

GREAT STORIES OF ST. JIM'S AND ROOKWOOD!

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FLOUR FOR FIVE! An Amusing Scene from "THE MASKED TRIO!"—the Lively St. Jim's Yarn Inside.

THE MASKED RAGGERS WHO WERE UNMASKED BY RIVAL RAGGERS!—

The MASKED TRIO!



"Bowled out!" murmured Tom Merry, as three masked pierrots entered the room. "What a ghastly frost!" The three japers moved towards the dressing-room door. The game was up and they felt that it was time they made their exit!

CHAPTER 1. D'Arcy's Box!

"TOM MEWWY, deah boy—" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's looked into Tom Merry's study in the Shell passage. It was Wednesday, a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and a clear, sharp winter's afternoon. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, the Terrible Three of the Shell, were in their study. They were holding an important discussion—what to do with the half-holiday—when the swell of St. Jim's looked in through his famous eyeglass.

"Tom Mewwy—" "You see, the ground's no good for footer," Tom Merry remarked. "And I don't know about getting up a row with the New House kids. I believe Figgins & Co. are going off somewhere this afternoon."

"Tom Mewwy—" "Might go along to Study No. 6 and rag Blake and those young bounders," said Monty Lowther, in a thoughtful mood.

"Weally, Lowthah—" "Yes; might do that," agreed THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,450.

Manners. "Let's go along and bust Gussy's best silk topper."

"Weally, Mannahs—"

The Terrible Three did not seem to see Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in the open doorway. They continued their discussion just as if he had not been there.

"That's a good ideah," said Tom Merry heartily. "I hear that Gussy has been wasting the study funds lately on a new topper, and a set of silk neckties, and it would only be a fair thing to Blake and Herries and Dig to give Gussy a lesson on the subject."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—" "Good! We'll get along," said Lowther. "Leave the silk topper to me. I'll—"

"You uttah asses!" shouted the swell of St. Jim's.

Then the Terrible Three turned round towards him, with expressions of astonishment upon their faces.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Is that you, Gussy?"

"Yaas, you ass!" "Glad to see you! We were just going to pay you a visit," said Tom Merry blandly.

The swell of St. Jim's screwed his eyeglass a little tighter into his eye, and regarded the Shell fellow with elaborate disdain.

"I wegard you as an ass, Tom Mewwy! I wegard Lowthah as anothah ass, and Mannahs as an ass, too! You are thwee uttah asses. Howevah, I did not come here to tell you that. I came to tell you I've got a box—"

"A box!" repeated the Terrible Three, in surprise.

"Yaas, wathah!" "Well, we've all got boxes for that matter," said Tom Merry. "Nothing new or surprising in having a box, is there?"

"You ass—" "Do you mean your clothes box, or a box of matches?" "Neithah, you duffah!"

"A box on the ear?" suggested Manners. "If you haven't one, I could give you one, and I would with pleasure—"

"Ear, 'ear!" said Monty Lowther. "I wepeat that I have a box!" shouted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, for a moment losing the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere. "I

—THIS LIVELY LONG ST. JIM'S YARN IS THE LAUGH OF A LIFETIME!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

am takin' Blake, Hewwies, and Dig, and I came to offah to take you with me in the box at Wayland Theatre." "Oh, now you're talking!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Why couldn't you say that at first?"

"Because you were intewwuptin' me with widiculous wemarks, you asses. I have taken a box at Wayland Theatre for the matinee this afternoon," said Arthur Augustus, "and there is woom for all of us, if you like to come."

"Talk about corn in Egypt in the lean years!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "We were just wondering what to do with the afternoon, and could think of nothing better than busting your silk hat."

"Weally, you ass—"

"We'll come," said Manners affectionately. "Gussy, old man, you always do the right thing at the right time."

"Yaas; that's what comes of bein' a fellow of tact and judgment," said Arthur Augustus innocently. "I shall be vewy pleased if you will come. I've taken the biggest box at the theatre, and I think there will be woom for the lot of us. It's about time we started. There's a wippin' performance—singin' and conjuwin' and things—and Cutts of the Fifth says it's wippin'! He's seen it, and he's goin' again to-day for the last performance. They go away this evenin', I undahstand."

"Then it's the last chance," said Tom Merry. "Pull up your socks, you fellows!"

"Ready!" said Lowther.

"Quite!" said Manners.

"Then lead on, Macduff!" said Tom Merry.

"Follow me, deah boys!"

Arthur Augustus turned to lead the way down the passage. The Terrible Three followed him. Arthur Augustus was walking with his usual elegant gait, which was always distinguished, and the chums of the Shell imitated that elegant gait as they followed him down the passage. Fellows looked out of their studies and roared with laughter as they caught sight of the procession.

D'Arcy looked surprised. He did not see what there was to laugh at—not being blessed with vision in the back of his head.

"Follow my leader!" yelled Gore.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Gore!" he exclaimed. "I should be glad to know what is the joke."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Gore.

"Weally, you fathead—"

"Look behind you!" chuckled Gore.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked behind. The Terrible Three stopped instantly, with expressions upon their faces of owl-like seriousness. They regarded D'Arcy with solemn inquiry.

"What are you stopping for?" asked Tom Merry.

"Nothin'. Come on!"

They marched on again.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What is it—a belated Fifth of November processh?" asked Kangaroo of the Shell, as he met them in the passage.

"Weally, Noble—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A sudden suspicion dawned upon Arthur Augustus, and he swung round abruptly, and glared at the Terrible Three.

They were fairly caught in the act. All three of them were walking with an exaggerated strut, in ludicrous imitation of D'Arcy's elegant bearing. D'Arcy jammed his monocle tighter into his eye.

"You—you uttah asses!" he exclaimed.

The Terrible Three turned pink.

"What are you doin', you feahful chumps?"

"Only—only exercising the arms and —and legs," said Tom Merry. "Lead on! We're trying to learn the Piccadilly Crawl!"

"I wegard you as an uttah ass—"

"Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery," suggested Monty Lowther. "Keep on, Gussy! I was just getting into my stride."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I have a gweat mind," said D'Arcy, glowering, "to wefuse to take you out, you impertinent young wascals!"

The Terrible Three grinned. All three of them were older than D'Arcy; but D'Arcy always had a somewhat fatherly way with him.

"So he's taking you out?" asked Kangaroo.

"Yes; and we're taking him in—one

Cutts & Co., of the Fifth Form at St. Jim's thought it a good plan to run a concert to swell the funds of their football club. But the startling things that happened in the programme were not at all according to plan—or to the taste of Cutts & Co.!

good turn deserves another," said Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a shout from below.

"How long are you going to be, Gussy? We shan't wait much longer." It was the voice of Jack Blake of the Fourth.

"Bai Jove! We shall have to huwwy, deah boys," said D'Arcy. "Pway don't play the giddy goat—come on, or we shall be late."

"Hear, hear! Hurry up, you chaps!" And the Terrible Three seized hold of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and rushed him along the passage at top speed.

The swell of St. Jim's shouted expostulations.

"Leggo, you uttah asses! You're wumplin' up my necktie! Yawwooh!"

"That's right, bring him along," said Blake, as the Terrible Three came dashing down the stairs with their helpless prisoner. "The way Gussy keeps us waiting is simply shocking. Help him along!"

"Ow! I wefuse to be helped! Yow! Wow!"

"Here you are!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as they arrived in the lower passage. "Come on! Don't trouble to thank us, Gussy; you can do that later."

"You—you—you fwightful ass—"

"Come on!"

"You dangerous lunatic—"

"This way!"

"You feahful chump—"

"Look here, Gussy, if you're going to run through the whole giddy dictionary, we shan't wait for you!" said Digby, in a tone of patient remonstrance.

"But these fwightful asses have wumpled my collah, and—"

"Are you coming?" roared Blake. "My hat! If you don't come, we shall carry you."

"I wefuse to be cawwied—"

"I give you two seconds," said Blake, taking out his watch. "If Gussy doesn't start in two seconds, you chaps, take hold of his arms and legs and ears and—"

D'Arcy started in one second.

CHAPTER 2.

Gussy's Little Party!

QUITE a crowd of St. Jim's fellows were turning out to go to the matinee at the Wayland Theatre Royal. A party of the Fifth Form, headed by Lefevre and Cutts, and elaborately ignoring the juniors, were going out by themselves.

D'Arcy minor of the Third and a party of fags were just starting. Over by the New House, Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn and Redfern of the Fourth could be seen with their coats and hats on.

The fact that Arthur Augustus had engaged a box at the local theatre seemed to have become known, for Fourth Formers and Shell fellows came round him as he emerged from the School House, and their sweet manners and polite smiles showed that they knew about the box.

The party walked towards the gate. Bishop of the Fourth, and Kangaroo of the Shell, and Bernard Glyn, Clifton Dane, and several other fellows hung longingly round D'Arcy.

"Standing room only in the box, I suppose, Gussy?" said Kangaroo.

"I'm afwaid there isn't even that, Kangy," said D'Arcy. "We are seven already, and the box is only weally for four."

"Well, if seven can get into a box for four, eight can get in," said Kangaroo argumentatively. "What do you fellows think?"

"I leave it to the othahs," said D'Arcy.

"Oh, come on, Kangy!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "We'll manage somehow."

"Good egg!"

"If eight can get in, nine can get in! One more can't make much difference," said Glyn.

"Weally, Glyn—"

"If nine can get in," said Reilly of the Fourth, "ten can get in! One more doesn't make any difference, just as Glyn says, intirely."

"Weally, Weilly—"

"If ten can get in, eleven can get in!" said Kerruish, the Manx junior. "I'll come with you with pleasure, Gussy!"

"Weally, Kewwuish—"

"If eleven can get in," said Gore, "twelve can get in—"

"Thirteen, you mean!" said Bishop.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, the whole coll can't get in, you know," said D'Arcy.

"Well, we can squeeze in," said Bishop. "I don't mind a crowd—in fact, I rather like it."

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"Same here," said Reilly. "Faith, it will be all right!"

"Quite a pleasure," said Bernard Glyn.

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Tom Merry. "It isn't a sardine-box, you know, and we're not sardines."

"Wathah not! You see—"

"Faith, and I've got an idea!" exclaimed Reilly enthusiastically, as if struck by a sudden and brilliant inspiration. "We'll all go down with Gussy, and if there's not room in the box, Gussy shall take stalls for us!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Hear, hear!" said Bishop. "That's a really ripping idea!"

"Weally, Bish—"

"Couldn't be improved upon," said Clifton Dane. "We're much obliged to you for pressing us to come in this way, D'Arcy!"

"But I weally haven't pwessed—"

"That's all right; we'll take the will for the deed," said Kerruish. "Don't apologise about the accommodation, Gussy; we shall manage somehow!"

"Yes, rather!"

"But I wasn't going to—"

"Better get off, or we shall be late," said Gore. "We don't want to miss any of the show when D'Arcy's so kind as to take us all free of charge."

"Hear, hear!"

"But, weally—"

"Come on!" roared Blake.

And the party, which grew in size like a snowball rolling downhill, marched out of the school gates. Arthur Augustus glanced over his company through his monocle. He had intended to take six fellows, and the party already numbered sixteen or seventeen.

Figgins & Co. of the New House joined them at the gates. The School House juniors gave the New House party a warlike look, but Figgins waved his hand in a friendly way in sign of amity.

"Pax!" he exclaimed. "No House rows now. This is a special occasion, and rags are barred when we're going to share a box with Gussy."

"Bai Jove!"

"It's jolly kind of you to take us with you, Gussy," said Kerr amiably. "Some fellows would only take chaps from their own House. Nothing of that sort about Gussy."

"Not at all!" said Fatty Wynn heartily.

"Oh, Gussy's the right sort!" said Redfern. "You can always depend on Gussy to do the proper thing!"

"Hear, hear!"

"But, weally, deah boys—"

"Not a word!" said Figgins generously. "We won't allow you to disclaim your proper credit, Gussy. It's kind of you to take us, and I insist upon saying so."

"But—"

"Really kind," said Lawrence. "We wouldn't miss the show for anything, chiefly because Gussy is so kind."

"He does those things in such a nice way, too," remarked Owen. "It's always a pleasure to go anywhere with Gussy."

"Yes, rather!"

"Bai Jove! I considah—"

"Not at all, Gussy! It's kind of you, and we all say the same. Come on, or we shall be late! If there's a crowd in the box, we don't mind stalls," said Redfern. "In fact, those School House bounders could go in the gallery!"

"Weally, Weddy—"

Blake seized the swell of St. Jim's by the arm and rushed him on.

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"Come on!" he exclaimed. "We shall have all the Fourth and the Shell and half the Third along with us soon!"

"Bai Jove! Yaas!"

The party numbered well over twenty by this time. They marched down the road in great spirits, and one or two of the juniors broke into song. Near the stile, where the footpath through the wood began, they overtook Cutts and his party of Fifth Formers.

The seniors glanced with great disdain at the junior crowd. The juniors hailed them with great friendliness.

"Hallo, Cutts, old chap!" said Monty Lowther. "Going to the show?"

"I am going, but I'm not going with a crowd of fags!" he said. "Keep your distance!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Yes; sheer off, you kids!" said Lefevre. "That's what I say—sheer off! We're not going to take children to the show!"

"This isn't a juvenile party for the Zoo, you know!" said Cutts sarcastically.

The juniors glared wrathfully at the Fifth Formers. There were twenty-two or twenty-three of them, and only five or six of the Fifth. It really was not a safe moment for Cutts & Co. to swank, but they realised it too late.

Tom Merry called a halt.

"Gentlemen—" he began.

"Oh, come on!" said Blake. "The matinee begins at three—"

"Hold on a minute! This is important. Gentlemen, it is up to us to see that any St. Jim's fellow who goes to the theatre behaves himself. We don't want to give the general public an impression that we have rowdies at our coll. I am not satisfied with those Fifth Form chaps."

"Hear, hear!"

"Cutts has his tie sideways, and Lefevre has forgotten to brush his hat. Jones' bags bag at the knees, and Gilmore hasn't washed his face."

"Horrid!"

"Disgraceful!"

The Fifth Formers frowned angrily. They would have passed on majestically, but the crowd of juniors had halted between them and the stile, and the way was barred.

"Clear out of the way!" exclaimed Cutts sharply.

"Yes; that's what I say—clear out!" said Lefevre.

Tom Merry paid no heed.

"The important question before the meeting, gentlemen, is—"

"Get out of the way!"

"Is whether we can allow Fifth Form chaps to bring discredit on the school this way. My opinion is—certainly not!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Quite impossible!"

"Quite outside!"

"Let me pass, or we'll lick you, you young asses!" yelled Cutts.

"Therefore, I suggest bumping these swanking bounders, and leaving them here!" said Tom Merry.

"Hurrah!"

"Here, keep off!" roared Lefevre. "That's what I— Wow-ow-ow!"

Bump, bump, bump!

"Yah!"

"Oh!"

"Gro-oh!"

"Yo-o-op!"

The rush of the juniors simply overwhelmed the little party of the Fifth. They went down in the muddy lane, with the juniors sprawling over them. Recent rain had left the lane in a far from desirable condition for rolling in. The Fifth Formers sprawled in mud and slush, and the juniors rolled them there;

and then, yelling with laughter, crowded over the stile and pursued their way to Wayland.

Cutts & Co. sat up. They looked at one another, and said things. They were muddy from head to foot, and in a towering rage.

Tom Merry & Co., quite contented and cheerful, marched on, and arrived at Wayland.

CHAPTER 3.

The Masked Trio!

THE Theatre Royal, Wayland, was not crowded. It seldom was, especially for matinees.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had no difficulty in finding seats for his flock. True, there was no room for a quarter of them in the box; but the stalls in the theatre were not high-priced, and not overcrowded.

Arthur Augustus had received a fiver from his "governor" that morning, hence the box. The swell of St. Jim's genially planked down the fiver, and his numerous followers were accommodated with seats in various parts of the house. In the box, Arthur Augustus, Blake, Digby, and Herries, and the Terrible Three found room—at all events, they managed to get in.

The performance was about to begin.

"Bai Jove, we're wathah crowded!" Arthur Augustus remarked. "Pew-waps I had bettah stand."

Tom Merry laughed, and pushed the swell of St. Jim's back into his chair.

"That's all right," he said. "We can stand at the back."

"There goes the curtain," said Digby.

All attention was given to the stage.

It was not a theatrical performance that was "on" at Wayland Theatre Royal that afternoon. Three entertainers formed all the group, and they gave a show of conjuring, acrobatic tricks, and singing and dancing. They were dressed as pierrots, and wore black masks upon their faces. They were billed in Wayland as the "Masked Trio," and that dodge, so common on the sea-sands in the summer, was new to the unsophisticated folk of Wayland Town.

There was a rumour that the three entertainers were members of the highest aristocracy, who, for obvious reasons, concealed their identity when they were giving public performances. The number of members of the aristocracy who give pierrot performances, with their faces masked to conceal their identity, at the seaside resorts, is astonishing—in fact, quite outnumbering all known members of the peerage. But in a little country town like Wayland, the mystification was novel, and it had attracted quite an unusual number of visitors to the local theatre.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, who was not of a suspicious nature. "I wondah who those chaps are, you know? There's a wumah that they belong to the peewage, you know."

"Might have relations among them," suggested Lowther. "Have you any near connections in a stony state, with a gift for giving a song, and dance, Gussy?"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"The fat one is a duke, I believe," said Lowther solemnly. "A hard-up duke might do worse than give a variety turn while the duchess takes in washing—"

"You uttah ass—"

"And that skinny chap—the one with the violin—resembles Gussy—doesn't he?" said Manners thoughtfully.



Arthur Augustus walked down the passage with his usual elegant gait, and Tom Merry & Co. imitated him as they followed in line. Fellows looked out of their studies and roared with laughter as they caught sight of the procession. "Follow my leader!" yelled Gore. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Mannahs—" "Don't talk, Gussy! They're going to sing." "I wasn't talking, you ass! I was only—" "Order!"

The crowded box relaxed into silence. The performance had started. The three masked pierrots sang a comic song to start with, and then proceeded to give a dance, and then the fat member of the party, whom Lowther surmised might be a duke, did conjuring tricks. The good folk of Wayland watched him with wide eyes as he made endless strings of coloured ribbon come out of his ears, and produced fire from his mouth, and rabbits from his sleeve. Then he advanced to the footlights, and asked a member of the audience to oblige him with the loan of a watch.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy obligingly handed down his famous gold ticker.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said the conjurer, "I shall now proceed to reduce this watch to fragments under your eyes—"

"Bai Jove!" "You will see me smash it to pieces, and—"

Arthur Augustus jumped up. "That you jolly well won't, you boundah!" he shouted. "I'm not goin' to have my watch smashed up, you ass!"

The audience laughed, and the masked conjurer smiled.

"I shall then restore the watch to its former state," he said.

"Wats! You can't do it!" "Sit down, Gussy!" "Weally, you fellahs—" "It will be all right," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"But he says he's going to smash it!"

"It's only a trick."

Arthur Augustus sat down rather uneasily. The conjurer placed the watch—or seemed to place it—in a metal jar, and crashed a stick into it, and there was a sound of a smash.

Arthur Augustus gave a sort of yelp.

"Bai Jove! My watch!"

"Quiet!"

"But my watch—"

Smash—smash—smash!

The fat conjurer was evidently in deadly earnest. The watch was not likely to go when he had finished with it. He brought a jar to the footlights, and showed the broken fragments to the audience.

"Ladies and gentlemen, you can all see that the watch is smashed—"

"You awful wottah! My watch—"

"Any lady or gentleman is at liberty to take it in his hand and examine it."

Two or three ladies and gentlemen did so. There was no doubt that the watch was a hopeless wreck, whether it was D'Arcy's watch or not. The audience being satisfied, the smashed watch was tossed back into the jar. The conjurer covered it with a cloth.

"My only hat!" murmured Figgins, who was one of the gentlemen who had examined the watch. "If that's really Gussy's watch—"

"But it isn't," grinned Kerr. "They change 'em when they're performing this trick. It's as old as the giddy hills!"

The conjurer made some mysterious passes over the jar, and then inserted his hand in it. He held up the jar; it was empty.

"Bai Jove! Where's my watch?" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"Dear me!" said the conjurer. "The watch has vanished!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"It will be found in the pocket of a member of the audience," said the conjurer.

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, that's rather thick!" grinned Figgins. "He could change one watch for another; but I'll bet he couldn't get it into the pocket of a chap sitting about here."

"Sounds very steep," said Fatty Wynn.

"Gentlemen," said the conjurer, "will you kindly feel in your pockets, and the gentleman who has this young gentleman's watch will kindly produce it!"

"Rot!" said Figgins.

The conjurer looked at him.

"You are not feeling in your pocket, sir," he said.

"Me?" said Figgins. "I—I mean, I—"

"Certainly!"

"I haven't got it!"

"Feel in your pocket, please!"

"Bat I—I—"

"Pray oblige me!"

Figgins felt in his pocket, and, with a look of wonder, drew out Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's famous gold ticker. He gazed at it with an expression of almost idiotic wonder.

"M-my hat! There it is!"

"Thank you!" said the conjurer blandly.

And he took the watch and handed it back to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a bow.

D'Arcy gave his watch an anxious glance; it was quite undamaged. Then the face of the swell of St. Jim's was wreathed in smiles.

"Bai Jove! That's a jolly cleavah twick!" he exclaimed. "Bwavo!"

"Bravo!" shouted all the juniors.

Figgins looked astounded.

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"Well, I'm blessed if I know how he did that!" he exclaimed.

"If you saw him do it, there wouldn't be much conjuring in it," grinned Kerr. "It must have slipped into your pocket when you were looking at the smashed watch."

"I didn't see him."

"That was his business."

"Well, it was jolly clever!" said Piggins. "Bravo!"

"Jolly clever, and no mistake," D'Arcy remarked. "I shall try that trick myself at St. Jim's. One of you fellows can lend me a watch—"

"Why not use your own?" demanded Blake.

"Well, I mightn't succeed with the trick, you know," said D'Arcy cautiously.

Blake's heated reply was drowned by a blare from the orchestra as the Masked Trio proceeded to sing and dance. The entertainment wore on, and it was three parts over when Cutts & Co. came in and took back seats.

Cutts & Co. had had to return to St. Jim's to clean up before coming to the theatre, and they were very late indeed. They gave the juniors ferocious glances, to which Tom Merry & Co. replied with the sweetest of smiles.

"Cutts looks angwy about somethin'," Arthur Augustus remarked. "The cheek of these Fifth Form chaps is weally astoundin'! Of course, they can't expect us to stand it. I have been thinkin' for a long time that it's time we wallied wound and wagged the Fifth, and broughit them to their senses, you know!"

"They haven't got any," said Lowther, with a shake of the head. "Besides, how are you going to wag a Fifth Former? He isn't a giddy flag!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Would you take him by his head or his heels to wag him?" asked Lowther.

"You uttah duffah! When I say wag, I mean wag, not wag!"

"Well, that's lucid, anyway. There goes the last turn!"

And the entertainment of the Masked Trio being over at last, Tom Merry & Co. crowded out of the theatre, well satisfied with the show, and walked home to St. Jim's.

On the way home D'Arcy made several requests for the loan of a watch, to try a trick with—requests that were refused unanimously.

CHAPTER 4.

Five on the Warpath!

TOM MERRY stood at the table in his study in the Shell passage, and cut up a loaf into big rounds, and Monty Lowther was opening a new jar of jam.

There were sardines on the table and a big jelly. The Terrible Three had come home hungry after the visit to the theatre, and they were "doing themselves" unusually well.

Tom Merry had found, on his return, a postal order awaiting him from Miss Priscilla Fawcett, his old governess, and the postal order had promptly changed hands at Dame Taggles' little shop in the corner of the quadrangle.

"Nough to go round," said Monty Lowther. "Might ask somebody in. Those chaps in Study No. 6 are having a feed with what's left of Gussy's fiver. But Kangaroo—"

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "Call him in."

Monty Lowther moved towards the door. It opened before he reached it, and Cutts looked in. Cutts had a somewhat unpleasant smile upon his face.

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Lefevre was looking in over his shoulder, and behind Lefevre could be seen Jones, Gilmore, and Prye.

The Terrible Three looked at them in surprise. Visits from the Fifth Form to the Shell studies were not common. And the looks of the Fifth Formers seemed to indicate that they had not come upon a friendly errand.

The chums of the Shell remembered the encounter in the lane, and drew together for defence.

"Come to tea, you chaps?" asked Tom Merry, with forced hospitality.

Cutts smiled.

"No; we haven't come to tea," said Cutts. "We're not in the habit of taking tea with fags!"

"Rats!" said Tom Merry warmly. "You know jolly well that the Shell don't fag for anybody!"

"Rather not!" said Manners and Lowther emphatically.

"Well, we haven't come to tea," said Cutts. "We've come for the pleasure of your conversation; we want to have a little talk with you!"

"Afraid we can't spare the time now!" said Tom Merry.

"Sorry—because you've got no choice in the matter!"

And the Fifth Formers chuckled.

The Terrible Three looked at the doorway; it was crowded by the Fifth Formers. Escape from the study was cut off.

"Look here—" began Monty Lowther.

"Come in, you fellows," said Cutts. "We haven't asked you in yet."

"Never mind; we can do without that."

The Fifth Formers came into the study, and Cutts closed the door and turned the key in the lock.

The chums of the Shell watched them in alarm. There were five of the seniors, and they were nearly all powerful fellows. If it came to a scrap, the three Shell fellows would not have much chance. And there was no doubt that the visit of Cutts & Co. meant trouble. They were there to avenge their little adventure in Rylcombe Lane.

"Look here, you bounders!" said Tom Merry. "If we yell, we shall have a crowd of the Shell here in a minute, and—"

"And they'll have to get through a locked door," remarked Gilmore.

And the Fifth Formers laughed.

"What do you want?"

"Only a little talk," said Cutts agreeably. "I see you're going to have tea. Jam and toast and sardines. Good!"

"If you've come here to scoff our tea—"

"We haven't. You're going to have it—every bit! Only you'll have it outside instead of inside!" explained Cutts.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Fifth Formers.

"The fact is," resumed Cutts, "you fags have been getting too cheeky—altogether too cheeky—lately. You seem to have the impression that you are regular knuts, and that you can't be cracked. We're going to try."

"That's what I say," remarked Lefevre.

"You smothered us with mud in the lane," remarked Cutts. "You made us late for the matinee, and I wanted the fellows to see that matinee for a special reason. As a matter of fact, we're going to engage those artistes to give a performance at St. Jim's, and we wanted to size them up. You spoiled all that."

"Well, you were cheeky, you know," said Manners.

"My hat!" ejaculated Lefevre.

"I—"

"Let 'em run on," said Cutts. "We're going to take all that out of them soon. You've spoiled our clothes and made us late for the performance."

"And we'll do it again if you cheek us," said Tom Merry.

"Hear, hear!" said Manners and Lowther.

Cutts smiled again.

"Then it's high time you had a lesson," he remarked. "Now, you're all going down on your knees to beg our pardon. If you do that sufficiently humble, we shall let you off lightly—say, with a spank each!"

The Terrible Three glared. They were not likely to beg anybody's pardon on their knees, and they were not likely to be spanked while they had fight in them. They drew closer together and clenched their fists, as the Fifth Formers advanced towards them.

"Now what do you say?" asked Cutts agreeably.

"Oh, I say rats!" said Tom Merry.

"And many of 'em!" said Manners.

Cutts waved his hand.

"Collar the young cads!"

"Rescue!" yelled the Terrible Three with one voice. "Rescue, Shell! Buck up, Shell! Rescue!"

"Collar them!"

"Rescue!"

Then there was a terrific struggle.

The five Fifth Formers naturally expected to have matters all their own way; but they did not find it quite so easy as they had expected. Tom Merry was the champion athlete of the Lower School, and Manners and Lowther were good seconds. Lefevre, the captain of the Fifth, rolled over on the floor under a terrific right-hander from Tom Merry, feeling as if a mule had kicked him. Cutts closed with Lowther and went down, Lowther on top. Prye gave a roar as a fist dashed into his eye.

Crash!

Bump!

"Yah! Oh! Yaroooh!"

Cutts rolled on Lowther and sat on him. Prye and Gilmore closed upon Tom Merry, and bore him struggling to the floor. Jones and Lefevre succeeded in getting Manners down. Then the Terrible Three were helpless. Prye caressed his eye with a tender hand. It was already assuming a beautiful blue colour. Lefevre dabbed at his nose with a pocket-handkerchief as he sat upon Manners' chest.

The handkerchief came away very red.

"The—the cheeky young rotters!" gaped Lefevre. "That's what I say! Ow!"

"Groogh!" murmured Prye.

"Hold them tight," said Cutts. "You sit on this beast, Gilly. I'll get the jam."

"Good!"

There was a shout in the passage and a knock on the door. The handle was tried, and then Kangaroo shouted through the keyhole:

"What's up?"

"We are," said Cutts, "and the fags are down!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rescue!" yelled Tom Merry. "It's the Fifth Form rotters!"

"The door's locked!" said Noble.

"Bust it in!"

There were many excited voices and footsteps in the Shell passage. Juniors

were crowding up from all quarters; but the door was thick and the lock was strong, and Cutts and company did not feel alarmed.

Cutts proceeded to ladle out jam from the jar Monty Lowther had opened for tea. He did not ladle it out into the jam-dish. He ladled it upon Tom Merry's face, and rubbed it gently into his hair.

Tom Merry roared and squirmed. "Hold him tight!" said Cutts. "What-ho!" gasped Prye. There was a roar outside. "Open this door, you Fifth Form bouncers!"

"Presently," said Cutts politely. "What are you doing?" "Jamming the fags!"

There was a laugh in the passage, as if it seemed funnier to the fellows outside than it did to the Terrible Three. But the attack on the door was renewed. The door stood firm.

Cutts expended the whole of the jam in fair proportions upon the three struggling and gasping Shell fellows. He smothered it on their faces, rubbed it into their hair, and squeezed it under their collars.

The Terrible Three felt horribly jammy and sticky, but Cutts was not finished yet. The jelly followed the jam, and then the sardines and the butter. Cutts squeezed sardines under the juniors' necks, and they shuddered with horror. The tea-table was soon cleared; the Terrible Three had had their tea—outside instead of inside, as Cutts had observed.

Gerald Cutts surveyed his handiwork with considerable satisfaction.

"Do you think they look as mucked up as we did in the lane, you chaps?" he asked.

The Fifth Formers roared. "Ha, ha, ha! Yes!" "Yes, rather!" gurgled Lefevre. "That's what I say. Ha, ha, ha!" Bump, bump, bump! at the door. "Have you had enough, you fags?" asked Cutts politely.

"Groogh!" groaned the Terrible Three.

"Are you going to beg pardon?" "No!" roared Tom Merry. "Are you sorry?" "No!"

"Well," said Cutts, "if you're not sorry, we'll give you some more. There are some ashes in the grate, and they may as well be added to the collection."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Ow! Beasts! Chuck it! Oooch!" "Ha, ha, ha!"

Cutts poured the ashes on the jam and the butter, and the aspect of the Terrible Three when he had finished was shocking.

"There," said Cutts, "I think that's enough. They mayn't say they're sorry, but I'm sure they feel sorry!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Crash, crash! at the door.

Cutts took the tablecloth from the table, calmly tore it into strips, and tied the ankles of the Terrible Three together.

The victims struggled desperately, but they were firmly held, and in a few minutes their feet were tied up in a bunch, and they lay helplessly on their backs on the carpet, their heads in different directions, and their feet inextricably mingled.

"Good-bye, dear boys!" said Cutts. Tom Merry gasped.

"Rescue, Shell! Look out for them!" "Rush for it," murmured Cutts.

He unlocked the door quietly and threw it open. The Fifth Formers made a sudden rush together, and drove

through the crowd of juniors in the passage, and darted away. They were gone almost before the juniors knew they were out of the study. It was not easy to stop five powerful seniors. Kangaroo made a clutch at Cutts, but he was pushed over, and they ran across him. The Cornstalk junior sat up rather dazedly when they had gone.

"Ow!" he said. "You asses! What did you let them pass for?" "Let's follow them!" exclaimed Blake.

But the juniors shook their heads. It was not a simple thing to pursue Fifth Formers into a senior passage. Cutts & Co., after all, were seniors. The juniors crowded into Tom Merry's study, and what they saw made them forget Cutts & Co. They stared at the three jammy, sticky, dusty figures on the floor and roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 5. Barred!

TOM MERRY sat up. He blinked at the juniors through jam and jelly and dust. The rescuers yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "You silly asses!" "Ha, ha, ha!" "You cackling chumps!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Oh, shut up!" roared Monty Lowther. "There's nothing to laugh at, that I can see. Why couldn't you get in sooner and lend a hand?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Weally, deah boys, I must say that I weguard this as wathah funny," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Bai Jove! You are in a shock-in' state."

"They want washing," grinned Gore.

"Untie us, you idiots!" yelled Manners.

"Blessed if I care to come near you for one," said Levi-son of the Fourth. "You're a bit too sticky for me to touch."

"Ha, ha, ha!" Kangaroo untied the feet of the Terrible Three, and they staggered up. Their aspect was so ludicrous that the juniors shrieked again.

The Terrible Three glared wrathfully. It was not a humorous experience for them.

"Did Cutts do this?" gasped Kangaroo, at last.

"Yes!" snorted Lowther. "A nd we'll make him sit up for it. Gerrout of the way, you cackling duffers! I want a wash!"

"You do! Ha, ha, ha! You do, badly!"

"Oh, dry up!" "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, it is awfully funny, deah boys!"

"Is it?" yelled Lowther, crossly.

"Then you can have some of the fun, too!"

And he grasped the swell of St. Jim's and embraced him affectionately, and rubbed his sticky face against the aristocratic features and beautiful clothes of Arthur Augustus.

There was a wail of anguish from the elegant Fourth Former.

"Ow, ow! Welease me, you wottah! You're wuinin' my jacket! Ow!"

D'Arcy wrenched himself away and a howl of laughter greeted his appearance. Monty Lowther, feeling a little consoled, stamped out of the study, followed by Tom Merry and Manners. The juniors gave them a wide berth, but they sent a fresh yell of laughter after them, and it rang in the ears of the Terrible Three as they made their way to the Shell dormitory.

Tom Merry & Co. dragged off their sticky and dusty clothes, and plunged their heads and faces into basins of water. Then they washed, and rubbed and scrubbed till their skin was burning with friction, to get off the mass of stickiness.

It was off at last; but it was a long and painful task. The chums of the Shell were quite breathless when they towelled themselves down.

"We've got to make Cutts sit up for this!" growled Monty Lowther, as he selected a new collar.

"Yes, rather!" "If they can invade our quarters we can invade theirs," said Tom Merry.

"It will be a bit new to raid a senior study, but that's what we're going to do."

"Good! And the sooner the better!"

The chums of the Shell went downstairs again. They found a good many

(Continued on the next page.)

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fellows waiting to see them, grinning gleefully.

"Got it all off?" asked Blake sympathetically. "I think Gussy is still going strong. That ass Lowther mucked up his hair with jam."

"Serve him right!" growled Lowther. "Sorry I didn't muck up yours, too!" "We're going to raid Cutts in his study," said Tom Merry. "Who's going to back us up?"

"Faith, and they're seniors, you know," said Reilly.

"I don't care if they are! They're not going to rag us without being ragged again."

"Well, they had their little bit in the lane," said Kangaroo.

"Oh, rot! Volunteers! Don't all speak at once!"

There was some hesitation. A raid in a senior study might lead to trouble. But there were volunteers.

"Count me in!" said Kangaroo.

"And me," said Clifton Dane, the Canadian.

"Faith, and me, too!"

And a dozen more fellows offered.

"That's enough!" said Tom Merry.

"Follow your uncle!"

And Tom Merry, with a warlike expression upon his face, led the way to the Fifth Form passage.

"We've got to rush 'em, rag 'em, wreck the study, and clear before they can call in the prefects," said Tom Merry. "Savvy?"

"What-ho!" said Blake. "Lead on!"

And the juniors trooped into the Fifth Form passage. Then they paused, for they had almost trooped into Kildare of the Sixth, the head prefect of the School House, and captain of St. Jim's.

The juniors assumed their most innocent expressions, but Kildare gave them a grim look. He was not likely to believe that sixteen or seventeen juniors were invading the Fifth Form passage with amicable intentions.

"What are you kids doing here?" Kildare asked.

"Ahem!" said Tom Merry.

"What do you want?"

"Nothing."

"You've come here for nothing?" asked Kildare.

"It seems so, anyway," murmured Monty Lowther.

"Come, out with it!" said the captain of St. Jim's tersely. "None of your nonsense. What is it—a rag?"

"We—we were going to see Cutts," stammered Tom Merry.

"Oh!" said Kildare grimly. "You were going to see Cutts, were you? Has he invited this numerous and distinguished party to his study?"

The juniors looked sheepish.

"Not exactly. B-but he visited us, and we—we thought it only right to return the visit," said Tom Merry.

"Quite in a friendly way, of course?"

"Well, you see—"

"As a matter of fact, it's a Form row, I suppose?" said Kildare.

"Well, perhaps something of that sort," admitted Tom Merry. "You see—"

"I see that I'm not going to allow anything of the sort," said Kildare. "You keep the juniors' studies in an uproar with your japing, but rags in the senior studies are not permitted. Clear out!"

"But, I say—"

"Kildare, old man—"

Kildare waved his hand.

"Clear out! And don't come back! Mind, I order you to keep clear of the Fifth Form quarters, and if any of you

come here again I shall make it warm for you."

The raiders exchanged glances of dismay. There was no resisting the authority of the captain of St. Jim's. Kildare's word was law.

"We—we only just want to look in on Cutts, you know," ventured Monty Lowther.

"Clear out!" shouted Kildare.

And the juniors cleared. There was nothing else to be done.

The Terrible Three re-entered their study and surveyed the cleared tenable and the patches of jam and jelly and ashes on the carpet.

"Done," said Tom Merry. "No good bucking up against old Kildare. Raids in the Fifth Form studies are barred."

"Rotten!" growled Lowther.

"Beastly shame!" grunted Manners.

"But Cutts isn't going to be top dog, all the same," said Tom Merry. "There are more ways of killing a cat than choking it with cream, you know; and we're going to bring Cutts down off his perch somehow."

"How?" asked Manners and Lowther together.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"That's what we've got to think out," he said.

And the chums of the Shell thought it out, but without much success for a long time.

CHAPTER 6.

Cutts' Programme!

"SEEN the notice on the board?" Blake asked the question the next day after morning school.

The Terrible Three were chatting in the Form-room passage when Blake came up.

"No," said Tom Merry, "what is it—footer notice?"

"No; it's Cutts."

"What on earth is Cutts putting up a notice for?" asked Manners, in surprise. "He's not head of anything in the coll—he's not in the footer eleven, and he hasn't much to do with anything, excepting sneaking cigarettes into the school, and smoking them in his study with the door locked."

"It's a show," explained Blake. "You remember the Masked Trio, as they call themselves, that we saw at the matinee yesterday?"

"Well?"

"Cutts has engaged them to give a performance here at the school."

"Oh, I remember he said something of the sort in my study yesterday!" remarked Tom Merry, with a nod.

"He's got permission to use the Fifth Form-room for the show," said Blake. "He's going to charge for admission, and the takings are to go to the Fifth Form footer club, which wants bucking up. After expenses are paid—including Cutts' own expenses, you bet. I know Cutts."

The Terrible Three grinned, and strolled over to the notice-board. They knew Cutts, too. Cutts had more than once had a leading hand in getting up entertainments and things of that kind to assist something or other; and Cutts was generally flush of money afterwards. The "expenses," like charity, covered a multitude of sins.

The notice on the board was written in Cutts' hand, and ran:

"SPECIAL NOTICE!"

"To-night, at seven-thirty precisely, a performance will be given in the Fifth Form-room, by the Celebrated Variety Company known as the Masked Trio,

whose recent performances at Wayland Theatre Royal have created such a sensation.

"The performance will be a specially attractive one, and the receipts will go to the Fifth Form football club, after necessary expenses have been paid.

"Price of admission: reserved seats, 2s.; unreserved, 1s. Fags in the Third Form and below, half-price.

"Roll up!"

"Special attractions! Special Turns! Gorgeous entertainment below theatre prices! Roll up in your thousands! Tickets may be had of the committee, or of Gerald Cutts of the Fifth, in his study.

"BY ORDER."

A crowd of fellows were reading the notice.

"Not a bad idea," said Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth. "I guess it's worth a bobble to see the show, anyway, if it's the same company that was at Wayland Theatre."

"Yaas, wathah! I have seen the show, and I wegard it as a vewy clevah one, and I shall go, to encourage the Fifth Form chaps," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Good! You can take a box for us," said Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah, there will be no box in the Fifth Form-woom."

"Yes, there is," said Lowther.

"Bai Jove, in that case I shall certainly take a box! But are you sure?"

"Quite sure," said Lowther solemnly.

"Is it a commodious box?"

"Quite large enough for the purpose," said Lowther.

"Then I shall take it. I had bettah go and speak to Cutts about it at once, in case it is snapped up by somebody else," said D'Arcy thoughtfully.

"Good! By the way, it will be rather a small box for you, Gussy, if you're taking a party, too," said Lowther. "The box I mean is the one old Ratty keeps the chalks and duster in for the blackboard."

Arthur Augustus turned back and jammed his monocle into his eye, and regarded the humorist of the Shell with a freezing glance.

"You uttah ass!" he said, in measured tones. "I wegard you as a silly chump, Lowthah."

"Well, I was only giving you information," said Lowther innocently. "Of course, there might be another kind of box—matchbox, for example."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, pway wing off, you ass!"

"Jolly good idea for us all to go and rag the entertainment," Herries of the Fourth suggested thoughtfully.

"Have to pay for admission," said Blake. "Too dear at the price."

"That's all right; we'll make Gussy pay for the lot!" said Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"We ought to rag the entertainment somehow," Tom Merry remarked thoughtfully. "This is where we make Cutts sit up!"

"Won't be possible," said Manners. "Trust Cutts; he's as deep as a well. He'll have the prefects there—distinguished visitors in free seats—what?"

"Yaas, wathah! Twust Cutts to look out for that," said Arthur Augustus.

"And the show will be a big success, I fancy," remarked Figgins of the Fourth, the great chief of the New House juniors. "Most of the fellows are keen to see the giddy Masked Trio. Everybody who couldn't get over to the matinee at Wayland will be glad of a chance to see 'em here."

"And Cutts will be able to stand

himself smokes galore out of the giddy expenses," Kerr remarked.

"Yes, rather!"

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

"Nothing funny in that, is there?" said Kerr. "Cutts always does it—it's an open secret. Where's the joke?"

"Eh? Oh, I wasn't laughing at that!"

"What were you laughing at then, fat-head?"

"Cutts."

"But what for?" demanded several voices. "Where's the joke?"

Tom Merry smiled.

"Excuse me," he said; "it's just an idea that came into my head. I'll tell you another time, so excuse me."

"Rats!" said Figgins. "Is it a wheeze?"

"Yes; a sort of a kind of a variety of one!"

"Then spout it out! Is it up against Cutts?"

"Yes."

"Then we'll all take a hand," said Figgins. "You owe him more than we do, but we all want to bring him down off his perch and cut his comb!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard Cutts as an impertinent ass!" said D'Arcy. "He made an insultin' remark yesterday about my appearance!"

"Horrible!" said Figgins. "It must be avenged! Blood must flow—"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"So what's the wheeze, Tom Merry? If there's anything in it," said Figgins condescendingly, "we'll run it for you, and make it go!"

"Thank you for nothing, Figgy!"

"What's the wheeze?" shouted the New House junior warmly.

"It's a—"

"Yes—what?"

"A School House wheeze!" explained Tom Merry sweetly.

"Look here, you ass—"

"Dogs and New House chaps not admitted," said Tom Merry. "Sorry, Figgy, but I can't tell you! You know what asses you New House chaps are, and you'd muck it up. I'll tell you afterwards, and tell you when to laugh."

"Why, you—silly ass—"

"Quite right," said Blake. "No good letting those New House bounders into a wheeze, they'd only mess it up! Come up to Study No. 6 and talk it over, Tommy."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Sorry, Blake—"

"Nothing to be sorry about," said Blake briskly. "Come up to Study No. 6 and we'll see if there's anything in it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Another shake of the head from Tom Merry. He moved strategically towards the door.

"Sorry!" he said. "Can't let Fourth Form kids into it; you'd only mess it up! And, besides, you see—"

"What!" roared Blake, Herries, Digby, Reilly, and Lumley, and half a dozen other Fourth Formers all together.

"You cheeky ass—"

"Bump him!" said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah! I agree with my friend Figgins! Those Shell bounders are gettin' as cheeky as the Fifth Form wottahs, deah boys! Bump 'em!"

There was a general movement towards the Terrible Three.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther stepped quickly out into the quadrangle, and the crowd followed them.

On the steps of the School House, Mr. Railton, the Housemaster, was standing chatting with Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth. Tom Merry had observed them.

"Rush the silly bounders!" yelled Figgins. "Rush 'em— Oh!"

He halted suddenly as he nearly cannoned into Mr. Railton.

"Figgins!" said the School House master severely.

"Ahem! Sorry, sir! I—I—"

"Please don't rush about in that reckless manner, Figgins!"

"Yes, sir—I mean, no, sir! Very well, sir!"

The Terrible Three strode away across the quad smiling. In the presence of the masters the exasperated juniors could not carry out their intentions.

"Now, what's the wheeze?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"It's first chop—it's ripping—it's gorgeous—if it will work!" he said. "But it will have to be kept awfully secret; just a whisper would mess up the whole thing. It will have to be kept awfully secret! Come round to the old chapel, and we'll talk it over where those bounders can't spot us!"

And Manners and Lowther, in a state of great curiosity, followed their leader to the old ruined chapel behind the School House, eager to hear the great wheeze.

CHAPTER 7.

Plotting a Plot!

FATTY WYNN of the Fourth, the Falstaff of the New House, was seated behind a fragment of masonry in the ruined chapel of St. Jim's.

Of the old chapel which had stood there in Saxon times, only ruins remained, but they were massive ruins, with trees and ivy growing among the shattered walls and casements. In the summer the St. Jim's fellows often picnicked there, but in the winter the ruins were quite deserted. Fatty Wynn had the place to himself, and he had chosen it because he was not likely to be interrupted there.

Fatty Wynn was seated upon a block of stone, and upon another block before him reposed a large pie. That pie had been specially cooked by Dame Taggles, and it was a triumph of steak and kidney and flaky crust. It had been ready for Fatty the moment morning lessons were over, and Fatty had made a bee-line for the tuckshop as soon as he was released from the class-room. And he had borne his prize into that quiet corner to devour at his leisure.

Fatty Wynn was, as he had often explained, not greedy, but he liked a lot. That pie was a triumph, and Fatty meant to enjoy it thoroughly.

Figgins & Co. would not have joined him in a gorgeous feed so soon before dinner, and so Fatty felt justified in carrying off the pie all by himself. As for the other fellows, he was glad to get out of the range of their view. There was not much of the pie for the dozen or so of fellows who would have chummed up with Fatty Wynn on the spot if they had known of it.

Figgins and Kerr knew, but otherwise it was Fatty's secret. And Fatty gloated over the pie as he sat before it and cut the nicely browned crust and sniffed the luscious odour that came from within.

"Oh, it's ripping!" murmured Fatty, as he helped himself to an enormous helping. "Mrs. Taggles can make pigs, and no mistake! Jolly lucky I got here without a crowd spotting me—jolly lucky! This will just stay me nicely till dinner. I wish old Figgins & Co. were here; they don't know a good thing when they see it, after all. I'm going to do justice to this pie!"

(Continued on the next page.)



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Contractor: "Does the foreman know that this trench has fallen in?"

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Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. Cole, 8, Windsor Terrace, City Road, London, N.1.

A CLEAN SWEEP.

Kerr: "You should always get up from the table hungry."

Fatty Wynn: "I do better than that—I always leave the table empty!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to L. Wintle, 4, Dorset Grove, Ashley Vale, Bristol 2.

NOT A WATER COLOUR!

Mr. Toper: "Could you make a water colour sketch of me?"

Mr. Palette: "All but your nose. I couldn't get that colour with water any more than you did!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. Miller, 38, Mabley Street, Homerton, London, E.9.

WORM TREATMENT.

The golf club grouser was bitterly complaining about the worm casts on the eighteenth green. The captain came into the pavilion, and was immediately buttonholed by the grouser.

"Isn't this the time of the year to treat worms?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the captain. "What will you have?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. Tibble, 20, Vauxhall Street, Kennington, London, S.E.

MISUNDERSTOOD.

Guide: "This tower, ladies and gentlemen, goes back to William the Conqueror."

American Visitor: "Say, what's it going back for? Aren't they satisfied with it?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to P. Sanderson, 43, West Park Avenue, Roundhay, Leeds 8.

DOING HIS BIT.

Bob: "Coming to the pictures tonight, Alf?"

Alf: "Can't, Bob; I've got to stay in to help dad with my homework!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Sissons, 351, Guinness Buildings, Page's Walk, Bermondsey, London, S.E.1.

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And he proceeded to do it. He was half-way through the pie when he heard the sound of footsteps on the old stones of the ruined chapel.

The fat Fourth Former started. If the footsteps were those of Figgins and Kerr, Fatty Wynn was ready to call them to the feed. He was capable of that heroic self-sacrifice, though it would have required an effort. But if the footsteps belonged to anybody else, Fatty Wynn meant to lie low—very low.

So he ceased to eat, and remained quiet, and listened. The great masses of masonry behind which he was ensconced concealed him from view, unless one had known that he was there and specially looked for him.

The footsteps came very near to his hiding-place, and stopped. Then a voice was heard.

"This will be all right."

It was Tom Merry's voice.

Fatty Wynn drew a deep breath. He was glad that he had been so cautious now. It was not Figgins and Kerr—not New House fellows at all. And if the School House juniors had discovered him there, Fatty Wynn knew only too well that they would have raided his pie, and probably eaten it under his very eyes, and very probably poured the gravy down his back.

Fatty Wynn sat tight, and scarcely breathed.

"Right as rain!" came Monty Lowther's voice. "There is none of the New House rotters to listen to us here, so get it off your chest!"

"Don't speak too loud!" said Tom Merry cautiously. "It's a ripping wheeze—a real high-roller, and Figgins would give his ears to know it."

Fatty Wynn smiled.

"Well, get it off your chest," said Manners.

"Right! Cutts is going to have the Masked Trio Variety Company here to-night to give a show in the Fifth Form Room—"

"So the notice says."

"We owe Cutts a long account—"

"We do—we do!"

"Well, this is where we score," said Tom Merry.

"You've said that before," said Lowther. "But you haven't explained how we score. Suppose you get on with the washing?"

"Well, I couldn't explain before those New House bounders. Figgins would have boned the wheeze at once."

"I shouldn't wonder. They're awfully keen, those New House bounders, and they can't think of any wheezes for themselves. Figgins is an ass, and Kerr is another ass, and Fatty Wynn never thinks of anything but gorging."

Fatty Wynn glared at the wall that separated him from the speaker. The voices came quite clearly to the ears of the fat Fourth Former. Fatty Wynn knew that he was about to hear a council of war, and he listened with all his ears. It was not eavesdropping. His conscience was clear on that point.

The rival juniors were at war, and Fatty Wynn regarded himself as a scout picking up information from the enemy. He shook a fat fist silently in the air as he heard Monty Lowther's uncomplimentary reference to himself.

"The Masked Entertainers will be coming here this evening," pursued Tom Merry. "Now this idea flashed into my mind."

"What idea?"

"I'm coming to that, fathead! Suppose they didn't come?"

"But they will!"

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"Suppose they were prevented somehow—"

"Oh!"

"That would mess up Cutts' entertainment, and he would have to give the money back," said Manners. "I don't think that's much of a wheeze, though."

"That isn't all, duffer! Suppose they didn't come—"

"We've had all that," murmured Lowther.

"Ass! Suppose they didn't come, and—"

"Third time of asking," said Lowther. "Pile it on!"

"Change the record!" suggested Manners.

Tom Merry snorted.

"Shut up, you asses! Suppose somebody else turned up in their places—what price that?"

"Oh! Somebody else—"

"Three somebody else," explained Tom Merry.

"My hat!"

"They're masked," said Tom Merry. "Cutts himself has never seen their faces. If three young chaps about our size came along masked and dressed in the same way as pierrots, Cutts couldn't possibly tell the difference."

"Oh crikey!"

"My only Uncle Joseph!"

"What do you think of that for a wheeze?" demanded Tom Merry triumphantly. "Instead of the Masked Trio, it would be the Terrible Three—and we could give such an entertainment that Cutts would be off his head when he saw it—and the fellows would rag him to death. We could sing a song about Cutts, and make jokes about the Fifth Form, and carry on like that—like giddy clowns, and mess up the whole bisney, and Cutts would never know it was us until afterwards."

"Great Scott!"

"Oh, great pip!"

And the Terrible Three chuckled together.

There was a pause, filled in by the chuckling of the chums of the Shell.

Fatty Wynn chuckled, too, but silently.

"Not a whisper, of course," went on Tom Merry. "Not a breath. This will have to be kept frightfully dark. Of course, Figgins wouldn't give us away; but he'd want to have a hand in the wheeze, and would spoil the show. And that ass Wynn would very likely jaw; he can't keep a secret."

"Can't I?" murmured Fatty Wynn.

"No; he'd blab it out in the tuck-shop," said Manners. "He'd let on that he'd got a secret, and somebody would fill him up with tuck to get it out of him, and then the whole thing would be kyboshed. Wynn is an ass!"

"Exactly!"

"But it will be hard to keep the Masked Trio away," said Manners thoughtfully. "If they're booked to come here, they'll come, I suppose?"

"Easy as falling off a form, my son," said Tom Merry serenely.

"How, then?"

"Suppose they receive a telegram. I know the hotel they're staying at in Wayland. The pro's who come down to the Theatre Royal generally stay there. Suppose they got a telegram from the school telling them that the order was cancelled?"

"My hat!"

"The order would be cancelled, you see—we shall cancel it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They wouldn't come after that," said Tom Merry. "But, to make all sure, I'd

ask for a reply wire, or, better still, I'll get to them on the telephone, if I can. We can use the telephone in the prefects' room, you know, and I can make an excuse to get out of the class-room, and speak on the telephone while the Fifth are in their Form-room this afternoon. They have the telephone at their hotel, and it will be as easy as winking. That will be simpler than the telegraph, too, because there would be some difficulty about the reply wire—they mightn't think the name of Merry the same name as Cutts—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But we can't let them lose the fee," said Manners. "They're booked for the evening, you know, and it wouldn't be fair on them to make them lose the money."

"Of course not! It's up to us to pay them their fee, of course. It's worth that, I should think, for such a ripping jape on the Fifth."

"Depends on how much the fee is," said Lowther cautiously.

"Well, they're only going to give about an hour's entertainment here, and I shouldn't think it would be more than a guinea each. This kind of entertainer doesn't rake in the cash by the barrelful, you know."

"Guinea each," said Lowther.

"We'll make a subscription among the fellows to raise the cash," said Tom Merry. "We'll take some of them into the wheeze—fellows who can be relied upon to hold their tongues, you know. Besides, we want to make sure of having a crowd of our fellows in the room, in case of trouble. If the Fifth bowled us out—"

"There would be trouble! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Five bob each from a dozen or so fellows would raise the cash," said Tom Merry. "I think it's jolly well worth it!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Is it agreed, then?"

"What-ho!"

"Then I'll get on the telephone to them this afternoon," said Tom Merry, grinning. "And when it's all serene we'll make our arrangements. We can borrow the pierrot dresses at Mr. Wiggs', in Rylcombe, and shove them on, with silk masks, and then it will be O.K.! One of the Masked Trio is rather fat, but one of us can pad out all right. They're not much taller than we are, and we can have high-heeled shoes."

"Easy as winking!" said Monty Lowther enthusiastically. "Tommy, my son, how do you do these things? You're a giddy genius!"

"We'll get Cutts on the stage to help us with conjuring tricks!" said Tom Merry blissfully. "We'll conjure ink down his neck and paint into his hair, and make him let himself be tied up so that he can't get loose, and sit on him—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But mum's the word—mind that, especially with the New House bounders. They'd be on to a wheeze like this at once if they knew."

"Yes, rather! Mum's the word!"

And the Terrible Three, chuckling over the great wheeze, strolled out of the ruins. When they were quite gone and out of hearing Fatty Wynn chuckled, too.

CHAPTER 8.

A Counterplot!

F IGGINS came into his study in the New House with a frown upon his face.

Kerr followed him into the study, frowning also.

Fatty Wynn was sitting in the room, finishing up a steak-and-kidney pie at the table.

"Hallo!" he said. "Anything up?"

Figgins grunted.

"Yes. Let that pie alone, for goodness' sake; dinner will be ready in ten minutes!"

"That's all right—this is a snack to go on with!"

"Groogh!" said Figgins irritably. "Blow your snacks! Sitting down here gorging while the School House are scoring over us!" added Figgins indignantly.

"Are they scoring over us?" asked Fatty Wynn, with a grin.

"Yes, they are!" snapped Figgins. "It's up to all of us to pull Cutts down off his perch, and Tom Merry's got a wheeze about that entertainment of his, and he won't let on about it. We've

said Fatty Wynn, grinning. "All's fair in war, you know."

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

"And what's the wheeze?" asked Kerr.

Fatty Wynn explained.

The New House simply gasped.

The audacity of the idea took their breath away for a moment.

"Well, of all the cheek!" exclaimed Figgins, in amazement. "They mean to stop the Masked Entertainers from coming—and come in their place! My hat!"

"That's it!" said Fatty Wynn, with a last glance into the piedish, which he had cleaned out so clean that it had a newly swept and garnished appearance. "I wonder how long it will be to dinner?"

"Blow dinner!" said Figgins.

"Well, I'm rather peckish—"

"They're late."

"Who's late, you ass?"

"With dinner, I mean," said Fatty Wynn.

"You fathead!" roared Figgins. "Who's talking about dinner?"

"I was," said the fat Fourth Former. "You asked me what I thought, and I told you. What are you yelling for?"

"I mean, what do you think about japing those School House spoofers to punish them for leaving us out of the game?" asked Figgins.

"Oh, I see! I thought of something while I was hearing them jaw!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Pile in!" said Figgins generously. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, you know. What's your idea?"

"Well, if those Shell bounders are going to pass themselves off on Cutts as



The Terrible Three were helpless under the weight of the Fifth Formers, and they shuddered as they received their tea outside instead of inside! "I think we'll add ashes to the jam and butter," said Cutts; and he poured the ashes over each junior. "Ow! Beast!" they gasped. "Chuck it! Oooch!"

got to stand by while the School House bounders score. Yah!"

"Perhaps we haven't," suggested Fatty Wynn.

Figgins snorted again.

"Perhaps you can bowl them out and discover what the wheeze is," he suggested sarcastically.

"No perhaps about it," said Fatty calmly.

His chums stared at him.

"What do you mean?" asked Figgins.

"You don't mean to say that you—that you—"

"Yes, I do," said Fatty Wynn, with a nod.

"You've found it out?"

"Yes."

"My hat!" Figgins slammed the door of the study. "What is it, Fatty? How did you find it out, old man?"

Fatty Wynn chuckled.

"They talked it over in the ruined chapel, to make sure that nobody would hear them," he explained, "and I was on the other side of the wall—with this pie!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I heard every blessed word,"

"Yes, you must be, after that pie," said Kerr. "The question before the meeting is what are we going to do?"

"We can't give 'em away to Cutts, of course," said Figgins thoughtfully.

"Must play the game! But they'll muck it up, you know. Those School House chaps aren't up to a wheeze of that size. Now, if Tom Merry had had the sense to bring it to us, and ask us to carry it out—"

"Ah! If—" said Kerr.

"You're such a good actor, Kerr, you'd have been ripping; and I think I could have kept my end up myself," said Figgins modestly.

"But the asses haven't come to us; and if we offer our services—"

"They'd refuse," said Figgins.

"No doubt about that."

Figgins wrinkled his brows in thought.

"Well, we ought to jape 'em somehow," he said. "How can we do it without spoiling the joke on Cutts? We don't want to let Cutts off."

"No fear!"

"What do you think, Fatty?"

the Masked Trio from the theatre, I don't see why we—"

"Well, why we—"

"Why we couldn't do the same," said Fatty Wynn.

"What on earth good would that be?" asked Figgins. "Cutts would know that there weren't two sets of giddy entertainers, wouldn't he? They're a trio, not a sextette."

"I mean, suppose the entertainer chaps tumbled to the wheeze and turned up after all; it would be a big come-down for the Shell bounders."

"But they won't."

"I know they won't; but we—"

Fatty Wynn did not need to say any more. Figgins understood at last. He rushed at Fatty Wynn, and hugged him in ecstasy.

"Come to my arms!" sobbed Figgins. "Oh, Fatty, you're a howling genius! You ought to have a monument of—of steak-and-kidney puddings! Oh crumbs!"

"Hurrah!" yelled Kerr. "It will be

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the wheeze of the season! And as easy as rolling off a wall!"

"Here, leggo!" gasped Fatty Wynn, as Figgins waltzed him round the study in his exuberant delight. "Chuck it! Yaroooh! I don't like dancing after that pie, you ass! Oh!"

"Waltz me around again, Willie!" gasped Figgins. "Oh, my summer chapeau! What a joke on the School House! What a score over Tom Merry! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Leggo!" roared Fatty Wynn. "There goes the dinner-bell."

And Fatty tore himself loose and rushed out of the study and downstairs at top speed. Fatty Wynn was always in time for meals.

Figgins and Kerr exchanged a joyous grin and followed him more slowly.

"Fatty's coming out!" chuckled Figgins. "If we get this jape off all serene, we'll stand him the biggest steak-and-kidney pie Mrs. Taggles can make."

"What-ho!" said Kerr.

And Figgins and Kerr wore smiles of great satisfaction during dinner. Even when Mr. Ratcliff, their Housemaster, found fault with Figgins for a soiled collar, in his unpleasant tones, and gave him fifty lines, Figgins hardly ceased to smile.

And when Figgins & Co. encountered the Terrible Three on the way to the classroom for afternoon lessons, they laughed.

"Going to tell us the wheeze?" asked Figgins blandly.

Tom Merry shook his head solemnly.

"Can't be did," he said. "We'll tell you afterwards; you shall come in when the time comes to laugh."

"Yes, I hope we shall," said Figgins. "I really think most likely we shall be there when the laughing starts. Ha, ha, ha!"

And Figgins & Co. chuckled as they went to the Fourth Form Room.

CHAPTER 9.

Great Preparations!

TOM MERRY made an excuse for getting out of the Shell classroom that afternoon. He had been very circumspect, and Mr. Linton regarded him with a favourable eye.

When Tom Merry said he wanted to telephone to Mr. Wiggs, in Rylcombe, about some costumes for amateur theatricals, before the shop closed, Mr. Linton kindly gave him permission to do so.

Tom Merry made his way to the prefects' room, where a telephone was installed for the use of the seniors. The prefects' room was, of course, empty now, as all the prefects were in the Sixth Form Room.

Tom Merry took down the receiver, and the young lady's voice from the exchange asked him what number he wanted, when she had finished a little conversation with another young lady.

"Mr. Wiggs—I mean, one-nought-one Rylcombe!" said Tom Merry.

Tom Merry had been given permission to telephone to Mr. Wiggs, and he had to do it.

It had not been necessary to mention to Mr. Linton that when he had finished with Mr. Wiggs he meant to telephone to somebody else, more especially as the somebody else was the Masked Trio staying at the Royal Hotel, Wayland.

Mr. Wiggs' voice came over the telephone. Mr. Wiggs was a tailor and a costumier and several other things, and he supplied the costumes the juniors used in their amateur theatricals. Tom Merry & Co. were good customers, and Mr. Wiggs made it a point to be very obliging to them.

"Hullo!" "That Wiggs?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes; I am Mr. Wiggs."

"This is Tom Merry, of St. Jim's."

"Ah! How do you do, Master Merry?"

"Oh, topping! I say, Wigg— I mean Mr. Wiggs!— I shall call after school for three errot costumes and three black silk masks."

"Yes, Master Merry."

"You'll have 'em ready?"

"Oh, yes; I have plenty in stock."

"Have you seen the Masked Trio show at Wayland, Mr. Wiggs? Yes? Well, I want the costumes to be exactly like theirs. We're getting up a show of the same sort."

"I see, Master Merry. Quite so. They shall be ready by six."

"Right-ho! Thanks!"

And Tom Merry rang off.

Then he rang up the exchange again, interrupting another conversation between the young ladies there, and a somewhat tired voice asked what number he wanted. It is very annoying to a young lady at an exchange to be interrupted in the midst of a discussion on the subject of millinery by a troublesome person requiring the use of the telephone, and the young lady's tone hinted as much.

"Number, please!"

"I want the Royal Hotel, Wayland," said Tom Merry. "I don't know the number, but perhaps you would be kind enough to—"

"Hold on, please!"

"Thank you!"

A faint voice came to Tom Merry's ear over the telephone.

"I was thinking of a grey wing—"

The junior grinned. But he was put on to the required number at last, and found that he was through.

"That the Royal Hotel, Wayland?"

"Yes. What's wanted?"

"The Masked Trio are staying with you?"

"Yes."

"I want to speak to them, please. It's about their engagement here—St. Jim's College—for this evening."

"Hang on a minute!"

A minute elapsed, and another voice came through. Tom Merry recognised the somewhat fat voice of the leader of the Masked Trio, the conjurer of the day before.

"Hullo! Hullo! Is that Mr. Cutts?"

"I'm speaking for Cutts," said Tom Merry, making his voice as deep as he could. "Cutts can't get to the telephone just now. You are booked to give your show here this evening, in the Form-room?"

"Yes."

"Owing to unavoidable circumstances, it can't come off. We're all very sorry if you are disappointed—"

"Oh, what rot! You've engaged the services of my troupe, and you'll have to pay for them. I can't be fooled about in this way."

"It's not a question of money. The fee will be paid, just the same."

"Oh, I see!" came in a mollified voice.

"You see, some chaps have arranged to give Cutts a show instead, and it is expected to go all right. But your cheque will be sent, just the same. We are sending a fellow over after school to settle up, so you needn't have any uneasiness on that score."

"Oh, good!"

"That's all, then. I hope it won't put you out in any way."

"Not at all. Only, as we're leaving to-morrow morning, we shan't be able to give you the show if it isn't given to-night."

"That's unfortunate, of course; but it can't be helped. We can't expect you to stay on another day for us. Only, it's impossible to have it to-night—quite impossible. You can expect our messenger about six."

"Right!"

"And the amount was—exactly—"

"Three guineas!"

"I'll send you a cheque."

"Very good! Thanks!"

Tom Merry rang off. The entertainer

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was, in all probability, pleased enough to get the cheque without giving the show. And the fact that the money was to be paid before the time fixed for the entertainment made it impossible for him to guess that it was a jape. In fact, such an idea was not likely to cross his mind.

If there had been any doubt about the payment the Masked Trio would undoubtedly have cut up very rusty, but as it was, all was serene.

Tom Merry put back the receiver and quitted the prefects' room with a smile of satisfaction upon his face.

All was going well.

Cutts could not possibly have the slightest suspicion that a junior had rung up his entertainers that afternoon and cancelled the engagement.

He would expect the Masked Trio to arrive in time for the show at seven-thirty—and they would arrive. In the pierrot dresses and masks their identity could not possibly be discovered.

What Cutts & Co. would say afterwards was another matter. That did not trouble the hero of the Shell in the least.

Tom Merry returned to the Shell Form Room.

Manners and Lowther met him with an inquiring glance as he came to his place. Tom Merry gave them a smile and a nod.

"All right?" asked Monty Lowther, in a whisper.

"Right as rain!"

"Good egg!"

Lessons seemed insufferably long to the chums of the Shell that afternoon. But the welcome hour of dismissal came at last, and they crowded out into the passage. The Fourth Form came out at the same time, and the chums of Study No. 6 at once gathered round the Terrible Three. They were very curious on the subject of that jape, which Tom Merry had not communicated to them.

"Well," said Blake interrogatively, "is there a jape, or is it all moonshine?"

"There is," said Tom Merry.

"You had better tell us, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "You see, I shall give you my opinion on it, and you can't do better than wely on a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Quite so," said Tom Merry unexpectedly. "Come up to my study, you chaps."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And bring all the money you've got."

"Eh?"

"Didn't I speak plainly?" asked Tom Merry. "Bring all the money you've got. It's a first-class jape, but it will cost money."

"Oh!" said Blake.

"If you don't like to subscribe, you can lend us the tin, and we'll pay it back later," said Tom Merry.

"Oh, rats! If there's anything in the jape, we'll stand our whack."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Kangaroo, Clifton Dane, and Bernard Glyn, Reilly, Lumley-Lumley, and Kerruish, and one or two other fellows were also quietly asked to step into Tom Merry's study. They did so cheerfully, and quite a large party crowded in. When they were all inside, Tom Merry closed the door and locked it.

"Quite mysterious!" grinned Kangaroo.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I expect it's all gas," said Blake. "But go ahead."

"All of you brought all the available tin?" asked Tom Merry.

"I have a pound, deah boy."

"I've got twopence," said Herries.

JUST MY FUN



Monty Lowther Calling!

Hallo, everybody! Now let's come down to earth, as the munition factory hand said after the explosion.

Umbrellas are selling poorly, we read. Yet they should go up.

I hear policemen at Mexican football matches have revolvers. What about when somebody shouts "Shoot!"?

Gore wants to become a machine-gunner. Well, we wouldn't stand in his way!

Two brothers are doing well as dentists. They "pull" together.

Taking a special exam, Gore says he had two hours to tell all he knew. But five minutes would have been enough.

Wally D'Arcy complains of having to write an essay on electricity in his spare time. Too much "ohm" work?

Then there was the ex-wireless salesman who offered himself as a ladies' hairdresser, because he knew all about "waves"!

Tom Merry took his guardian, Miss Fawcett, to a fashionable restaurant. "Do you like hot rhythm?" he asked. "No, just a little lobster mayonnaise," she answered.

Next: Figgins was asking Fatty Wynn about his trip to France last

vac. "It was all right till we came to the Channel," said Fatty. "I can't remember after that."

The Air Force and the Navy have many customs in common, I read. But not, of course, "dropping the pilot."

You heard about the mass meeting of absent-minded professors? Nobody turned up!

"Gunpowder Factory Blows Up," says a headline. On the "up and up"?

A car manufacturer says he will back his car against a car of any other make. Dangerous to park next to!

"Diving is easy," said the swimming instructor to the trembling fag. "Yes, but it's coming up again that I'm worrying about," replied the fag.

Most of the older St. Jim's masters attended a dinner recently. Sort of "middle-aged spread."

Young Jameson says his father can beat him at either football, cricket, or running. An "eclipse of the son"!

A new photographer in Wayland claimed to enlarge snaps to life-size. "Well, what about this?" asked Wally D'Arcy, holding up a snap of St. Paul's Cathedral.

Story: "The anchor's weighed," called out the ship's officer. "And did it weigh as much as you expected?" asked the old lady.

Now try this: "Have you ever seen an ice breaker?" Gibson asked Wally D'Arcy. "Yes," said Wally. "Where?" asked Gibson. "They don't have them in England." "I saw a nice breaker at the seaside," explained Wally. Breaking off till next week, chaps!

"Got it all in your pockets?" asked Monty Lowther sarcastically. "Or are you hiring a wagon to bring it along?"

"Look here—" said Herries.

"Half-a-crown here," said Kerruish.

"I guess I can make up ten bob," said Lumley-Lumley.

"I can stand a bit, too," said Blake.

"But before we ladle out the cash, Tommy, my infant, let's hear the jape. Look before you buy, you know."

"Yaas; that is only weasonable, deah boy."

"Mind, it's a dead secret," said Tom Merry cautiously.

"Oh, we'll keep mum."

"Just one whisper outside this study, and the game would be up. Cutts would smell a mouse immediately. You know what a keen beast he is. And if the New House bounders got hold of it, they would chip in in some way and mess up the game."

"We know all that. Pile in!"

"Honour bright—not a word, then?"

"Honour bright!" said all the juniors together.

"Good!" And Tom Merry explained.

There was a gurgle of laughter in the study.

"Holy smoke!" gasped Reilly. "You won't have the nerve, Tom Merry, darling!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, you spoofer!"

"What a surprise for Cutts when he knows!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the juniors roared.

"Well, do you think it's worth three guineas?" asked Tom Merry.

"What-ho!"

"You bet!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then pile out the cash. Equal proportions from everybody in accordance with their means," said Tom Merry.

"Right-ho!"

And the cash was soon forthcoming.

Tom Merry collected up the varied heap of coins to the value of three guineas.

"I'll get Mr. Railton to give me a cheque for this," he said. "He's done it before for fellows with accounts to pay, you know. That's easy enough. And a cheque looks better. More convincing to the chaps, you know. They couldn't suspect that juniors were japing them then."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I'll get Toby, the page, to go over with it, and instruct him to keep his head shut," said Tom Merry. "Gentlemen, the meeting's over, and mun's the word!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The meeting broke up, and Tom Merry made his way to the House-master's study with three pounds three shillings in various small coins clinking in his trousers pocket.

Mr. Railton greeted him with a kind glance.

"Would you mind giving me a cheque for three guineas, sir, to pay an account?" asked Tom Merry diffidently. "I've got the money here—all small money—"

"Certainly!" said Mr. Railton, un-looking the drawer in his table and taking out his cheque-book. He smiled at the sight of the coins Tom Merry

piled on the table. They could not be sent conveniently by post, certainly, and Mr. Railton naturally supposed that it was by post that Tom Merry wanted to send the payment.

"Whom shall I make the cheque payable to, Merry?" asked the School House master, as he dipped his pen into the ink.

"The M. T. Co.," said Tom Merry. "Very well."

If Mr. Railton thought about the matter at all, he probably supposed that the M. T. Co. meant Manufacturing Something Co., or something of that kind. He certainly did not suspect that it was the Masked Trio Company. He wrote out the cheque, and Tom Merry thanked him and left the study rather hurriedly.

Ten minutes later, Toby, the School House page, was pressed into service, and a bribe of two shillings induced him to neglect his many duties and slip out of the school and take the letter enclosing the cheque to Wayland. He was strictly enjoined to say merely that the letter had been given to him by a St. Jim's fellow to take, and not to mention names. And Toby grinned and promised that he would be careful.

The cheque was enclosed in the envelope without a letter. Toby's message would make it clear enough where it came from.

"That's done," said Tom Merry, with great satisfaction, when Toby had departed. "Now we'll have some tea, and after that a stroll down to Mr. Wiggs'."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Terrible Three and the chums of Study No. 6 had a great tea together, and chuckled joyously most of the time.

Over in the New House, Figgins & Co. were also having tea, and, curiously enough, they were chuckling most of the time, too.

CHAPTER 10.

Two Trios!

THE shades of night were falling fast—as has been remarked before—when Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther came out of the School House with their coats and caps on and walked down to the school gates.

There was time to get out before locking-up, and as they intended to return in the character of masked pierrots, there would be no difficulty in getting in again.

Figgins & Co., also with their coats on, came down to the gates at the same time.

"Hallo!" said Figgins. "Going out?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry, rather annoyed by the meeting at that inopportune moment. Not that Figgins & Co. seemed to suspect anything.

"So are we," said Figgins.

"Missing the Fifth Form show?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Oh, no; we shall come back in time for that!"

"So shall we," said Manners.

"Walking down to Rylcombe?" asked Figgins, in a friendly way. "We'll come with you, if you like?"

"Especially if you're going to stop at Mother Murphy's," added Fatty Wynn. Tom Merry frowned.

"We're not going to stop at Mother Murphy's, and we shall be walking too quickly for you youngsters to keep up with us," he said. "Come on, chaps!"

And the Terrible Three marched off.

"Well, of all the cheek—" began Kerr.

Figgins chuckled softly.

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"All serene!" he said. "We don't want them to watch us, any more than they want us to watch them. I was only pulling Tom Merry's leg, though he doesn't know it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll go another way; we don't want to get to Mr. Wiggs' till after they've gone."

And Figgins & Co. chuckled joyously, and set off for the village by a roundabout path, which did not bring them into contact with the Terrible Three again.

Meanwhile, the chums of the Shell, somewhat surprised and much relieved to get rid of the New House fellows so easily, walked quickly down the lane to Rylcombe.

"Jolly lucky getting away from those bouncers like that!" Tom Merry remarked. "I was afraid Figgys had spotted something for a minute."

"No danger of that; the secret's all right. None of the fellows we've told would say a word."

"Oh, yes, it's all right!"

The chums of the Shell arrived at Mr. Wiggs' little shop. Mr. Wiggs was closed for the day, but he lived over the shop, and he was there ready for the juniors. He greeted them most benevolently, and he had the costumes and the masks all ready.

Tom Merry looked them over with great satisfaction.

"Ripping!" he exclaimed. "We'll change here."

"Very good," said Mr. Wiggs.

"We can keep on our clothes under these things," said Manners. "That will be better, in case of a sudden change being necessary; and it will make us look a bit plumper, too. Those chaps were stouter than us."

"Good egg!"

The Terrible Three soon had the pierrot garb over their Etons.

Then they donned high-heeled shoes, which added to their height, and put on the black silk masks, which very nearly covered their faces. They surveyed themselves in a cheval-glass with great satisfaction. If they had not known that they were themselves, as Lowther remarked, they would certainly have taken themselves for the Masked Trio of Wayland Theatre Royal.

Mr. Wiggs rubbed his hands.

"Excellent, young gentlemen—excellent!" he said.

"Do you think we look the part?" grinned Tom Merry.

"To the life, Master Merry!"

"Good! Now we'll put on our coats, and you can lend us some soft hats, and then send for a cab. The Masked Trio would have come in the station cab, anyway," Tom Merry added to his chums. And soon all was ready.

The Terrible Three, alias the Masked Trio, enveloped in coats over their professional costumes, and with soft Homburg hats on their boyish heads, took their places in the station cab, and drove off towards St. Jim's.

Mr. Wiggs watched them go with a



"If three young chaps about our size came along masked as couldn't tell the difference." "Great Scott!" exclaimed M. But the three plotters little knew that Fatty Wynn, a New H

smile. Mr. Wiggs knew Tom Merry & Co., and he could easily guess that a jape of some kind was in progress. But that was no business of his; and he knew Tom Merry well enough to be sure that there would be no harm in any jape that he planned, though the fun might be very funny.

Mr. Wiggs returned into his shop and locked the door, and ascended to his living quarters above. A quarter of an hour later he heard a loud ring at the bell, and as it was repeated again and again, he grunted and left his comfortable armchair and descended to see who it was.

Three youths in coats and caps stood before him as he opened the shop door.

"Good-evening, Mr. Wiggs!" said the voice of Figgins.

"Oh, is it you, Master Figgins?"

"Yes, rather!" said Figgins. "Sorry to disturb you in this way, Mr. Wiggs, but it's a most pressing matter."

"Has Master Merry forgotten something?" asked Mr. Wiggs, thinking that perhaps Tom Merry had sent Figgins back for some necessary article overlooked at the shop.

Figgins chuckled.

"Yes—he's forgotten us!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kerr and Fatty Wynn.

Mr. Wiggs looked puzzled.

"I don't quite understand—" he began.

"It's all right," said Figgins. "I know you've got plenty of pierrot costumes and masks in stock, for fancy-dress balls and things, haven't you?"



and dressed as the pierrots," said Tom Merry, "Cutts Lanners and Lowther. "It would be a glorious jape!" House rival, was listening on the other side of the wall!

"Yes," said Mr. Wiggs, in wonder. "Well, this is a repeat order; we want the same outfit."

"Dear me!" Mr. Wiggs stepped back, and the New House juniors followed him into the shop. Mr. Wiggs turned up the gas, and closed the shop door.

"Pierrot costumes?" he asked.

"That's it!" said Figgins.

"And masks?"

"Yes; black silk masks, same as those chaps wore at Wayland Theatre, you know."

"Ah! The same as Tom Merry—"

"Exactly the same."

"I have plenty in stock," said Mr. Wiggs. "You can take your choice. I suppose this is some joke that you young gentlemen are playing at the school?"

"Just so," grinned Figgins.

Figgins & Co. promptly donned the pierrot costumes. They changed their boots for high-heeled shoes, and put on black silk masks, hiding their faces completely from recognition. They borrowed combs and brushes from Mr. Wiggs, and parted their hair in the middle, as they had noticed the entertainers at Wayland Theatre did. Mr. Wiggs watched them with a smiling face.

"There, I think that's all right," said Figgins, surveying himself in the glass which had reflected Tom Merry a short time before. "We want some soft hats now."

"Yes," said Kerr—"something like professionals wear."

"Good!"

Soft hats were forthcoming, and the New House juniors donned them, and their coats.

"Is that all?" asked Mr. Wiggs.

"That's all, thank you, Mr. Wiggs! You're a giddy Trojan! Good-night!"

"Good-night, young gentlemen!"

Figgins & Co. left the shop, and Mr. Wiggs smiled and closed the door after them. As in the case of the Terrible Three, it was none of his business; and as it was a double order for him for hire of costumes, he was not displeased.

"This way!" said Figgins, starting off.

"Are we going to walk, Figgy?"

"Of course!"

"But wouldn't it look better—"

"Ass!" said Figgins politely. "When we—the Masked Trio—arrived at the station, we found the station cab was gone."

"Oh, I see!"

"It had been taken by the impostors who had preceded us."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course, we don't know anything about the impostors yet; we shall be astonished to find 'em at St. Jim's."

Figgins & Co. chuckled joyfully as they walked down the High Street of Rylcombe, and then tramped along the lane to St. Jim's.

They had been left out of the wheeze; but it seemed to Figgins & Co. that they were going to score this time, and score very heavily.

The station cab, going back to Rylcombe empty, passed them in the lane. Figgins stopped it, and spoke to the driver.

"Hallo, Peter! Have you just taken a party to St. Jim's?"

"Yes," said the driver, staring at him in the gloom.

"Left them there all right?"

"Yes. What—"

But Figgins did not stay for any more. The Terrible Three, in their disguise, had evidently been received without suspicion at St. Jim's. Figgins & Co., chuckling under their masks, hurried on towards the old school.

CHAPTER 11.

Not Comic for Cutts!

CUTTS glanced into the Form-room soon after seven o'clock.

He wore a satisfied look.

The Form-room was a good-sized apartment, and in addition to the forms used by the Fifth at classes, chairs and other forms had been ranged in order, affording seating accommodation for a large audience.

There was standing-room at the back and at the sides for fags, who were admitted at half-price.

Cutts had reason to be satisfied with his audience. The reserved seats were nearly all taken. Half a dozen of them had been given free to prefects, in

order to induce those great men to be present in case of a rag. Cutts expected the juniors intended to make a rag, but in the presence of Kildare, the captain of the school, and Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, a rag by the juniors would be out of the question.

The Fifth Form had turned up almost to a man. The entertainment was in aid of the Form footer club, and the Fifth naturally supported it loyally.

Cutts had been doubtful about the number of juniors who would come, but he was reassured as he saw them crowding in.

Blake & Co. had come along with a very large party; Kangaroo had brought a crowd of Shell fellows, and a swarm of fags came in at half-price, and ranged themselves round the walls.

New House juniors, too, came in great force; all Figgins' friends were there, and Figgy's friends in the New House numbered very nearly all the juniors on that side of the school.

Before seven o'clock the room was crowded, and after that the crowd thickened. Cutts, Lefevre, Prye, Gilmore, and Jones had formed a magnificent committee of themselves, and they had everything in order for the entertainment. The upper end of the room had been marked off as a stage, and draped with borrowed curtains, and a piano had been placed on the stage for the use of the performers.

Cutts & Co. were grouped about the door to see that no one entered without a ticket.

"My hat! It will soon be standing room only, that's what I say," Lefevre remarked, as he glanced over the crowded room.

"We shall clear a few quid over this," Prye remarked.

Cutts nodded.

"Time the performers were here," he said, glancing at his watch.

There was a sound of a cab outside.

"Here they are!" said Jones.

"Stay here, and see that nobody comes in on the nod," said Cutts. "I'll look after the pros."

"Right you are!"

Cutts went out to meet the new arrivals.

Three figures in coats, with masked faces and soft hats, stood in the hall.

Cutts nodded to them.

"Glad you've come," he remarked.

"We're all ready. My word! Have you been travelling in those masks?"

"Certainly!" said the fat pierrot, who was evidently the leader. "I think you are aware that we have good reasons for keeping our identity secret."

"Our titled relations would not care to know that we gave variety performances," said the tallest of the pierrots.

Cutts grinned.

"Yes, I know," he said. "Come on! We've got you a dressing-room here, and you can enter the Form-room by the door at the top end, so as to get right on the stage."

"Very good, Mr. Cutts!"

Cutts conducted the trio into the room assigned as a dressing-room. There they removed their coats and hats.

They stood revealed in pierrot costume, their faces still hidden by the masks, and looking almost exactly as the Masked Trio had looked on the stage at the Wayland Theatre Royal.

"Got your props with you?" asked Cutts, noticing that the Trio had not brought any bags, as he had expected.

"No; we do not require any."

"But for your conjuring tricks?"

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"That will be all right. If you are ready, we are ready."

"Right!" said Cutts. "It's time now nearly. I'll ring a bell at exactly seven-thirty, and you come in through this door."

"Very good!"

Cutts returned to the Form-room. "All serene, my pippins!" murmured the tallest of the pierrots. "Our respected friend Cutts hasn't the remotest idea."

"Not the faintest."

"We'll make Comic Cutts of him before we're finished!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In a short time a bell rang, and the three pierrots passed through the door upon the stage.

They glanced through the eyeholes of their masks at the crowded room.

A sea of eyes and faces confronted the Masked Trio as they appeared at the upper end of the room, and there was a cheer.

"Here they are! Bravo!"

The Masked Trio bowed.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to Jack Blake. "I—I suppose it's all right? The real party hasn't turned up by mistake, have they?"

Blake grinned.

"I fancy it's the Shell bounders, but I'm blessed if a chap can be sure in that rig! Their own paters wouldn't know 'em!"

"Wathah not!"

"Gentlemen," said the leader of the Trio, advancing to the edge of the stage, "we are just going to begin—"

"Bravo!"

"We have been asked to give a performance here by our young friend, Comic Cutts—"

"What!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cutts turned crimson.

The audience roared with laughter. Whether it was a mistake of the pierrot or his first joke in the performance, it was very successful. The audience shrieked.

"Our friend Comic Cutts has requested—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My name isn't Comic Cutts, you imbecile!" said Cutts, from the side of the stage. "It's Gerald Cutts, you silly idiot!"

"Our friend Comic Cutts—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Did you say your name was Comic Cutts or Chips?" asked the pierrot, turning, with a polite bow, towards the Fifth Former.

"You—you fathead—"

"Eh?"

"Shut up about me, and get on with the washing!" hissed Cutts. "I'm not paying you three guineas to come here and play the fool! Leave me out of it, and get on with the performance, confound you!"

Cutts' voice was subdued, but a good many of the audience heard what he said, and they yelled again.

"Very well, Mr. Chips—"

"Cutts, you dummy!"

"Excuse me—I mean, Cutts, you dummy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The performance will now begin," said the pierrot chief. "I shall start with a conjuring trick. If a gentleman in the audience will lend me his handkerchief, I will undertake to make it disappear, and it will be found down the back of our friend Mr. Comic Cutts—"

"Oh, good!"

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"Look here—" began Cutts.

"Here's a hanky!" roared Wally of the Third, rushing towards the stage. "Let's see it found down Cutts' back."

"Ahem! I prefer a handkerchief that has not been used to clean a slate with!" said the pierrot.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh rats!" said Wally.

"Pway accept my handkerchief, my dear sir!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, rising and handing over his elegant cambric.

"Thank you very much, young sir! Of course, you do not mind if this handkerchief is damaged?"

"Weally, sir—"

"It is about to come into close contact with our friend Comic Cutts—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Leave me out of it, you idiot!" howled Cutts. "I tell you I'm not taking part in your rotten, fatheaded performance! Find somebody else!"

The pierrot did not seem to hear. He made mysterious passes in the air with the handkerchief, and finally it disappeared. Everybody in the room had seen it go up the pierrot's sleeve, so there was no very deep mystery about its disappearance.

"Gentleman, that handkerchief will now be found down the back of Comic Cutts!"

Cutts of the Fifth strode towards the conjurer.

"Look here, you clump," he hissed, "if you don't leave off calling me Comic Cutts, there will be a row! Do you understand?"

"Chuck it, Cutts!" murmured Prye. "It's all in the entertainment, you know. They're paid to come here and make jokes."

"They're not going to make jokes about me!" growled Cutts.

"Oh, let him rip!" urged Lefevre. "That's what I say—let him rip! The audience like it, anyway, and that's the object of the entertainment, you know."

"Just so," said Gilmore. "The audience like it like anything. See how they're laughing at you, Cutts, old man."

Cutts scowled fiercely.

"They're jolly well not going to laugh at me, you silly fathead."

"Well, they've paid for admission, and—"

"Are you ready, Mr. Cutts?" asked the pierrot.

"Ready for what?" growled Cutts.

"To be searched for the missing handkerchief!"

"I'm jolly well not going to be searched!"

The pierrot turned to the audience with a resigned gesture.

"Ladies and gentlemen, if Comic Cutts refuses to be searched for the handkerchief, it cannot be produced, and—"

"Bai Jove, I want my handkerchief, you know!"

"Comic Cutts will have to be searched!" shouted Kangaroo.

The three masked pierrots surrounded the exasperated Fifth Former. Cutts pushed back his cuffs and doubled his fists. He evidently did not intend to have his jacket and waistcoat and shirt stripped off in public. The juniors were yelling with glee in anticipation.

The Fourth Form door suddenly opened, and Toby the page came in, with a startled face.

"Master Cutts, if you please—"

"Hallo! Clear out!"

"But, Master Cutts—"

"Don't bother now, you young idiot!" roared the ruffled Cutts. "Get out!"

"But three gentlemen want to see you—three gentlemen in masks!" said

Toby. "They say they've come to give the performance!"

"What?" yelled Cutts.

"They says I'm to tell you the Masked Trio have arrived, sir, and they're sorry they're late, 'cause somebody 'ad taken the cab at the station, and they 'ad to walk!" said Toby.

There was a buzz of amazement in the crowded room.

Cutts was dumbfounded.

"There they are!" yelled Redfern of the New House suddenly.

In the open doorway of the Form-room appeared three figures in pierrot costumes and black silk masks, and if the doorway had been a looking-glass, it could not have reflected more accurately the three figures on the stage.

There was a shout of astonishment.

"The Masked Trio!"

"Another lot!"

"It's raining entertainers!"

"Gweat Scott! Poor old Tom Mewry! Here's the weal party turned up, afaah all!"

CHAPTER 12.

Bowled Out!

CUTTS of the Fifth looked at the Masked Trio in the doorway, and then at the Masked Trio on the stage, and his head seemed to turn round and round.

He was utterly mystified.

The three newcomers advanced into the room gravely.

They looked at the trio on the stage through the poles in their masks; but the expression on their faces, of course, could not be seen.

On the stage, the Masked Trio—alias the Terrible Three—stood rooted to the floor.

"Bowled out!" murmured Tom Merry. "What a ghastly frost!"

"Done!" groaned Monty Lowther. "You ass, Tom! You said you'd arranged it all on the telephone, and now the real article turns up at the rottenest possible moment."

"Oh crumbs!" said Manners. "Let's cut!"

The three japers backed away towards the door leading into the adjoining room, which they had used as a dressing-room.

But their movement was at once spotted by Cutts.

"They're going!" he exclaimed.

"They're spoofers! Stop 'em!"

Cutts made a bound to get between the Terrible Three and the exit. It was dawning on him now that he had been japed; and he understood at last the singular way in which the performers had persisted in making fun of him.

Kildare jumped up in his place. Most of the audience were on their feet now, and the room was in a loud buzz.

"You fellows had better explain yourselves," said the captain of St. Jim's. "Who are you?"

"We're the Masked Trio," replied Tom Merry.

"Then who are these other chaps?"

"We're the Masked Trio," said the tallest of the newcomers.

"My hat! There can't be two sets of them," said Darrell of the Sixth.

"See that they don't get away!" hissed Cutts to a crowd of Fifth Formers, who were thronging on the stage to back him up. "We're jolly well going to have this out! We've been spoofed—it's a jape!"

"Looks like it," said Prye. "But how—"

"Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther

(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! Although it seems early yet to get letters from readers about our great new Rookwood series, many of you have lost no time in writing to me on the subject. My daily postbag is swelling as more and more letters reach me! All the letters I have opened are full of praise for Owen Conquest's new series. So far I have only come across one letter with a "grouse." The reader considers that the Rookwood story is so good it ought to be longer! The important thing, however, is that the latest adventures of Jimmy Silver & Co. are proving one hundred per cent popular with readers. If you have not yet read this week's powerful yarn, turn to page 23 and see what a wonderful story it is.

There's another like it, entitled:

"THE UNSEEN HAND!"

in next week's first-rate number.

What will happen to Lovell? Innocent of wrecking Mr. Dalton's study, it yet looks as if he can only be adjudged guilty by the Head on the evidence, and "sacked" from Rookwood. Will the culprit be discovered before that fate overtakes Arthur Edward? It doesn't look like it, for not a shadow of suspicion falls upon anyone else. Who is the real culprit? That remains to be seen. But the unknown gets moving again in next week's gripping story, and his latest outrage creates even a bigger stir at Rookwood than his wrecking of Mr. Dalton's study. Whatever you do, chums, take good care you don't miss this great yarn.

"ST. JIM'S ON THE WARPATH!"

When the warfare between Tom Merry & Co. and their old rivals of the Grammar School breaks out, you can always reckon on an extra-good, rollicking yarn of fun and excitement. So you can look forward to a ripping treat in next Wednesday's GEM.

The one and only Gussy starts the ball rolling by trying to jape Gordon Gay & Co. on his own. But much to Gussy's astonishment, if not to that of his chums,

it is a case of the japer being japed. But it is enough to set the rival juniors on the warpath again, and the fun continues fast and furious, Tom Merry & Co. finally working off the biggest rag of the term. This is one of the liveliest yarns of the year, as you will readily agree when you read it.

OUR CHRISTMAS NUMBER.

By the way, I am now busy on our grand Christmas number, which will be on sale the week after next. It will contain a magnificent COVER-TO-COVER mystery yarn of the chums of St. Jim's. More about this next week.

A GRAND GIFT BOOK.

With Christmas quickly drawing near, chums, parents and relatives will no doubt be asking many of you what you would like for a Christmas present. Now, a gift that always gives most entertainment for a small outlay is a good book. And what book would suit GEM readers more than the famous "Holiday Annual"? None! In its 256 pages you can read all about the further adventures of Tom Merry & Co., and you can make the acquaintance again of hosts of other schoolboy favourites, such as Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars, and Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood. The "H.A." is packed with school stories of just the type you like, and I strongly recommend it to readers. It is on sale now, price five shillings. So drop a hint about it in the right quarter!

IT'S AN ILL WIND—

If the dream of some scientists comes true, the bleak, snow-bound wastes of Siberia will, in years to come, no longer be barren of vegetation and inhabitants. At the moment the scheme for transforming this country is only in the experimental stage. But the idea is that

the cold winds which blow in Siberia throughout the year can be used to supply eternal light and heat! "It's an ill-wind that blows no good," is an old maxim, and the engineers engaged on the experiment are hopeful that its meaning will be borne out in their work.

They propose to erect large windmills which will provide the motive power to immense dynamos. Thus there will be a constant supply of cheap electricity, and once you've got that there's no limit to the uses to which it can be put. For instance, huge arc-lights will shed light like sunshine over the country, and electric cables buried in the earth will give off warmth for growing vegetables, wheat, and corn. In addition, it is proposed to build tremendous glass-houses, which will cover hundreds of acres of land and provide protection for plants from the biting blizzards. It is an ambitious scheme, costing many millions of money, but the sponsors of it are confident of success.

A RECORD RIDE.

Talking about Siberia, do you know that it was across this snow-covered country that the greatest ride on one horse was made? The man who did it was a Russian named Pechkoff. Mounted on a strong and wiry pony, he covered the journey from Vladivostok to St. Petersburg, a distance of 5,000 miles, in six months. Twenty-six weeks seems a long time, but when you work it out you'll find that he had to average over 27 miles a day, riding day and night without halt. But he was probably in the saddle for two-thirds of the time taken, which makes his average about forty miles a day—a wonderful feat of endurance and stamina for pony and rider over such difficult country.

WHEN THE FALLS FAILED.

Nature sometimes plays some amazing freaks, but probably one of the most amazing she played was the time when she stopped the mighty Niagara Falls. It happened 87 years ago. The inhabitants of Niagara and other towns on the banks of the river, used to the roar of the Falls, were astonished one night when that roar suddenly ceased. It seemed incredible that the waters of the Niagara River, which dropped over 160 feet when they reached the Falls, had somehow run dry. Yet that is what had happened. Pack-ice, carried from Lake Erie into the Niagara River, became jammed and acted as a dam to the waters. But it couldn't last long. The pressure of water behind the ice was too great, and the next night it gave way. Once more the water came sweeping down, to thunder over the Falls, and from that day Nature has never repeated the freak.

TAILPIECE.

Teacher: "Tommy, do you know it is very wrong to fight?"

Tommy: "Yes, sir — when I get licked!"

THE EDITOR.

PEN PALS COUPON
30-11-35



A free feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging topics of interest to each other. If you want a pen pal, post your notice, together with the coupon on this page, to the address given above.

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(Continued on page 22.)

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ain't in the audience," said Cutts. "I'd noticed that already. Their friends are all here, but they're not!"

"Oh gad!"

"Take off those masks!" thundered Cutts.

The three pierrots on the stage drew together.

"Impossible, Comic Cutts——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't call me Comic Cutts again, or I'll smash your face in for you!" roared Cutts. "Take off those masks! We're going to see who you are. I believe you're St. Jim's chaps japing us!"

"Oh, great Scott!" exclaimed Kildare, in amazement. "I shouldn't wonder. You'd better take off those masks, you fellows."

"Can't be done, Kildare——"

"Hallo!" cried Cutts. "How do you know Kildare's name if you're not St. Jim's fellows?"

The pierrots were silent. It was certainly a slip of the tongue, and Tom Merry had pretty well given himself away.

Kildare burst into a laugh.

"You may as well own up," he said. "The real fellows are here now, and you can't keep this up, you know."

"We are ready to begin the performance, Mr. Cutts, as soon as you please," said the leader of the newly arrived trio.

"Wait a minute or two," said Cutts; "we've got to deal with these impostors. They came here representing themselves as you fellows, and took us in."

"Is it possible?"

"Yes; and we're going to know who they are!"

"Dear me! I suppose that is why the cab was gone from the station—I suppose they must have come here in it."

"So they did!" said Prye.

"The spoofers!" yelled Gilmore.

"Have those masks off them!"

"Take 'em off!" shouted Cutts.

"Impossible!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Our noble connections among the highest aristocracy of the land would be shocked if they knew that we were

doing a variety turn. My uncle, the aged duke, would have a fit!"

"And my father, the marquis, would never get over it!" said Monty Lowther.

"And my brother, the earl, would cut me off with a tanner!" said Manners.

"Ha, ha ha!"

Cutts made a sudden rush. He was certain that the spoofers belonged to St. Jim's and he meant to know for certain.

"Line up!" roared Tom Merry, forgetting to disguise his voice.

There was a shout.

"That's Tom Merry's voice!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They're Shell chaps!"

Seven or eight Fifth Formers rushed at the masked trio with Cutts. There was a terrific struggle on the stage for a moment. In the body of the room, Blako & Co., and Kangaroo and a band of the Shell fellows jumped up to rush to the rescue. There would have been a battle royal if they had succeeded in reaching the stage. But the wisdom of Cutts' arrangements was then apparent.

Kildare and the rest of the prefects interposed, and the would-be rescuers were shoved back.

"Weally, Kildare, I must go to the rescue of Tom Mewwy," Arthur Augustus explained, as the captain of the School pushed him over a form.

Kildare grinned.

"So it is Tom Merry?" he said.

"Well, I—I mean—ahem!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Stand back, you kids! You're not to go on the stage. Sling them back! I'll turn out any fag who doesn't sit down immediately!" shouted Kildare.

The rescuers being thus kept off, Cutts & Co., had it all their own way with the Terrible Three.

The unfortunate japers of the Shell were rolled over on the stage, and the pierrot costumes and the silk masks were torn from them with no gentle hands.

Three juniors in Etons were revealed when the costumes and the masks were gone, and their faces were very well known to all present. There was a shout of recognition.

"Tom Merry!"

"Manners!"

"Lowther!"

"Oh, the spoofers! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silly asses!" grunted Blake, as he sat down again. "They were too cocksure about it. Now, if I had been working that little jape, I should have made sure that the real article wouldn't turn up."

"Yaas, wathah! I considah——"

"It's rough on poor old Tommy," said Kangaroo, with tears of merriment in his eyes. "I'm sorry for him. Ha, ha, ha! The silly ass! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tom Merry, Manners, Lowther!" hissed Cutts, as he dragged the rags of the costumes from the much dishevelled Shell fellows. "You young villains! I'll teach you to be funny at my entertainment! Bump the cads!"

"Yes, rather!" said Lefevre. "That's what I say—bump them!"

Kildare strode forward.

"That will do," he said curtly.

Cutts glared at him.

"Leave us alone, Kildare!"

Kildare's blue eyes glinted.

"You're not going to handle them roughly, Cutts. I know what you did in Tom Merry's study, and this is only a jape in return, I expect. They've been pretty roughly handled already, and now you can let them slide."

"Look here, Kildare——"

"Do you hear what I say?"

There was a restive movement among the juniors in the audience. They would have chanced the prefects and rushed to the rescue if Cutts & Co. had been allowed to bump their victims. But Kildare's interposition had the desired effect. The juniors knew that the captain of St. Jim's could be trusted not to allow any bullying.

Cutts gritted his teeth.

But there was no gainsaying Kildare, and he reluctantly released his grasp on Tom Merry.

"They can be turned out," said Kildare. "You'd better buzz off, you young rascals. And the next time you take on somebody else's name and character, mind that that somebody else doesn't turn up in time to show you up!"

Tom Merry grinned ruefully.

"Blessed if I know how they turned up!" he said. "I had it all nicely arranged on the telephone, and——"

"Get off the stage!" shouted Cutts.

"Buzz off!" said Kildare. "The performance is over—due."

"Oh, we've had the best part of the performance!" said Darrell, laughing. "Buzz off, you kids!"

And the Terrible Three, extremely breathless and dusty, and almost in tatters, buzzed off. Loud laughter followed them from the Form-room, and the door closed upon them.

In the passage the dusty heroes looked at one another ruefully.

"Well, of all the giddy frosts!" said Manners.

"How many sorts of a silly ass do you call yourself, Tom Merry?" asked Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry snorted.

"It was a jolly good jape," he said.

"How those chaps came to smell a mouse at the last moment, and turn up like that, I don't know!"

"Well, they did, anyway."

"Yes, they did it, that's a cert. But how?"

"It doesn't matter how," grunted Manners. "We've been dished and done, and Cutts is going to have his performance after all. Let's go and get brushed, and get into the room again. They can't keep us out if we pay for admission, and there may be some chance of ragging the Fifth yet."



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"Good!"

And the unhappy japers washed and brushed themselves, and returned to the Fifth Form Room; and although Prye and Gilmore, at the door, gave them very grim looks, they were allowed to enter and join the audience on paying for admission.

Jack Blake grinned as he made room for Tom Merry to sit down beside him. "Something like a frost—eh?" he remarked.

The captain of the Shell grunted. "You should have left it to the New House," said Redfern, with a chuckle. "We should have handled it all right on our side."

"Oh rats!" said Tom Merry crossly. "You should have left it to Studay No. 6, dear boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a wise shake of the head. "In a mottah like this, what you wequiah is the assistance of a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Br-r-r-r!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—" "Oh, dry up, and let's listen to the show!" said Monty Lowther.

CHAPTER 13.

The Vanishing Trick!

THE newly arrived Masked Trio had been silent spectators of the peculiar scene on the stage.

They joined in the laughter, true; but they made no movement to interfere actively, and waited patiently till the stage was clear for them.

Then they took up the place vacated by the spoofers.

The audience, having laughed themselves husky, settled down into quietness again, to see what the genuine performers would be like; but it was generally agreed that there would be nothing quite so funny as the debut—and abrupt exit—of the Terrible Three.

Cutts' face was clearing now. If the "spoof" performance had gone on, he knew that he would have been further japed by the Terrible Three, and the timely arrival of the Masked Trio the Second had saved him from that. And, in fact, there came a smile upon the face of Gerald Cutts as he reflected how completely the Shell fellows' jape had turned out to be a frost.

But the smile vanished as the performance began.

Cutts had not specially demanded it, but he had supposed that the performance at St. Jim's would be the same as that given at Wayland Theatre Royal, only cut a little to compress it into a shorter time.

But the three pierrots seemed to have made great changes in their performance.

The shortest and the fattest of the trio was the first to begin operations, while the other two sat upon chairs on the stage and watched him.

The fat pierrot glanced at Cutts.

"I shall require some things, please," he said. "We haven't been able to bring with us all that we need, owing to—to circumstances—"

"Had to walk, you know," explained Figgins. "Couldn't carry a heavy bag."

"Ahem—yes!" said the third pierrot. "Quite so," said Cutts. "I understand. It's all due to those young scoundrels. What can I get for you?"

"This is a new thing," said the fat pierrot, who was speaking in a deep, guttural voice. "It is called the Steak Pie and Twelve Jam Tarts Trick."

"The—the what?" "The Steak Pie and Twelve Jam

Tarts Trick," replied the pierrot calmly. "I make a steak pie and twelve jam tarts disappear. Can you get them for me?"

"Well," said Cutts, "I suppose we could get them at Mrs. Taggles', but—but—"

"Then please get them."

"Shall we borrow them to be returned?"

"No; I am afraid they could not be returned."

"Well, those things cost money, you know."

"Oh, if there is a lack of funds, I will not perform the trick!" said the fat pierrot with dignity. "But I should have thought that, after the indignity we have been subjected to—our name borrowed, our appearance imitated—and, as we have made no complaint to—"

"Dash it all, let 'em have the things they want, Cutts!" whispered Prye. "The blessed audience are getting impatient, too! Must give them some kind of a show."

"All right. Cut down to the tuckshop and get them, then. I suppose a cold pie will do?"

"Certainly!" said the pierrot. "I require a steak-and-kidney pie, twelve jam tarts, and a knife and fork and plate. And look sharp!"

"Oh, all right!"

Prye disappeared. In the interval of waiting the three pierrots kept up a fire of talk with one another, and the audience grinned; for the talk, strangely enough, had local allusions, and they were mostly to Cutts. The tallest of the pierrots recited a limerick, which ran:

"There's a school which is famous for knuts,
Where the Fifth are regarded as
buts;
They are all off their dot,
But the worst of the lot
Is an asinine boulder named Cutts."

Cutts could scarcely believe his ears.

There was a howl of laughter in the Form-room, and the Fifth Formers did not join in, but looked decidedly blank.

"What on earth—" muttered Jones. "This is as bad as the other gang," said Gilmore. "Better give 'em a hint not to be quite so funny about us."

"The audience like it," murmured Lefevre. "That's what I say."

"Oh, dry up!"

Fortunately Prye re-entered just then with the requisites from the tuckshop. He opened a basket upon the stage and produced a large pie in a dish and a dozen jam tarts wrapped up in tissue paper.

The fat pierrot's eyes glistened with satisfaction through the holes in his mask as he regarded them.

"That all right?" asked Prye.

"Yes, that will do, thanks."

Prye retired from the stage. The fat pierrot took the knife and fork and sat down, with the pie between his knees, and began

to eat it. The audience stared at him blankly. He had undertaken to make the pie disappear, but there was nobody present who could not have made it disappear in that way—and many of them would have been pleased to make the trial.

Cutts & Co. watched the fat hero.

So did the audience.

In fact, he was the cynosure of all eyes. But he did not seem to be aware of it; all his attention was given to the steak-and-kidney pie.

"My hat!" said Prye at last. "What's the giddy game? Is that what they call an entertainment, Cutts?"

"Chap seems to be entertaining himself," said Lefevre. "I don't know about the audience. That's what I say."

"The silly ass!" growled Cutts restlessly. "If it's part of the game, I don't know about interfering with him. But—"

The audience were grinning, but in rather a puzzled way. They did not seem to know what to make of the fat pierrot and his proceeding any more than Cutts did. Some of them supposed that it was a very deep joke, of which the point would be seen later. Many of the juniors laughed heartily, especially New House juniors.

The New House fellows, in fact, seemed to think that it was a really ripping joke, for reasons best known to themselves.

"Well, I think Cutts would have done better to let us keep on," said Monty Lowther, as the Terrible Three watched the performance from the back of the room. "I'm blessed if I see anything exhilarating in watching that fat boulder wolfing a pie! We could watch Fatty Wynn doing that any day!"

"Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry. "He's got a fat chivvy just like Wynn, too—you can see it now he's pushed his mask up a lot. Blessed if this is worth paying admission for!"

"Let's give 'em a yell," suggested Manners. "After all, we've paid, and we've a right to be entertained."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I must say that this is wathah slow. You boundahs have let us in for this!"

"How?" demanded Lowther.

"We paid to come in to see you jape the Fifth," said Arthur Augustus severely, "and it hasn't come off!"

(Continued on the next page.)

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"Ahem! Well, if those chaps hadn't turned up—"

"If I had been awwagin' this maffah, deah boys, they wouldn't have turned up, you know," said D'Arcy.

"Oh, rats!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Hullo, he's finished the pie, at any rate!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "Perhaps there's something going to happen now."

"There is," grinned Lowther. "He's starting on the tarts."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You ass—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lawrence and Owen, and Pratt and Thompson, and a crowd more New House juniors. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's finished the tarts," said Tom Merry at last. "I wonder what's coming next? We've been waiting long enough."

"Gentlemen," said the tall pierrot, "we shall now proceed to do a dance."

"Hold on!" said Cutts. "Have you finished that trick?"

"Yes, that is finished," said the fat pierrot.

"You said you were going to make those tarts and the pie disappear!" hooted Cutts.

"Well, I've made them disappear, haven't I?"

"Why, you—you—"

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

"I've had to pay for that tommy!" roared Cutts.

The fat pierrot nodded.

"Yes," he explained. "That's where the joke comes in."

The audience roared again.

Cutts was speechless; and the three pierrots, leaving him muttering to himself, proceeded with their dance.

Their method of dancing seemed to be to put their hands on their hips, and, standing in this attitude, to bring their boots down with a clatter on the stage.

This lasted for about five minutes, and by the end of that time some of the seniors among the audience retired from the Form-room. They were fed-up.

Cutts muttered a remonstrance to the Masked Trio.

"Dash it all! Can't you do something a bit more entertaining than that, you fellows?" he said. "Do you call that dancing?"

"It's our style of dancing," said the tall pierrot.

"Well, I call it rotten!"

"Oh, that's your ignorance, you know."

"What?"

"Cheese it, Cutts!"

"Wh-what!"

"Don't interrupt!" said the pierrot severely. "How can I dance when I'm being jawed at by a silly ass?"

"Oh!" gasped Cutts.

Lefevre tapped his friend on the arm. "Better let 'em alone, Cutts," he whispered.

"But, look here—"

"Better let 'em rip! After all, you engaged 'em, you know, and they've got to be paid, so we may as well let 'em go through their tricks," said the captain of the Fifth philosophically.

"The audience are getting sick of 'em!"

"Never mind. They paid in advance!"

"Well, there's something in that," agreed Cutts. "But I didn't engage these fellows to come here to play the fool. I thought they were going to give a show like the one in Wayland Theatre."

"Perhaps it'll improve."

Cutts snorted.

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"Doesn't seem much prospect of it," he said.

Stamp, stamp, stamp!

The Masked Trio were still dancing—what they called dancing.

Presently they ceased—not, apparently, for any reason, excepting that they were out of breath. Half the seniors had left the Form-room by that time, tired of the show. But some of them, and nearly all the juniors, remained, determined to get their money's worth as far as they could. But the fellows were beginning to get restive now, and shouting to the performers to buck up.

The tall pierrot bowed to the audience when he ceased stamping.

"Yah!" yelled the juniors in the audience.

"Gentlemen—"

"Poof!"

"Rats!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Gentlemen," said the pierrot, undisturbed, "this is where you cheer."

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Hurrah!" roared Redfern of the Fourth. "Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"What are you cheering for, you New House duffer?" demanded the Terrible Three, with one voice. "There never was a rottenner show!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Hear, hear!" yelled Redfern.

"Gentlemen, I shall now proceed to perform my celebrated conjuring trick with a silk hat. Will any gentleman present me with a silk hat?"

"Go it, Gussy!"

"That's up to you, D'Arcy!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Surely you came in a silk hat, Gussy!" exclaimed Redfern in a shocked tone.

"Weally, Weddy, I should not be likely to put a silk hat on to walk down a passage into a Form-room!"

"Gentlemen, I require a silk hat. I require a silk hat of the first quality belonging to a wearer of a really first-class topper."

D'Arcy rose.

"Then I suppose it's up to me," he remarked. "I am the only chap at St. Jim's who answers to that description."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see anythin' to laugh at. Pway wait a few minutes, my deah sir, and I will bring you a silk hat!"

"Your best one, please," said the tall pierrot.

D'Arcy hesitated.

"Do you want my best Sunday toppah?" he asked.

"Certainly!"

"It will not be damaged?"

"Not unless you damage it yourself."

"Oh, vewy well!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy quitted the Form-room, and returned in a few minutes with the silk hat. He walked up to the stage and handed it to the pierrot. The performer made him a sign to step on the stage.

"Pray lend me your assistance," he said.

"Weally, my deah sir—"

"I shall require assistance in performing this trick, and you look like a youth of the greatest intelligence," said the pierrot.

"Yaas, wathah! You are quite wight there!" said D'Arcy.

"Pray hand me the hat." The pierrot turned it over in his hands. "This is your Sunday one?"

"Yaas!"

"Very good! Now, ladies and gentlemen, I call upon you to watch this closely, and see whether you observe me change this hat for another."

The audience began to get interested at last. Some of the seniors who had got up to go sat down again. The pierrot certainly did not seem to have much chance of changing the hat for another. Certainly he wore baggy clothes, in which he might have concealed the ribbons, the white rabbits, the yards of coloured paper, etc., which are the usual conjurer's paraphernalia. But it did not appear possible that he had a silk hat concealed about him—in fact, it seemed impossible.

The conjurer turned his back to the audience, holding the silk hat close to his chest, so that it was hidden from view.

He turned round in another minute and placed a silk hat on the stage.

"My word!" murmured Blake. "If he's changed it, he must have been smart. How could he have a hat hidden about him?"

"Opera hat, perhaps, closed up," suggested Monty Lowther.

"Then what has he done with Gussy's?"

"True!"

The tall pierrot pointed to the hat.

"Does that look to you like your hat, young sir?" he asked.

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"Yaas; it looks wemarkably like it," he said.

"You would be deceived by the resemblance?"

"Yaas!"

"Good! Now jump on that hat!"

"Wh-what!"

"It is part of the performance," the tall pierrot explained. "Jump on it!"

Arthur Augustus hesitated, and then he remembered the wonderful restoration of his gold watch at the performance at Wayland Theatre Royal. Then his hesitation vanished. He made a jump, and landed on the silk topper.

Crunch!

The topper bore a slight resemblance to a concertina after that, but no resemblance to anything else on earth.

D'Arcy stepped off the wreck.

"That all wight?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha!" The three pierrots roared. "Ha, ha, ha! Yes; that's all right!"

"Good egg!"

"Gentlemen, you see that wreck of a hat? You would say that it was impossible to restore this young gentleman's hat as he handed it to me—"

"I know I should," said Monty Lowther.

"Examine the hat, gentlemen," said the pierrot. "Master D'Arcy, pray hand the hat down among the audience."

"Bai Jove! How did you know my name?" asked D'Arcy, in astonishment.

"Ahem! I— It is written in your hat."

"But you didn't look in the hat."

"Am I not a conjurer?" demanded the tall pierrot, with dignity. "Pray do as I have requested."

"All wight!"

Arthur Augustus handed down the smashed topper. Kildare took it and looked at it, and then Darrell, and then it passed among the juniors. There was not the slightest doubt that it was a hopeless wreck, and nothing short of the most powerful magic could possibly restore it to its pristine glory.

The hat was handed back to the conjurer.

"Are you satisfied, gentlemen?"

"Yes."

"Are you satisfied, Master D'Arcy?"

"Yaas."

"You are sure you are satisfied?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good! That is fortunate! Gentlemen, now that you have examined that hat, would you not say that it is quite impossible to restore it?"

"Yes."

"What-ho!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, gentlemen," said the pierrot calmly, "you are quite right!"

"What!"

"Oh!"

"You would be quite right; it is quite impossible to restore the hat. But, as Master D'Arcy has stated that he is quite satisfied, it is a matter of no moment. Now, if any gentleman will lend me a gold watch, I will proceed to—"

"My hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"Bai Jove! Is—is that my hat?"

The pierrot nodded.

"Yes, that is your hat. Kindly remove it, as the trick is finished. If any gentleman will lend me a gold watch—a valuable one will be necessary—I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "I think that's very likely, after what's happened to Gussy's topper!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy stood transfixed.

"That—that is my hat!" he gasped at last. "You—you wascal! You said that it would not be damaged!"

"Unless you damaged it yourself," corrected the pierrot. "I appeal to the audience if I did not say that?"

"Ha, ha, ha! You did!"

"He's got you there, Gussy!"

"You damaged it, Adolphus!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus shook his fist at the conjurer.

"I regard you as a swindlin' wascal!" he yelled, picking up his hat.

"You are an impostor, sir—a wank impostor!"

And the swell of St. Jim's marched away with the wreck of his silk topper, while the audience yelled with laughter.

CHAPTER 14.

Foiled by Figgins!

"GENTLEMEN, if any member of the audience will kindly oblige me with a watch—a gold watch—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I will proceed to perform—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Not taking any, thanks!"

"Not this evening!"

"Gussy," roared Kangaroo, "hand out your gold ticker, old man!"

"Weally, Kangy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mr. Cutts!" The pierrot turned to the grinning Fifth Former. Cutts had not been displeased by the joke on the swell of the Fourth. "Mr. Cutts, if you will kindly oblige me with your watch—"

"Catch me!" said Cutts.

"Very well," said the conjurer. "I will pass over that trick. Now, gentlemen, I am going to show you the great rope trick. This did not appear in the programme at the Wayland Theatre, and I think it will interest you very much. I shall require five assistants—juniors will not do."

"Ahem!"

"Blessed if I want to have a hand, anyway," said Tom Merry. "The assistants may get off as well as Gussy's topper!"

"Yaas, wathah! The man is a silly ass!"

"Kildare, there's your chance!"

The captain of St. Jim's shook his head.

"Not Sixth Formers," said the conjurer hastily. "Mr. Cutts and his friends will do very well. Members of the Sixth Form would not do, as they are too strong for this trick. Boys of the Fifth will do excellently. Mr. Cutts, will you oblige me?"

"That depends on what you want me to do," said Cutts, grimly. "You're not going to get me to smash up any of my property."

"This is quite a different trick; there will be no smashing. Indeed, I think you will very likely want to do some smashing at the conclusion, but I shall not permit it."

"Well, what is it?" asked Cutts.

"Come on the stage, you and your friends."

"All of us?" asked Lefevre.

"I require five."

"Well, I suppose it's up to us!" grunted Jones. "Come on!"

And the Fifth Form Entertainment Committee came forward. They were looking a little uneasy, and the audience watched with redoubled attention. One of the masked pierrots took a long rope from his tunic, and began to uncoil it.

"Gentlemen, the rope trick is very simple, but I guarantee that it will bring down the house," said the tall pierrot. "In the first place, the rope is looped round these five young gentlemen—"

"Oh, is it?" said Lefevre. "That's what I say—is it?"

"Hold on!" said Frye.

"I am not going to hurt you," said the conjurer reassuringly, as he looped



"Jump on your hat," said the tall pierrot. "It is part of the performance." Arthur Augustus hesitated to jump on his best Sunday topper. But then he remembered the wonderful restoration of his gold watch by the conjurer, and his hesitation vanished. He leaped and landed on the silk hat. Crunch!

the rope round the uneasy Fifth Formers. "As you see, it is not tight."

The rope was passed round the waist of the Fifth Formers loosely. The pierrot made a slip-knot, and pulled it a little tighter.

The five seniors were bunched together, looking very sheepish.

The conjurer made a sign to his companions, and the Masked Trio all laid hold of the rope and pulled it hard.

The knot tightened, and the five seniors were roped together.

Cutts turned red. "Look here, I've had enough of this!" he said. "What are you up to?" "Now your hands," said the conjurer.

Cutts clenched his hands. "You're not going to tie my hands!" he said stubbornly.

"Nor mine!" growled Prye.

"No fear!" grunted Gilmore.

"Well, it is not essential for the trick," said the conjurer gracefully as he knotted the rope more securely.

"Now see if you can get free."

The Fifth Formers essayed to free themselves. But it was in vain.

The knots on the rope were tied in awkward places, and very tightly, and the bunch of prisoners could not get at them.

They struggled and wriggled in the rope, keeping their feet with great difficulty as they did so, and after a few minutes they gave it up.

"You cannot get loose?" asked the conjurer.

"No!" growled Cutts.

"Untie us," said Gilmore.

The conjurer shook his head.

"No; the trick is not finished yet."

He drew a bag from under his loose tunic, and the other two followed his example. They were paper bags, and they were full of flour.

Cutts eyed the pierrots uneasily, as each one mounted on a chair.

"What are you going to do with that flour?" he demanded.

"Throw it over you, Master Cutts!"

"What!" yelled Cutts.

There was a yell from the audience.

"My hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't you dare to throw that over us!" yelled the five seniors together.

"You villains! Stop it! Yow! Oh! Yaroo! Yow! Ow!"

Swish, swish! came the flour from

the bags descending in a shower over the unhappy Fifth Formers.

Cutts & Co. roared and wriggled and yelled, and lost their footing, and rolled in a confused heap on the stage.

Still the flour descended in showers until the bags were empty.

The Fifth Formers wriggled on the stage, gasping and spluttering, and looking as if there had been a sudden fall of snow.

The audience gasped and laughed.

Kildare rose to his feet.

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"This is going altogether too far!" he exclaimed. "I don't understand this. What on earth do the fellows mean, unless they're dotty?"

The Masked Trio jumped down from the chairs, and advanced towards the front of the stage.

"Gentlemen," said the tall pierrot, "I have an announcement to make. Pray lend me your ears."

"I'll lend you a thick ear as soon as I get loose, you scoundrel!" came Cutts' voice, muffled with flour.

"Pile in!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard this as extraordinary, deah boys."

"Gentlemen, there is a queer idea in the School House here that the School

House is Cock House of St. Jim's. That is the most egregious error. The New House is Cock House at St. Jim's."

"Wh-wh-what!"

"Hear, hear!" yelled Redfern.

"Why-why-"

"What the-"

"It was up to the juniors of this school to bring Cutts down from off his perch," went on the pierrot calmly.

"Tom Merry made a mess of it, as I warned him he would do."

"You warned me?" yelled Tom Merry.

"Why-what-who-"

"Bai Jove!"

"It's a jape!" yelled Blake excitedly.

"A New House jape! I know his voice now-"

"Gentlemen, the School House failed, but we have pulled it off. Gentlemen, I have the honour to bid you good-evening! Show your chivvies, kids!"

The Masked Trio removed their masks.

There was a gasp in the crowded room, and then a yell of amazement.

"Figgins!"

"Kerr!"

"Wynn!"

"Figgins & Co.!"

"Great Scott!" gasped Kildare.

"Why-you-you cheeky young rascals, I'll-"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Redfern.

"Who's Cock House at St. Jim's?"

And the New House juniors, who had evidently been in the secret all along, roared:

"New House—New House!"

Tom Merry's face was a study. He understood it all now.

It was not the real Masked Trio who had arrived in time to interrupt his performance. The real Masked Trio were still in Wayland. It was Figgins & Co. of the New House who had come in their guise.

"Oh," gasped Tom Merry at last, "my-my hat! We ought to have guessed-"

"Collar the rotters!" shrieked Monty Lowther. "Squash 'em! Bump 'em! Slaughter 'em! Jump on 'em!"

"This is where we mizzle!" grinned Figgins.

And the unmasked trio dashed through the door at the upper end of the stage.

One minute later a crowd of School

(Continued on page 28.)

PEN PALS

(Continued from page 17.)

Billie Lloyd, Albermarle Hotel, Brighton; age 13-15; stamps.

Douglas A. Chudleigh, 4, Malton Way, Clifton, York; age 15-18; stamps, coins; overseas.

Stan Macdonald, 28, Thelma Street, Como, Perth, Western Australia.

Bennet Perera, 23, Imbi Road, Kuala Lumpur, Malaya; stamps; Australia, South Africa.

Harry King, 37, London Road, Chertsey, Surrey; age 11-14; British Empire and U.S.

David Cossar, 35, Denham Street, Hawthorn, Victoria, Australia; age 12-16; football, cricket.

I. Schuspy, 24, Breda Street, Cape Town, South Africa; age 13-18; stamps.

Miss Iris Eaton, 145, Umbilo Road, Durban, Natal, South Africa; girl correspondents; age 18 up.

A. Moskowit, Eureka, Hansen Road, Muizenberg, South Africa; age 14-16; stamps, coins.

Arthur Howse, 9, Burlington Road, Small Heath, Birmingham; correspondent in Kent; Gems and "Magnets."

Miss Daphne Lovick, Everley, 18, Baldock Road, Letchworth, Herts; girl correspondents; age 12-16; overseas.

Miss H. Harris, 74, Lawrence Road, Hove, 3, Sussex; girl correspondents; 18 up; films, travel, etc.

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W. C. Harper 99, Arlington Street, Islington, London, N.1, wants pen pals.

Miss Mara Hennings, Naitauba, Lau Group, Fiji Islands; girl correspondents; age 11-15; films, gardening.

Desmond V. Jenkins, 27, Mt. Roskill Road, Auckland S.3, New Zealand; members for the Kiwi Correspondence Club.

Geoffrey N. Barker, Ransom Sanatorium, Rainworth, Mansfield, Notts; Canada, South Africa, U.S.A.

Neville White, 589, Lincoln Road, Halswell, Canterbury, New Zealand; age 12-14; stamps.

A. J. Tew, 38, Essex Park, Finchley, London, N.3; age 12-14; Canada; books, aviation.

Charles William Smith, 127, Ferry Road, Linwood, Christchurch, New Zealand; age 19-21; sports, travel.

Maurice Furlonger, 73, Godfrey Road, Woolwich, London, S.E.18; age 10-12; sports.

Miss Irene Case, c/o. The Butts, Oughterside, Maryport, Cumberland; girl correspondents; age from 17.

Miss Marjorie Fretwell, 3, Sweet Street, West Holbeck, Leeds, 11, Yorks; girl correspondents; overseas.

Miss Pamela Hitchmough, Talbot House, Parkgate, Cheshire; girl correspondents; London, U.S.A.; sports.

Arthur Sambrook, Fair Holm, Turnhurst, Tunstall, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs, wants pen pals in Texas and Hollywood.

Arthur Collins, 656, Second Avenue, Verdun, Pro. Quebec, Canada; age 12-16; stamps, sports.

James McNay, 92, Waverley Street, Crossmyloof, Glasgow, S.1; members for the Magnet and Gem Club.

R. Hilton, Glen Roy, Westhill Road, Cowes, Isle of Wight; age 16-18; Australia, Canada; Meccano.

THE MYSTERY MIDNIGHT MARAUDER OF ROOKWOOD SCHOOL!



As Mr. Dalton entered his study Lovell could only stare at him in astonishment. He was fairly caught! The room was completely wrecked! "Lovell, you will be expelled for this!" said the Fourth Form master.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

The Heavy Hand!

"THAT cad Carthew!" growled Lovell.

"Better go!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Rats!"
"Look here, Lovell, you'd better—"
"Rot!"

When Arthur Edward Lovell of the Classical Fourth Form at Rookwood spoke in that tone it meant that there was to be no further argument. When Arthur Edward had made up his mind, words of wisdom were wasted on him.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were at games practice on Little Side when Carthew of the Sixth came along. Standing in touch, Carthew shouted to Lovell.

It was irritating enough to all the junior footballers. No doubt Lovell had lines. No doubt he hadn't done them. No doubt he ought to have done them. But no Sixth Form prefect at Rookwood School, except Mark Carthew, would have interrupted games practice on a matter of lines. The fact was that Carthew was a bully, and had a special down on that cheery company, the Fistical Four. He liked to make himself obnoxious.

Arthur Edward had looked round as Carthew called him. But he took no further notice. The Classics were playing in a pick-up, to get into form for the House match with the Moderns which was coming off on Saturday. Soccer was more important than Carthew—in Lovell's opinion, at least. Lovell was in the Classical junior team. He was going to be at the top of his form on Saturday. He plunged into the game again, heedless of the prefect shouting on the touchline.

"Lovell," roared Carthew, "come off at once!"

And as Lovell still turned a deaf ear, Carthew of the Sixth strode on the field, with the evident intention of grabbing Lovell and hooking him off. It was then that Dudley Vane, new fellow in the Classical Fourth, weighed in. He had the ball at his feet, and he kicked it—at Carthew!

Plop!

Carthew did not know that it was

coming till it came! It landed on his ear, and the prefect went staggering.

"Ha, ha, ha!" a yell went up.

Carthew righted himself, clapped a hand to a muddy ear, and stared round, crimson with rage. His eyes had been on Lovell, and he had not seen who landed the leather.

"Who kicked that ball?" roared Carthew. "Was it you, Silver?"

"Not guilty, my lord!" grinned Jimmy.

"You, Raby—or you, Newcome?"

But Raby and Newcome grinned and shook their heads.

"Serve you jolly well right!" hooted Lovell. "What do you mean by barging on the field? Get out of it!"

Carthew made a rush for him. Mornington put out a foot, and Carthew tripped and went over.

"Man down!" chortled Conroy, in goal. "Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a rush of the footballers. Carthew had interrupted the pick-up. They could not get on with the game with the bully of the Sixth throwing his weight about in the field. So a dozen fellows at once had the bright idea of making Carthew sorry he had barged in. Morny was the first to fall on him, then Erroll, then Oswald, and then Jimmy Silver, Raby, Newcome, and Lovell added their weight.

Carthew disappeared from sight. Juniors swarmed all over him and swamped him, and under them the bully of the Sixth wriggled and writhed and gasped and gurgled. He had asked for it—there was no doubt about that. And in the excitement of the moment the Fourth Formers rather forgot that they were dealing with a prefect!

Who made a mess of the Form-master's study? The finger of suspicion points to Lovell, caught on the scene of the outrage. But is he guilty?

"Oooogh!" gurgled the hapless Sixth Former. "Gerroff! You young—Urrgh! I'll report this—Urrgh! I'll—Yurrgh!"

How many muddy football boots were wiped on Carthew he could hardly have counted. They were wiped hard, too! Carthew of the Sixth, for some wild and whirling minutes, led the life of a doormat.

"Gerroff!" shrieked Carthew. "Stop stamping on me! Yaroooh! Gerroff! Will you lemme gerrup? Yooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ware beaks, you men!" called out Dudley Vane suddenly. "Here comes Dalton!"

"Oh scissors!" gasped Lovell.

The Classical juniors looked round in alarm. Mr. Richard Dalton, the master of the Fourth, was striding on the scene. From a distance Mr. Dalton had discerned that something unusual was going on, and he was hastening up to see what it was.

The crowd parted over Carthew. He sat up. He sat and gurgled and gasped. He looked a shocking sight. His collar and tie were gone; his coat was split up the back; his hat had disappeared. He was covered with mud as with a garment. There was hardly a square inch of Carthew that was not muddy. He sat and spluttered.

Richard Dalton, arriving, gazed at him. He hardly recognised Carthew's face under a thick coating of mud.

"Who—who—who is that?" gasped Mr. Dalton. "Silver, who is that?"

"I—I—I think it's Carthew of the Sixth, sir!" stammered Jimmy.

"Carthew! A prefect! You have dared to lay hands on a prefect!" exclaimed the Fourth Form master.

"The cheeky ass barged into our game, sir," said Dudley Vane.

"Shut up, you ass!" whispered Jimmy Silver.

Mr. Dalton flashed a look at the new boy in the Fourth. Dudley Vane had been hardly a week at Rookwood, but he had made himself liked in the Classical Fourth. He was good at games, which was a passport to the

esteem of Jimmy Silver & Co. He was good in class—unusually good and keen—which gave Mr. Dalton a good opinion of him. Dalton, like his Form, liked the new fellow, but he had no use for impertinence, even from a boy he liked. "Vane, take a hundred lines for impertinence!" rapped the master of the Fourth.

"Sorry, sir!" said Vane. "I didn't mean to be cheeky, but Carthew did barge in and interrupt our game, sir."

"Carthew, what does this mean?" Carthew staggered to his feet. He was still gasping for breath. He clawed mud from his face.

"Ooogh! Those young rascals—Ooogh! Look what they've done! I came here to call Lovell—oogh!—and they rushed me over—Groogh!"

"You had better go to the House, Carthew," said Mr. Dalton. "I will deal with these juniors. You need have no doubt that they will be adequately punished for assaulting a prefect."

Carthew, still gasping, tottered away. Mr. Dalton fixed stern eyes on the juniors. Seldom had the Classical Fourth seen their Form-master look so angry. They waited in silence for the thunderbolt. Even Arthur Edward Lovell, little given to reflection as he was, realised that it was a serious matter to handle a prefect of the Sixth—so serious a matter that the Fourth Form master could not have passed it over, even had he wished to do so. And Dicky Dalton did not look as if he wished to do so.

"Every boy here," said Mr. Dalton grimly, "will take five hundred lines, and will be kept in detention on Saturday afternoon."

There was a general gasp. "Oh, sir!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Saturday's the House match—"

"I am aware of it, Silver. That is your punishment. If you behave like hooligans on the football field—"

"But we can't cut House matches, sir!" gasped Lovell, in consternation.

Mr. Dalton gave him a look, turned on his heel, and walked away. Jimmy Silver & Co. stood looking after him—in silence. It was the silence of utter dismay.

Tubby Knows What!

JIMMY SILVER'S face was glum at tea in the end study that day. "Keep smiling" was the motto of "Uncle James" of Rookwood, but Jimmy's smile was now conspicuous by its absence.

House matches were rather important affairs at Rookwood. And Jimmy Silver had his team at the top notch, ready to wipe the Moderns off the face of the earth. Jimmy played centre-half himself. He had a keen eye for a fellow's form in the front line, and he had picked out the new fellow, Vane, to play forward—and from what he had seen of him he regarded him as a rod in pickle for the Moderns.

The whole thing was absolutely rotten. Another date had to be found for the match; but the footballers did not want to find another date—they wanted to play the House match on the date arranged. They did not want to sit in detention, writing endless lines, instead of playing football.

"All Lovell's fault, of course!" remarked Raby.

Arthur Edward gave him a glare across the tea-table. Arthur Edward was rubbing an eye that persisted in winking.

"How was it my fault?" bawled Lovell.

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"If you'd gone off when Carthew called you—" said Newcome. "After all, it wasn't a match—only a pick-up—"

"Blow Carthew!"

"The truth is, we all asked for it," said Jimmy Silver. "Ragging a prefect is outside the limit. Dicky was bound to come down heavy."

"Dicky's an ass!" growled Lovell.

"Well, that fathead Vane started the ragging," said Raby. "Look here, Vane, you're new here; but you jolly well know you can't kick a footer at the head of a Sixth Form prefect."

Dudley Vane laughed.

"The other fellows seemed ready enough to follow my lead," he remarked. "I think I saw you wiping your boots on the cad!"

"Well, yes; but—"

"Rot!" said Lovell. "Vane was right—and so were we. That cad Carthew came there to stir up trouble, and he got what he came for." Arthur Edward rubbed his eye again. "That silly ass, Tommy Dodd, had the cheek to say that we should have got licked on Saturday, anyhow, when I told him. I punched him."

Judging by the state of Lovell's eye, Tommy Dodd of the Modern Fourth had also done some punching.

"Well, it can't be helped!" sighed Jimmy Silver. "No chance of playing on Saturday now—Oh, get out, Muffin!" he added, with an irritation unusual to Uncle James, as Tubby Muffin looked into the study.

But Cecil Adolphus Muffin did not get out. He waddled in.

"It's all right, you fellows!" said Tubby cheerily. "Don't you worry about the House match on Saturday. It will all come off all right."

The Fistical Four and Dudley Vane jumped. They forgot tea, and stared eagerly at Tubby.

They could only conclude, from his words, that Dicky Dalton had relented and washed out the detention for Saturday afternoon. If that was the message that Tubby Muffin was bringing to the study, he was as welcome as the flowers in May.

"Oh, good!" gasped Jimmy. "That's ripping! Have you got that from Dicky Dalton?"

"Eh! No!"

"Then what—?"

"What I mean is," explained the fat Classical, "that you fellows ain't the only pebbles on the beach."

"Wha-a-at?"

"Only the chaps who were at games practice have got detention," said Tubby. "Well, there's a lot more fellows, ain't there? There's me, for instance—"

"You!" exclaimed Jimmy.

"Me!" said Muffin. "You needn't scratch that match, Jimmy. All you've got to do is to make up an eleven of the fellows who aren't detained. I'm prepared to captain the side."

The end study gazed at Tubby Muffin. They did not seem able to speak. They just gazed at him, like cows at a train.

"What about that?" asked Tubby.

It was true that there were plenty of juniors on the Classical side to make up another eleven, apart from the fellows who had fallen under the frown of authority. Unfortunately, they were not much use at footer. Slackers like Peele and Gover of the Fourth, dandies like Townsend and Topham, were hardly the men to stop the Moderns. Superb youths like Smythe and Tracy of the Shell were more ornamental than useful. As for Tubby, he was neither

ornamental nor useful—though no doubt the fat and ineffable Tubby would have been prepared to captain the side.

Apparently Tubby took silence for consent.

"Is it a go?" he asked. "I'll skipper the side with pleasure. I fancy I can pick out some pretty good men. After all, you chap, don't amount to much, if you don't mind my mentioning it. Look at the way Lovell barges about at half; look at the way Raby and Newcome fall over their own feet in the front line. Even you, Jimmy, old chap, stick at centre-half like a sack of coke, if you don't mind my saying so! If you like to leave this to me—"

Tubby Muffin got no further than that.

If Tubby had come to the end study with the kind desire to help Silver out of a difficulty, he was repaid with the blackest ingratitude.

Four fellows were still gazing at the happy Tubby, as if petrified, when Lovell woke to action. He grabbed a loaf from the table. He hurled it.

Crash! It landed on the best-filled waistcoat at Rookwood School. It cut short Tubby's remarks with startling suddenness.

"Urrrgh!" gurgled Tubby, as he staggered.

Bump!

The end study almost shook, as Cecil Adolphus Muffin sat down.

"Ooogh!" spluttered Tubby.

"You fat, fooling, frumpious freak!" roared Lovell. "Making us think that Dicky had let us off, and then—"

"Urrrgh!"

"By gum, I'll—"

Instead of explaining what he would do, Lovell did it. He jumped up and rushed at Tubby.

Tubby Muffin squirmed out of the study doorway like a fat eel. He squirmed swiftly, but not swiftly enough. Lovell's boot reached him in the doorway, and helped him into the passage.

Muffin disappeared with a roar.

Lovell slammed the door after him.

But Tubby Muffin's brilliant suggestion had not helped matters, and there were gloomy faces in the Classical Fourth that evening. For once, Dicky Dalton, generally very popular in his Form, was the most unpopular beak at Rookwood.

All the footballers agreed that it was too thick, and some mooted the idea of "getting back" on Dicky, and making it clear to him what his Form thought of him. And Arthur Edward Lovell, needless to say, was one of them. Arthur Edward could always be relied upon to rush in where angels feared to tread!

Looking After Lovell!

WHAT the thump's that?" "That," said Lovell rather proudly, "is for Dicky Dalton!"

It was after class the following day. In the Form-room that day many fellows had looked glum, even sulky. They wanted Dalton to see how he had fallen in their estimation.

If Dalton saw it, he did not seem to mind. He carried on as usual, regardless of the lowered estimation of the Fourth.

After class there was only one topic—the cancelled football match and Saturday's detention. Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome were still on that sore topic in the quad when Dudley Vane



Carthew was a shocking sight when he sat up. His collar and tie were gone, his coat was spilt up the back, and he was covered with mud. "Who is that?" asked Mr. Dalton, hardly recognising the prefect. "I-I-I think it's Carthew, sir," stammered Jimmy. "Carthew!" exclaimed the Fourth Form master. "You have dared to lay hands on a prefect!"

came up to the end study, with a bundle under his arm, from the school shop, for tea. He found Lovell there, and he stared at Lovell and his occupation with wide eyes.

On the study table lay a large sheet of cardboard. On that card Arthur Edward Lovell was daubing capital letters with a brush in ink. He was giving the final touches when the new junior came in. Vane stared blankly as he read:

"DON'T BE AN ASS, DICKY!

WASH IT OUT!

PLAY THE GAME!"

Having read that remarkable legend, Dudley Vane looked at Lovell. In Lovell's face was a smiling satisfaction—which might almost have been called fatuous. Lovell, evidently, was pleased with his handiwork.

"What on earth are you going to do with that?" gasped Vane. "If Dalton sees it, you'll get a whopping!" "Dalton's going to see it!" said Lovell calmly. "I've done it specially for Dalton to see it, of course."

"Oh, my hat!" said Vane. "It will let him know what the Fourth think of him—see?" Lovell condescended to explain. "It will be a strong hint that he's gone too far. There's plenty of time for him to wash out the detention before Saturday, if he takes this tip."

"But," gasped Vane, "if Dicky Dalton sees that he'll march you straight to the Head. What do you suppose Dr. Chisholm will think of it?"

"I'm not going to sign my name to it!" said Lovell sarcastically. "And I'm not going to tap at Dalton's door and hand it to him personally!"

"Then how—"

There was a tramp of feet in the passage, and Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome came in.

They, like Vane, stared at Lovell's card.

"What the merry dickens—" exclaimed Jimmy.

"For goodness' sake, you men, talk to that ass!" said Vane. "He's got that up for Dicky Dalton!"

"What?" yelled the three.

"It's all right, you fellows," said Lovell calmly. "I'm not asking for a flogging. I'm going to tack this card up in Dalton's study for him to find there—some time when he's not there, of course. Easy enough to go down from the dorm to-night and do it. See?"

Vane jumped. "Go down from the dorm at night!" he exclaimed, evidently startled.

"Easy as falling off a form," said Lovell complacently. "You're a new kid, Vane, and don't know the ropes. Think we've never been out of the dormitory after lights out before?"

"You'll be spotted!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

"Rot!"

"You'll be flogged!" howled Raby.

"Rubbish!"

"You're not going to do it!" shrieked Newcome.

"Bosh!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. gazed at Arthur Edward. Breaking dormitory bounds after lights out was a serious thing in itself, though, as Lovell had said, fellows had done that before. Putting that notice up in Dalton's study was a much more serious thing. Even if Dicky Dalton was an ass—as the Fourth Form rather thought at present—it was not a safe game to tell him so. Painful truths of that nature could not be told to Form-masters.

Lovell, of course, thought that he was going to do this, with his usual astuteness, without getting spotted. But his chums knew what his astuteness was like. They had had some, so to speak!

"You—you—you ass!" said Jimmy Silver at last. "You'll be spotted out of dorm bounds—"

"You know what a fathead you are," Raby pointed out.

"If there's a master up you'll walk right into him," said Newcome. "If there isn't, you'll knock over something and wake one."

"For goodness' sake, chuck it!" said Vane.

Lovell's face set obstinately. Oppositions always had that effect on Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Don't talk rot!" he said. "And I don't want any cheeky advice from a new kid, Vane, either! I thought you fellows would think this a ripping wheeze!"

"Oh, topping!" said Jimmy. "Only—don't do it!"

"Well, I'm going to do it!"

"Look here, Lovell—"

"You can jaw," said Lovell, "till you're black in the face. But I'm going to do it, all the same."

Dudley Vane glanced round at the faces of the Co., half-resigned and half-alarmed. They knew from experience how useless it was to argue with Lovell.

"Are you going to let that ass do this?" asked Vane.

"You shut up!" hooted Lovell.

"Why not tear up that card and jam it down the back of his neck, as a warning not to play the goat?" suggested Vane.

"Why, you—you cheeky rotter!" roared Lovell, in great wrath. "I'd like to see anybody jam that card

down the back of my neck! I'd just like—"

Jimmy Silver chuckled.

"Vane, old man, you're a new kid here, but you've got some jolly good ideas," he said. "You fellows, let's!"

"I'd like to see you do it!" bawled Lovell.

"Good! Then you shall," said Jimmy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Three fellows jumped at Lovell, and collared him. Arthur Edward gave a roar of wrath and resisted fiercely. But with Raby and Newcome grasping his arms and Jimmy Silver gripping the back of his collar, Arthur Edward had simply no chance.

"Go it, Vane!" panted Jimmy.

Dudley Vane, grinning, grabbed up the card. He tore it across, and across again, heedless of Lovell's frenzied indignation. Then he proceeded to cram the fragments down Arthur Edward's back.

Lovell struggled frantically.

"You rotters!" he roared. "Leggo! I'll smash you! Ow! Vane, you cad, I'll bash you! I'll mop you up! Leggo!"

"Hold him!" grinned Jimmy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell was not easy to hold—but he was held. Struggling and wriggling wildly, he had the last fragment of the torn cardboard jammed down the back of his neck. He fairly raved with wrath.

"That's that!" said Jimmy Silver. "Don't be shirty, old bean; we're only saying you from a Head's flogging."

"You cheeky rotters!" shrieked Lovell.

"Now let's have tea, old chap," said Jimmy amicably.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell was released. He stood crimson and panting. For a moment or two he looked as if he would burl himself headlong at his friends, hitting out right and left. Fortunately, he refrained from those extreme measures. He swung round to the door, stamped out into the passage, and slammed the door after him with a terrific slam.

He was not present at tea in the end study that day. Later, at prep, his face was grim and unfriendly. His chums had the consolation of feeling that they had saved him from himself. But had they?

Done in the Dark!

MIDNIGHT!

Lovell of the Fourth sat up in bed.

Lovell, when he went to bed that night in the Classical Fourth dormitory, fully intended to keep awake. He did keep awake for about a quarter of an hour, after which he dropped into slumber. But he did not sleep quite so soundly as was his wont—which was as soundly as a top, as a rule.

It was on his mind that he had meant to keep awake. And when the deep boom of midnight came through the silence he opened his eyes and sat up and blinked round him in the darkness of the dormitory.

All was dark, only a pale gleam of starlight dropping from the high windows. There was a faint sound of deep breathing, and a snore from Tubby Muffin. No other fellow was awake, and Lovell, sitting with the bedclothes round him, sleepy and disinclined to turn out, was strongly tempted to lay

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his head on the pillow again and drop back into dreamland.

But obstinacy supervened.

It was warm in bed; it was cold and chilly outside. But Lovell was not the fellow to back down. What he had said, he had said! He had declared that he was going to stick that defiant message in Dicky Dalton's study. His friends had put "paid" to that—as they fancied. Certainly, Lovell had no idea of piecing together the sheet of cardboard which had been rammed, in sections, down his back. That would have been as difficult a task as putting Humpty-Dumpty together again, after

for two reasons—he was in haste, and it was very cold. If any of his pals woke up there would be trouble, for it was very probable that they would intervene to prevent him from leaving the dormitory.

He made hardly any sound. Softly, on tiptoe, he reached the door, opened it noiselessly, and stepped out. Quietly he drew the door shut after him.

He stepped away down the passage, to the stairs, groping in the dark. He had left it very late—later than he had intended. Still, that made it all the safer, for at midnight it was absolutely certain that nobody would be out of bed. At the same time, Lovell did not enjoy creeping through a sleeping House, in darkness and silence.

Darkness and silence, however, were not dangerous; it was only a matter of nerves. Not a single light burned in all the great building of Rookwood School. Here and there, from a window, came a pale glimmer—that was all. He felt for the banisters, and groped down.

Masters' studies were as silent as the tomb. Lovell's heart was beating a little faster as he reached Mr. Dalton's door. And it not only beat faster, but jumped at a sudden sound inside the study as he turned the door-handle.

He stood almost palpitating.

What was that sound?

Dalton could not be still up at midnight. Besides, there was no light in the study. He could not be there without a light. But what was that sound?

With thumping heart, he listened.

There could be nobody in the study. Yet he had heard a sound as of a sudden movement; as if someone inside the room had been startled by the turning of the door-handle. Thoughts of burglars flashed uncomfortably into his mind.

He listened. There was no repetition of the sound. A long minute passed—and another. Still deep silence.

He wondered whether he had imagined that sound. Or had it been the rustle of ivy at the window, stirred by the wind? He made up his mind at last, and opened the door a few inches, and peered in.

All was dark—all was silent. He smiled at his own uneasiness, pushed the door wider open and stepped into the room.

What happened next seemed like some evil dream to Lovell.

From the darkness a dark figure dimly loomed, leaping from behind the door he had opened.

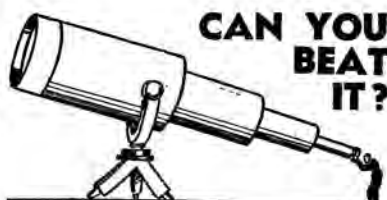
A violent shove sent him reeling and stumbling across the study, to fall with a crash. The next instant the figure was gone.

"Oh!" gasped Lovell. "Ow! Oh, what—what—"

He sprawled on the floor. He sat up dizzily. His hands went up instinctively to ward off attack. Something like terror seized on him there in the darkness—fear of an enemy in the dark—dread of the unknown, the unseen. His heart beat in great throbs.

But there was silence. A faint sound came from afar, like a retreating footstep in the distance. That was all. Lovell struggled to his feet.

His hands were wet. He realised it with amazement. How had his hands got wet on Dalton's carpet? He stood peering and shuddering. Someone had been in the study in the dark—had knocked him over to make his escape, and was gone. He knew now that he really had heard a sound when he stood outside the door—he knew that someone had been there, and had placed himself to be hidden by the door when it opened. Who?



CAN YOU BEAT IT?

ASTRONOMERS, gazing through telescopes, can see 5,000,000 times as many stars as we can with our eyes. Now they are building a telescope double the size of the present world's largest one—at Mount Wilson Observatory, in America—to see still more. The lens of this new telescope will be sixteen feet across and cost two million pounds.

Talking about lenses, did you know that an American movie camera was made recently which had 30,000 of them? It was designed for super-speed cinephotography and can take 30,000 separate photos in a single second—one picture per lens. Slow motion films are taken at the rate of 128 pictures a second; ordinary movies at 24!

The first microscope was made by a draper's assistant called Leuenhoek, who ground lenses for a hobby. He didn't know how to focus and had to make a new microscope for each object he wished to examine. Eventually he blinded himself by trying to watch a gunpowder explosion through one of his crude instruments.

The Romans had no butter and no sugar. They used to spread oil on their bread and sweeten their food with honey.

And did you know that one-way streets were used in Ancient Rome? Julius Caesar invented them 2,000 years before they were used in London.

his celebrated accident. But there are more ways than one of killing a cat!

His friends had had an eye on him that evening. Had Lovell been seen with another placard, like the first, that placard would certainly have followed the first, down Lovell's back. But they were not aware that Lovell had put a stick of chalk into his pocket before going up to the dorm. They were not aware that he was going, in spite of them, to carry out his stunt—though instead of sticking up a cardboard placard in Mr. Dalton's study, he was going to chalk his message on the looking-glass there.

Making an effort, Lovell stepped out of bed.

Once out, he dressed himself quickly,

The blinds were over the study window. It was no burglar from outside. It dawned on Lovell's startled mind that most likely it had been some fellow on an errand like his own. He was not the only fellow in the Fourth who had thought of a "rag" on Dalton.

That idea was rather a comfort to him. It was less horrifying if that dark and mysterious figure was only some reckless japer like himself—a Rookwood fellow out of dorm bounds. Standing there in the dark, trying to think it out, Lovell rather forgot that he had made a terrific crash in going over, and that the Masters' rooms were over the studies. It was extremely probable that Mr. Dalton, in the room above, had been awakened by that crash in his study below.

That possibility was brought to Lovell's mind by the sound of an opening door. In the silence of the night he heard that sound from up the staircase. He caught his breath.

Someone had been awakened. Lovell gritted his teeth. That fool who had been there in the dark, and had knocked him over, had spoiled everything. He had intended to draw back the blinds, and chalk his message on the looking-glass by the gleam of the starlight. Obviously, he had no time for that now. He had time to make his escape before he was discovered there—and lucky if he had that.

He groped towards the door. Crash!

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Lovell. He had barged into something in the dark. In amazement he realised that he was stumbling over a pile of books in the middle of the room.

He stumbled and fell, scattering volumes to right and left. His head knocked on something. It was the leg of an overturned armchair. He gave a startled howl.

The study had been ragged by the unknown predecessor. That flashed into his mind now. The whole room was in disorder. It was ink that smothered his hands, where they had come into contact with the carpet. Ink had been spilt all over the place.

He scrambled up wildly. He gave a yell, as his hands came in contact with broken glass on the floor. He banged his elbow on something—it was Mr. Dalton's bookcase lying on its side.

Amazed, horrified, wildly excited, Lovell got to his feet, and groped to the door. He stumbled over the legs of a chair, and ran into something that seemed like a post—it was the leg of a table that was upside-down. A gleam of light from the passage flashed into the room.

Footsteps approached. He could guess whose. Lovell gasped. His escape was cut off. The light was in the passage.

He stood panting, horrified, at his wits' end, as an athletic figure, in a dressing-gown, stepped into the doorway. Richard Dalton switched on the light in the study.

"Lovell!" Lovell could not speak. He could only stare at Mr. Dalton. He was fairly caught. Mr. Dalton's glance rested on him only for a second. Then it passed round the study. The look that came over his face almost petrified Lovell.

He also looked round. What he saw almost shattered his nerves. He had realised already that a ragger had been at work. Now, in the light, he saw the extent of the "rag." He could scarcely believe what he saw.

A "rag" was not an uncommon occurrence at Rookwood. Lovell had seen a

study "shipped" before—had indeed taken a hand in such "shippings." But he had never seen anything like this.

The study was a wreck. Tables and chairs were overturned. The armchair had been ripped, and the stuffing streamed out. Ink drenched the carpet, and splashed on the walls. The looking-glass, where Lovell had intended to leave his defiant message, was starred in the centre. The bookcase lay on the floor, the glass doors cracked and broken, the books heaped over the room. Papers from the desk had been torn and scattered, like scent in a paper-chase. Cinders and ashes from the grate had been flung about in handfuls. The clock lay in the fender, with the poker thrust into the works. Whoever had ragged that study had gone to work rather like a bull in a china-shop. It was amazing that he had been able to carry out such a ragging without noise. Lovell fairly stuttered at the sight of that widespread wreckage.

Richard Dalton stood dumbfounded for a long moment. Then he spoke:

"Lovell, you will be expelled for this. Go back to your dormitory!"

Lovell stared at him. Not till that moment had it dawned on Lovell that he would be suspected of that outrageous rag.

"I!" he gasped. "I never did that—"

"What?"

"I never did it!" panted Lovell. "I haven't been here a few minutes—I never did a thing—I—I never—"

"That will do!" Mr. Dalton's tone was cold and contemptuous. "You need say no more, Lovell! Go back to your dormitory at once."

"But I—I—I never—"

"Go!"

And Lovell went like a fellow in a dream.

Who?

"YOU mad ass!" said Valentine Mornington.

After breakfast, in the morning, fellows were gathered in groups in the quadrangle, excitedly discussing the news.

That news was all over Rookwood School. All the Head's House—the Classical Side—knew, and it had reached Manders' House—the Modern Side. Moderns were as excited about it as Classics. It was an event in the history of Rookwood. It was such a "rag" as had never happened before, since the old school in Hampshire had had a local habitation and a name. Everybody knew what had happened, and knew that Lovell was under orders to go before the Head. Morny came out of the House, after looking in at the wrecked study, and came up to the Fistical Four, surrounded by a crowd of excited juniors.

"You potty idiot!" went on Morny. "Were you off your rocker last night? You'll be sacked!"

"I never did it!" roared Lovell.

"Oh, don't be an ass! Didn't Dalton catch you doing it?"

"No," roared Lovell, "he didn't! He caught me there, but I never did it! I dare say you did it!"

"What!" yelled Morny.

"Well, you're reckless idiot enough," said Lovell. "I don't know any man in the Fourth who'd do it, unless you did."

Mornington glared at him, speechless. Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome were looking utterly dismayed. They had to take their chum's word that he

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had not done it. But it was putting their faith in his word to a tremendous strain.

"Think I'd do such an absolutely rotten" and "blackguardly thing?" bawled Lovell. "I went there to rag Dicky—I own that. But I wasn't going to do any damage. Think I'm a dashed hoodlum, or what?"

"Somebody did it," said Peele of the Fourth.

"Yes; and it was the brute who was skulking in the study when I got there, and knocked me over, and got away in the dark!" gasped Lovell.

"Was there somebody?" grinned Cyril Peele.

"Yes, there was, you cad! I dare say it was you!" bawled Lovell. "You've always been up against Dicky, because he's whopped you for smoking. And you're cad enough to do it!"

"No good slinging round accusations at every fellow who speaks to you, old bean," remarked Dudley Vane.

Lovell gave him a fierce glare.

"Do you believe I did it?" he bel- lowed. He clenched his fists.

Vane shook his head.

"No, I don't. I haven't been here long, but I've been in your study long enough to know that I can take your word. If you say you didn't do it, you didn't."

"Oh!" said Lovell, mollified. "That's decent of you, Vane. I've every fellow here my word that I never did it!"

"Let's hope the Head will be your word like Vane," chuckled.

"Don't you?" roared Lovell.

"Well, it's a bit thick, isn't it?" said Gower. "Dicky caught you on the spot, with his study wrecked. What did it, if you didn't?"

"I dare say you did."

"Yes, you're rotter enough! And I dare say you did it because Dicky's whopped you for having a racing paper in your study."

"Why, you're ciky rotter—"

"I'll jolly well—"

"For goodness' sake draw it mild, Lovell!" said Jimmy Silver, interposing. "It wasn't you, as you say it wasn't, but don't accuse every fellow in the school, one after another."

"Well, it was somebody," said Lovell. "Might have been a Snell chap. Nobody was out of our dorm when I got back to it. If it was you, Smythe—"

"You silly ass!" gasped Smythe of the Shell.

"Well, if it was you, you'd better

own up when I have to go before the big beak."

"I say, that man Lovell is getting dangerous," said Tommy Dodd of the Modern Fourth. "He'll be saying it was me next."

Lovell spun round at the Modern junior.

"I dare say it was!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Just like a Modern cad!" hooped Lovell. "Come to think of it, no Classical man would do a dirty trick like that! Modern all over!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled a dozen fellows.

"You can cackle!" roared Lovell.

"I'll bet it was a Modern cad all the time. Just a rotten Modern trick. You can all see that. I'd like to know how you got into the House, Dodd, if you did it."

"You silly owl!" yelled Tommy Dodd. "You did it, and you're jolly well going to be sacked for it, and serve you jolly well right! And— Yaroooh!"

Lovell was on him before he could finish. Lovell's right landed on Tommy Dodd's nose—his left followed it up in Tommy's eye. The Modern junior went over with a crash.

"Lovell!" shrieked Jimmy.

Tommy Dodd was up in a twinkling, and hurling himself at Lovell. Arthur Edward met him more than half-way.

"Go in, Tommy!" yelled Cook and Doyle.

"Stop them!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Here comes Dalton!" shouted Vane. But the combatants did not heed Dalton. They were fighting furiously, tramping and gasping, lifting hard, and hitting often.

Mr. Dalton, with a sweeping bow, strode on the scene. He grasped Tommy Dodd with his left hand, Lovell with his right, and fairly wrenched them away from one another.

"Stop this, instantly!" he snapped.

"Lovell, follow me! Dr. Chisholm is ready to see you."

"Oooh!" gasped Lovell.

He dabbed his handkerchief to his nose, which streamed red. That handkerchief was very quickly spotted with crimson.

"Follow me!" snapped Mr. Dalton. And Arthur Edward Lovell followed him, still with his handkerchief to his nose, leaving the crowd in the quadrangle in a wild buzz of excitement behind him.

(Is Lovell booked for the "sack"?

And who is the mystery study-wrecker?

Don't miss reading "THE UNSEEN HAND!"—next week's great yarn.)

THE MASKED TRIO!

(Continued from page 22.)

House fellows were shying at it, but it was locked on the other side.

"Figgins & Co. were gone, and were safe in their own House before the School House crowd could get through the door.

In the wild excitement Cutts & Co. roared for help in vain for some time. They were untied at last, gasping and spluttering, and they crawled away smothered with flour, followed by yells of laughter.

There was no doubt that Cutts & Co. of the Fifth had been utterly and hopelessly done.

"Well, my only hat!" Tom Merry exclaimed, as the excited crowd surged out of the Form-room. "I never dreamed of it. Figgys must have got on to the wheeze somehow, and—"

"And spoofed you!" grinned Blake.

"Didn't I tell you you'd better leave the wheeze to Study No. 6?"

"Yes, wathah!"

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry. "Let's go over and see Figgys. He's done us brown; but he's done the Fifth brown—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who's Cock House of St. J.?" yelled Redfern.

"We are!" said Tom Merry promptly. "But Figgys' done this time and we owe up."

Figgins & Co. were looking out of their study window when the School House fellows came across the quad.

They waved black silk masks at the Fourth, Third, and ground.

Tom Merry laughed.

"It's all right, Figgys!" he called out. "We're not on the warpath! Pax, you giddy impostor! You've done the Fifth, and we're going to stand you a feed, so come down, and if Fatty's got any room left after the pie and the tarts—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What-ho!" said Patty Wynn at once. "That was only a snack!"

And the School House and the New House juniors fraternised most amicably in the tuckshop, while Cutts & Co. came charging home from their clothes and themselves, and waving vengeance upon the Masked Trio.

(Next Wednesday: "ST. JIM'S ON THE WARPATH!" They're at it again! Tom Merry & Co. and the Grammarians get to grips in next week's sparkling long story. It's a riot of ragging and fun. Look out for it!)

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