulders. Then, laughing and cheering, they bore him round the Common-room. And when at last they had finished with him, Tom Merry felt amply repaid for all the doubts which had been cast upon his character.

When the bell rang for afternoon lessons the juniors were very excited, and those who were invited to the banquet considered themselves very lucky indeed.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I now beg to declare the banquet open," went on Tom Merry. "Everybody is now requested to tuck in for all they are worth—"

"Hear, hear!" mumbled Fatty Wynn, who was tucking in already.

"For this auspicious occasion!"

cheerfully. "No harm done—except to the study! Suppose we set it to rights?"

And all was—more or less—calm and bright!

Anyhow, it was a great relief. If Dudley Vane had been on the sick list before coming to Rookwood, it was clear that the end study was not going to have a peaky, piny invalid on its hands—anything but that! And that was a considerable satisfaction to Jimmy Silver & Co., far from foreseeing the strange events that were to follow the coming of the new fellow to Rookwood.

(Next week: **"WHO WRECKED DALTON'S STUDY?"** Look out for the next great yarn in this magnificent new series. **"Order your GEMs early."**)

UNDER SUSPICION!

(Continued from page 22.)

"dinnah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I'm going to tell you what a wippin' chap Tom Merry is. You are a set of uttall duffalls for havin' doubted him for a moment. Tom Merry is one of the best chaps at St. Jim's, and I think we ought to give him three wousin' cheers for havin' come up to the scawtch like a hero!"

"Look here, Gussy—" began Tom Merry.

"I uttally wufuse to look here. Tom Merry—I mean, I wufuse to take any notice of you whatever! I'm going to tell the fellows what I think, so you can wun off!"

The Common-room was in a roar.

"What are you jawin' about, Gussy?" demanded Kangaroo.

"Cut the chin-wagging, and come to the bisney!" said Lumley-Lumley.

"Vewy well, deah boy!"

And Arthur Augustus related, with a wealth of detail, how Tom Merry had acted like a hero while the other juniors were shunning him and thinking that he had been mixing with bad company at the Green Man. Mellish and Levison looked extremely small, and when D'Arcy had finished they disappeared from the Common-room.

But the other fellows were wildly enthusiastic

have the honour to entertain the worthy Mr. and Mrs. Griggs!" said Tom Merry, shouting to make his voice heard. "They are the guests of the evening, and I trust they will thoroughly enjoy themselves—and make the grub look silly!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry's study, in the Shell passage, presented a festive appearance. It was crammed with juniors, and Mr. and Mrs. Griggs, as the guests of honour, were sitting side by side at the head of the table. At first the old people had felt rather out of place, but as the banquet proceeded they entered into the spirit of the thing, and laughed and joked as merrily as anybody.

And when Mr. and Mrs. Griggs took their departure at last, they shook hands all round and declared that they had never enjoyed themselves so much in their lives before. And the juniors, too, were light-hearted and merry.

Manners and Monty Lowther, especially, were feeling as gay as sandboys. They were extremely proud of their leader—proud of the manner in which he had kept his promise in spite of the dark suspicions which were harboured against him by every junior except Tom.

THE END.

(Next Wednesday: **"THE MASKED THRO!"** You can get ready for a good laugh, chums, when you read this sparkling story. It's full of fun and japing at St. Jim's. Don't miss it.)

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