

"SKIPPER AND SCHEMER!" **THRILLING LONG ST. JIM'S STORY** **INSIDE.**

The **GEM** **2d**



"RESCUE ST JIM'S!"

2
GERALD CUTTS' ONLY CHANCE OF RETAINING THE CAPTAINCY OF ST. JIM'S IS TO
PREVENT THE RETURN OF KILDARE!

SKIPPER and SCHEMER!



"It's a question of preventing Kildare from coming back to St. Jim's for a few weeks," said Cutts, almost in a whisper. "That's where I want you to help me, Lasker. Kildare is not to reach the school on Wednesday!"

CHAPTER 1.

Tidings of Great Joy!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY heard the news first. Arthur Augustus, the swell of the School House at St. Jim's, was usually distinguished for a lofty repose of manner. He cultivated carefully the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere. But when he heard the news his noble visage was irradiated with joy, and his manners quite lost their aristocratic repose. His monocle dropped from his eye as he rushed upstairs to the junior quarters with a wild and excited haste that bore no resemblance whatever to the repose of Vere de Vere.

He was scudding along the Fourth Form passage to Study No. 6, when he met the Terrible Three—Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther of the Shell. Each of them had a sheaf of imput paper in his hand, and their faces wore glum expressions.

They were taking their lines to the captain of St. Jim's—after an hour's hard work in their study to get them done. Hence their glumness.

Evil days had fallen upon the chums of St. Jim's. Cutts of the Fifth, their old enemy, had become captain of the school, and lines were falling upon Tom

Merry & Co. as thickly as leaves in the celebrated Vallambrosa. In the circumstances, the joy irradiating the noble countenance of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had an exasperating effect upon the Terrible Three. They felt a great desire to bump him on the floor of the passage, and thus reduce him to a frame of mind corresponding to their own.

So they lined up across the passage, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was going at too great a speed to stop himself, rushed into their arms.

"Collar him!" said Tom Merry.

"Bump him!" growled Manners.

"What does he mean by looking so chirpy when we're down on our luck?"

"Weally, you fellows— Oh!"

Bump!

Arthur Augustus, swept off his feet in the powerful grasp of the Terrible Three, descended upon the floor and gasped.

"Oh—ow! You silly asses!"

"Now, don't look so jolly joyful!" said Monty Lowther severely. "What do you mean by it? We don't feel joyful!"

"Ow!"

"Sit there and reflect upon the error of your ways!" said Tom Merry.

"Come on, you chaps; we're only just in time with these lines, and Cutts will make us do them over again if we're

late. Come on; it doesn't matter if you tread on Gussy!"

But Arthur Augustus jumped up like a jack-in-the-box.

At any other time, Arthur Augustus would probably have been wrathful at being so unceremoniously handled. But just now he was too joyful to be wrathful about anything. He grasped Tom Merry excitedly by the arm.

"Have you heard the news?" he gasped.

"I haven't heard any news—what is it?"

"Good news, old chap—the vewy best!"

"Cutts had a stroke of apoplexy?" asked Monty Lowther hopefully.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Has the Head found him gambling and sacked him?" asked Manners.

"Certainly not. It—"

"Nothing happened to Cutts?" asked Tom Merry.

"Nothin' that I know of. But—"

"Then what do you mean by saying there's good news, if nothing's happened to Cutts?" demanded Lowther wrathfully.

"Bump him again for raising our hopes!"

"Weally, you know— Yawwooh!"

Bump!

"You uttah asses!" said Arthur Augustus. "You are wuinin' my

A THRILLING LONG YARN IN WHICH THE PLOTTING OF A BLACK SHEEP IS MATCHED BY THE PLUCK AND RESOURCE OF TOM MERRY & CO.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

twosahs, as well as hurfin' me considewably. I have a gweat mind not to tell you my news at all, you fwabjous asses!"

"Oa, keep it!" said Lowther. "If nothing's happened to Cutts we don't want to hear it."

As a matter of fact, the Terrible Three were feeling quite ferocious towards Cutts. Since old Kildare had left, and Cutts had become captain of the school in his place, things had gone from bad to worse. Indeed, Blake of the Fourth had averred solemnly that the old school was going to the giddy bow-wows, and the other fellows fully agreed with him. Certainly Gerald Cutts' hand had fallen heavily upon Tom Merry & Co.

From day to day they hoped to hear that Kildare was coming back to take his old place, but he did not come. It looked as if Cutts was installed as a permanency.

And an exasperating feature of the case was that Cutts was a "rotter" of the first water—that he was guilty of all sorts of wild proceedings in secret, which would have earned him the "sack" if the Head had known anything about them. But Cutts was far too deep to be bowled out, and the juniors had given up hoping that the Head would tumble to his real character and bestow upon him the order of the "boot."

"I won't tell you silly asses a word now," gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "afiah the wotten way you have tweeked me. I wese to tell you a word. You can find out for yourselves, you boundahs; but if you knew that I was goin' to tell you that old Kildare is comin' back at last——"

"Kildare——"

"Comin' back!"

"Hurrah!"

They looked now as joyful as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had looked before the bumping process. Tom Merry caught hold of the swell of St. Jim's and helped him to his feet.

"Is it true?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah! Dawwell of the Sixth has just weceived a lettah fwom him——"

"And he told you?"

"He told Langton in my heawin'."

"Hurrah!"

Arthur Augustus dusted down his elegant trousers.

"You uttah asses, you——"

"Gussy," said Monty Lowther solemnly, "we take back that bumping. You may consider that it hasn't happened."

"We withdraw it entirely," said Manners.

"Yaas, that's all vewy well, but my bags are feashfully wumped, all the same," said Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, an apology is quite suffish fwom one gentleman to anothah. I ovahlook your wotten conduct. But weally it is wippin'—old Kildare comin' back, and, of course, he's goin' to be captain of the school again. Cutts will be pushed out."

"Won't Cutts be pleased? Ha, ha, ha!"

"We can take these lines in to Cutts now with pleasure!" remarked Monty Lowther. "We'll impart the good news at the same time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Did Darrell say when Kildare was coming, Gussy?"

"I didn't wait to heah, deah boy. I wushed off to tell the chaps the news at once. Pway excuse me—I must tell Blake——"

And Arthur Augustus, still sadly lacking in the repose which stamps, or should stamp, the noble caste of Vere de Vere, rushed on to Study No. 6 to impart the good news to his chums, Blake, Herries, and Digby of the Fourth.

And the Shell fellows, with cheerful grins, went on their way to Cutts' study, with great joy in their hearts. They had news for Cutts which would make the new captain of St. Jim's feel more "sick" than he had ever been made to feel before—and the prospect pleased them highly.

CHAPTER 2.

The Blow Falls!

CUTTS of the Fifth was in his study, chatting with Knox. Cutts was looking pleased and cheerful. His long ambition had been gratified—he was captain of the school, and seemed likely to remain so.

There had been many things said against him, but he had overcome them all by cunning and by force of character. Now he was fairly established, and he was making his position more firm and secure every day. He was ingratiating himself with the Head and with the Housemaster by very careful conduct. He made himself acceptable to the Sixth Form, who had been a little sore at first about a Fifth Former becoming captain of the school. Only his old enemies, Tom Merry & Co., had felt the weight of his hand—but they had felt it very heavily.

Kildare had been called away to the bedside of his uncle, who was ill. Whether old Kildare would ever come back from Ireland was doubtful. If he did return, it was understood that he

*By cunning scheming Gerald Cutts,
the black sheep of the Fifth,
made himself captain of St. Jim's.
And by the same shady method
he seeks to retain his exalted
position.*

would resume his old place as captain of St. Jim's. In that case, Cutts was simply keeping his place warm, as it were.

But Cutts hoped that he would not come back. And if his return was long delayed, Cutts hoped to have established himself so firmly by that time that he could not be displaced, even by Kildare.

To that end, he was exerting himself in every way to make his rule popular, and he was succeeding. Only with Tom Merry & Co. he made no effort of that kind; he knew that it would be useless. They were irreconcilable.

It was upon the subject of Kildare's possible return that he was chatting now with Knox of the Sixth. Under Cutts' rule the "fast set" of St. Jim's had had a very good time. Cutts and Knox, and Gilmore and Sefton, and the rest, were making hay while the sun shone.

Little bridge parties in Cutts' study,

with cigarettes and cigars, and refreshments that were much stronger than lemonade, took place now without interruption or fear of trouble to follow.

Kildare had always been sternly down on that kind of thing, and his authority and his personal influence had always been good. Cutts' influence was wholly bad, and his strong and determined character caused many fellows with weaker natures to follow his lead.

Fellows who had money were specially welcome in Cutts' study for those little card parties. Cutts was very lucky at cards—so lucky that suspicious persons might have surmised that he had ways of assisting chance. Certainly it was very rare for Cutts to be any the poorer after an evening of bridge.

There was only one cloud on the horizon of the smart set of St. Jim's—the possible return of Kildare to take his old place.

"The fellow can't be coming back now," Cutts was saying to Knox in confident tones. "The last I heard, his blessed uncle was as seedy as ever, and it seemed that Kildare is to be the heir; so he's bound to stay there and look after the loaves and fishes, you know."

"I don't fancy Kildare would think of that kind of thing," said Knox. "He's fond of his uncle, I believe."

Cutts shrugged his shoulders.

"I shouldn't wonder; he was that kind of an ass. All the better for us. It makes him less likely to come back. And a few more weeks, and then I think I could hold my own, even if he did come back. If I could remain captain for a whole term, they couldn't push me out, even for him, I think. And I'm popular, too."

Knox nodded.

"Looks like a good prospect," he agreed. "It would be pretty rotten for us if Kildare did drop in suddenly. A good many things would have to be stopped. If we hear that he's coming, it——"

He paused, and looked at Cutts.

"You'd have to put up with it if he came now," he finished.

Cutts set his teeth hard.

"If I heard that he was coming back now, I'd stop him somehow!" he said in a low and bitter voice. "I wouldn't have everything mucked up at this stage of the game! I've gone too far to allow myself to be stopped now! If the fool comes back—if I hear of it in time—I shall——"

He paused.

"You'll what?" said Knox uneasily.

Sometimes he was a little afraid of Cutts. There was a glimmering suspicion in his mind that Gerald Cutts, the dandy of the Fifth—the sportsman, the gambler, the blackguard—had the makings of a complete criminal in him.

"I'd find a way to stop him, I think!" said Cutts.

"How could you?"

"I don't know, but I think I'd find a way. I know I wouldn't give up all I've won without a fight for it; and I shouldn't be particular what kind of weapons I used, either! I tell you——"

Knock!

Cutts paused suddenly as the knock came at his door. His customary manner, cool and rather lazy, returned to him at once.

"Come in!" he said.

The door opened, and Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther came into the study. They laid their impositions upon the table.

"Our lines, Cutts!" said Tom Merry suavely.

"Leave them there!" said Cutts sharply. "I'll look over them presently."

"Yes, Cutts?"

"And now get out!"

"Yes, Cutts."

The three juniors moved towards the door. Tom Merry turned back suddenly, smiling.

"By the way, have you heard the news, Cutts?" he asked.

Cutts gave him a sharp and searching look.

"The news? What is it?" he asked.

"Only that Kildare's coming back!" said Tom Merry sweetly.

Cutts' eyes seemed to become fixed upon the juniors' smiling faces. For the moment the coolness of the Fifth Former deserted him, and his face went quite pale. The blow was too sudden for him to guard against. But the next moment he sprang to his feet, his face growing crimson with anger.

"You lying hound!"

"But it's true," said Tom Merry kindly.

"How—how do you know?"

"Darrell's just had a letter from him saying so."

Cutts knew that it was true then.

"Get out of my study!" he breathed.

"Yes, Cutts!"

The door closed behind the Terrible Three. Cutts heard a suppressed chuckle outside in the passage. He knew that the chums of the Shell were rejoicing, and a sudden gust of rage came over him. He gripped a cane and started towards the door, his face flaming with fury.

"Don't you give yourself away!" said Knox warningly.

Cutts paused.

He had certainly come very near to giving himself away. Certainly nothing would have amused and delighted his enemies more than to see him break out into a rage at the mere idea of Kildare returning to the school. He tossed the cane upon the table.

"You're right," he muttered thickly.

"I—I mustn't give myself away. If I'm going to do anything, I've got to keep up appearances."

"If you do anything," repeated Knox—"if you do anything! What can you do, Cutts?"

"I don't know. But I'm going to think of something. I'm not going to give up everything without a fight."

"But I—I say," stammered Knox, scared by the expression that had come over Gerald Cutts' face, "you—you're not thinking of—of anything rotten—anything violent! Don't be an idiot!"

"Leave me alone now," said Cutts. "I've got to think it out."

Knox, his face pale and troubled, left the study. He was afraid to think of what might be passing in Cutts' desperate mind—and he was afraid to think of what it might mean for him, too. For whatever Cutts did, Knox knew very well that he would be dragged into it—that they would sink or swim together. What was Cutts thinking of doing?

Left alone in his study, Cutts sat down to think it out. And the expression that grew upon his face, hardening and sharpening it, and making it look years older, would fully have justified Knox's alarm if he could have seen it then.

CHAPTER 3.

Two Telegrams!

"HURRAH!"

"Hip, pip!"

The juniors were rejoicing. Faintly from afar the sounds reached Gerald Cutts in his study. Tom Merry & Co. were in high feather.

Kildare was coming back.

The reign of their old enemy, Cutts of the Fifth, was coming to an end. No wonder the heroes of the Lower School rejoiced.

And their satisfaction was shared by most of the school when the news spread. Cutts had succeeded in making himself popular to a certain extent, but most of the fellows would be glad to have Kildare back again. Only Cutts' own particular set, the black sheep of the school, looked forward with uneasiness to Kildare's return.

Figgins & Co. of the New House were rejoicing, too. Figgins & Co. had hoped to get a New House candidate elected when Kildare vacated the captaincy. Cutts had outwitted them in that matter. And so the New House looked forward keenly to the coming downfall of Cutts—especially Monteith, the prefect, who would have been captain if Cutts had not outplayed him.

The general satisfaction was not very complimentary to Cutts.

"It's ripping!" Tom Merry said to his rejoicing chums. "Simply ripping! Old Kildare is a brick!"

"A weal bwick, deah boy!" agreed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I have been thinkin' that we ought to have a celebration when Kildare comes back."

"Hear, hear!" said a dozen voices heartily.

"We ought to give him a stunnin' welcome, you know," pursued Arthur Augustus, encouraged by the general approval. "What do you fellows say to a bwass band?"

"Oh!"

"We can hire a bwass band in Wylcombe," went on Arthur Augustus enthusiastically. "I will w'ite to my patah for a fivah."

"When is he coming, though?" asked Jack Blake.

"Nobody seems to know," said Tom Merry. "Darrell knows, I suppose. Let's ask Darrell."

"Yaas, wathah! We must have time to make the pwepawations."

And a crowd of juniors marched away in search of Darrell of the Sixth. They found him in the gymnasium. He was looking very cheerful.

Darrell was Kildare's best chum, and naturally delighted by the news he had received. Also, he did not approve of the way things were going under Cutts' captaincy. He was as glad as the juniors to hear that the old captain of St. Jim's was coming back.

"Dawwell, deah boy—"

"I say, Darrell—"

The big Sixth Former gave the juniors a good-humoured glance.

"Well, what do you young sweeps want?" he asked.

"About Kildare," said Tom Merry.

"When is he coming?"

"You see, we want to give him a welcome."

"Sure, we want to paint the town red intirely," said Reilly of the Fourth.

"We're goin' to get a bwass band—"

"When is he coming, Darrell? We want to know."

Darrell laughed.

"I think I should draw the line at brass bands," he said. "But there is no harm in giving him a welcome. He

said in his letter that he would be here on Wednesday."

"And to-day's Monday," said Tom Merry. "Lots of time to make preparations."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And Wednesday being a half-holiday, we shall be free to celebrate," said Blake, with much satisfaction.

"That's topping!"

"Weally toppin', deah boy!"

"Has he started yet?" asked Tom Merry. "We should like to send him a telegram of—of welcome, you know."

"Yes," said Darrell, laughing. "He leaves Ireland to-night. But he is going to stay a bit with his people in Lancaster before he comes on to St. Jim's. His mater and pater live there, you know. He's coming on here on Wednesday."

"Lancaster," said Blake. "That's about fifty miles from here."

"Yes."

"Good! We'll wire him there," said Tom Merry. "He'll find the wire waiting for him when he gets there, and that will be all right."

"Come on," said Blake. "Let's get down to the post office and send it. I suppose he won't get to Lancaster until to-morrow; but there's nothing like being in time."

And having got Kildare's address in Lancaster, the Co. walked down into Rylcombe to the post office to dispatch that telegram of welcome to Kildare. They all gathered round the desk to write the telegram.

"Pway don't think of the number of words, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "We want old Kildare to understand how much we want him back. Bettah leave the telegram to me."

"Good egg!" said Blake, with a wink at the others. "We'll leave it entirely in Gussy's hands. Gussy will do the thing in style."

"Hear, hear!" said the juniors.

Arthur Augustus smiled with satisfaction.

"All sewene, deah boys. You can't do bettah than wely on a fellow of tact and judgment at a time like this."

Arthur Augustus filled up the form and held it up for the juniors to read. It was quite a long message, considering that it cost a penny a word after the first twelve words.

"Dear old Kildare,—We are delighted to hear that you are coming back. The school has been going to the bow-wows while you have been away. Cutts is a rotter. When you come back, we're going to rally round and back you up like anything. Signed—D'Arcy, Blake, Merry, Lowther, Manners, Digby, Herries, Noble, Reilly, Kerr, Wynn, Figgins."

"Is that all wight, deah boys?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see anything to cackle at. By the way, is bow-wows one word or two?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Countin' it as two, there are fifty-nine words, I think," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "That will only be four shillings and fivepence. Then there is the address—five words more. Four shillings and tenpence, deah boys! Who's got four shillings and tenpence?"

"We're leaving it entirely in your hands, Gussy," said Blake blandly.

"Yaas; but—"

"See to it," said Monty Lowther.

"The fact is, deah boys, I haven't had a wemittance lately, and—"

"We'll wait for you outside," said Blake, apparently not hearing. "If

you think of anything else to shove into the telegram shove it in, and don't mind us!"

"Certainly," said Tom Merry. "It's in your hands, Gussy."

"Yaas, but—"

"Don't keep us waiting too long."

And the juniors crowded out of the post office, grinning.

Arthur Augustus looked after them, with his eyeglass jammed into his eye, and shook his head in a doubtful sort of way. Then he went through his pockets. Funds were low in Study No. 6 just then. Arthur Augustus discovered a sixpence in one pocket, and a shilling in another, and a penny in a third.

"Bai Jove! Only one-and-seven-pence!" he murmured. "I say, deah boys—"

But the "deah boys" were gone.

"I shall have to cut it down a bit," murmured D'Arcy. "Aftah all, I needn't mention that Cutts is a wotah. Kildare knows that already. That's four words out. Then I will put in dogs instead of bow-wows—it isn't quite so expressive, but it saves a word. And, bai Jove, I'll cut out the signatuaahs of all those boundahs, if they're not goin' to pay for them to be put in."

And at the cost of a great deal of mental labour, Arthur Augustus cut down the telegram to the exact value of one-and-sevenpence, and dispatched it triumphantly. Then he walked out of the post office and rejoined his chums.

"Has it gone?" asked Blake, with a grin.

"Yaas. I had to cut it down a bit."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All right. So long as you left all our names down," said Tom Merry. "That was the really important point."

"Bai Jove! You see, I had to scratch out all your names."

"What?"

"I left my own signatuaah, as wewpew-sentin' the whole of the Lowah School, you know," explained Arthur Augustus.

"That will be all wight."

"You ass!" roared Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"You fathead!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Let's go in and send another!" growled Figgins. "Might have known what would happen if we trusted it to Gussy."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Oh, scat!"

And the juniors invaded the post office again, and a second telegram was dispatched. This time it was shorter, if not sweeter.

"Welcome home!—Merry, Manners, Lowther, Blake, Herries, Noble, Digby, Reilly, Kerr, Wynn, Figgins."

And this time the noble name of D'Arcy was conspicuous by its absence.

CHAPTER 4.

One Good Turn Deserves Another!

THE dusk was falling as Tom Merry & Co. left the post office to walk back to St. Jim's.

In their enthusiasm over Kildare's return, and their eagerness to send him a message of welcome, they had overlooked the fact that they had no time to get back from the village before locking-up. That thought came into their mind now—rather late!

"By gum!" said Noble, otherwise known as "Kangaroo." "We shall be late, you chaps. Taggles will be shutting the gates."

"And Cutts will be down on us again!" grunted Blake. "What asses we are to give him another chance! He's bound to make the most of it, as he won't be captain of the school for more than two days longer."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Never mind. We've only got to stand him till Wednesday," said Tom Merry comfortingly. "We can put up with lines and lickings till then. Cutts is coming down off his perch with a big bump on Wednesday."

"All the same, we may as well hurry up," said Figgins. "Let's take the cut through the wood and trot."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The party of juniors plunged into the footpath through the wood, which saved a considerable distance in returning to the school, as the high road was by no means direct. Under the trees it was much darker than in the road. The juniors broke into a trot, covering the ground quickly, their footfalls soft and inaudible on the grass.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus suddenly. "Pway stop a minute, deah boys!"

"What's the matter?" asked Blake.

"I've dropped my eyeglass."

"Blow your eyeglass!"

"Wats! Pway wait for me while I find it," said Arthur Augustus, stooping and groping in the shadowy grass. "I shall find it in a minute. How beastly dark it is here!"

The juniors halted impatiently.

"Found it?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Not yet, deah boy. Pway be patient."

"Leave it there, can't you?" growled Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Look here, we're jolly well not going to be licked for the sake of your silly eyeglass!" exclaimed Kangaroo.

"Let it stay there, and come on!"

"I decline to come on till I have dis-covahed my monacle!" said D'Arcy firmly.

"Fathead!"

"Duffer!"

"Look here, if you don't come on



As the Terrible Three moved towards the door, Tom Merry turned back. "By the way, have you heard the news, Cutts?" he asked. "What news?" said Cutts. "Only that Kildare's coming back!" said Tom Merry sweetly. The Fifth Former sprang to his feet, his face going crimson with anger. "You lying hound!"

we'll go on without you!" roared Blake, exasperated.

"I wufuse to come until——"

"Let's get on," said Kerr. "Gussy will follow. You can put on a spurt after you've found your giddy monocle, Gussy."

"Vewy well, deah boys; I will ovah-take you."

"Come on, idiot!" said Blake.

"I wufuse to be called an idiot!"

"There's no need for us all to be caned because Gussy wants to play the giddy ox," said Tom Merry. "Get a move on!"

The juniors were all of the same opinion. They certainly did not consider Arthur Augustus' eyeglass of sufficient importance to be caned for. They broke into a run again, and disappeared along the footpath, leaving the swell of St. Jim's groping desperately in the thick glass for his monocle.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, after a few minutes of frantic search. "I weally cannot find the beastly thing. I wondah exactly where I drowped it? It is weally most annoy-in'! I certainly cannot go on and leave it here!"

And Arthur Augustus searched on determinedly, striking match after match.

The glimmer of the glass caught his eye at last, and he picked it up with an exclamation of relief.

"Bai Jove, that was lucky!" he murmured, and, jamming the precious monocle firmly in his eye, Arthur Augustus resumed his way.

He did not know how far ahead his friends were, and he hurried to overtake them. It was intensely dark on the footpath now, and on the grass his boots made no sound. There was a shock in the darkness as Arthur Augustus, going at a good speed, ran into somebody's back.

Bump!

Arthur Augustus staggered back from the shock, but the individual he had run into, quite upset by the sudden collision in the rear, went sprawling forward on his hands and knees, with a bump and a loud grunt.

"Ow!" gasped D'Arcy. "Bai Jove! Who's that? Is that you, Blake?"

"Ugh! Groogh!"

"Bai Jove, it's not one of the chaps!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus as he caught a whiff of mingled tobacco and spirits. "I say, whoevah you are, I'm sowwy! I didn't see you in the dark, you know. Pway allow me to assist you."

Arthur Augustus struck a match, and looked down at the fallen man, who was just rising to his feet.

Then he uttered another exclamation.

He knew the man by sight.

The flicker of the match disclosed a hard, coarse face, and two little eyes set close together.

D'Arcy knew the face well enough. It was that of a disreputable character well known in Ryelombe. His name was Lasker, and he turned a more or less honest penny by playing billiards with less skilful players at the Green Man, and by "making a book" on the races. He generally played in the little card parties at the Green Man, to which the "blades" of St. Jim's—Cutts and his set—resorted after lights out.

However, blackguard as the man was, D'Arcy had bumped him over, and he owed him an apology; and he never failed in politeness.

"I am weally sowwy, Mr. Laskah," he said, as the match went out. "You see, it is so dark that I did not observe you, and I was in wathah a huwwy!"

"You clumsy young idiot!" growled Mr. Lasker. "I've a good mind to wallop you!"

"I have made my apology for knockin' you ovah," said Arthur Augustus stiffly. "If you were a decent chap you would wegard that as quite suffish. I have nothin' more to say to you. I wegard you as an outsidah."

And Arthur Augustus walked on, leaving Mr. Lasker growling to himself.

D'Arcy broke into a run again, but his luck was out. Two minutes had not elapsed, when there was another bump in the darkness of the footpath as D'Arcy ran into some unseen person. This time it was D'Arcy who fell. He

staggered back and fell into the grass with a gasp.

"Is that you, Lasker?"

Arthur Augustus sat up quickly as he heard that sharp voice from the person he had run into. For it was the voice of Cutts of the Fifth, the captain of St. Jim's.

Dazed as he was by the collision and the fall, D'Arcy could not help grinning.

He understood now that he had chanced upon one of Cutts' secret meetings with one of his disreputable associates.

"No, I am not Laskah," said Arthur Augustus, as he scrambled up. "I'm D'Arcy of the Fourth."

Cutts uttered an exclamation, sharp and startled, and it seemed to D'Arcy that there was a note of fear in his voice.

"D'Arcy! You young hound, you're spying on me, are you?"

"You uttah wottah, you know I am quite incapable of spyin' on anybody!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's indignantly.

"What are you doing here?"

"I am goin' back to the school."

"You're out after locking-up," said Cutts harshly. "You'll take five hundred lines, and come to my study to be caned before bed-time!"

Arthur Augustus set his lips hard. Fifty lines, or a hundred, would have been a fully adequate punishment for being out after locking-up. Five hundred lines and a caning were a little too "thick."

"I suppose you are jokin', Cutts," said D'Arcy quietly.

"You'll find I'm not, you young hound!"

Cutts came groping towards the junior in the darkness, guided by the sound of his voice. Arthur Augustus stepped back and eluded him.

"Keep your paws off me, Cutts!" he said, in the same quiet tone. "You are not goin' to handle me, you wottah! And I am not goin' to do any lines, and I am not comin' to your study to be caned!"

"What?"

"Mr. Laskah is quite neah if you want him," pursued D'Arcy imperturbably. "One good turn deserves another, Cutts. Pewwaps, howevah, you would like me to mention to Mr. Waiton that you have come here to meet that blackguard Laskah."

He heard Cutts draw a sharp breath. "You are goin' to excuse me for bein' late," said D'Arcy calmly. "I have already remarked that one good turn deserves another. Don't you think so?"

Cutts realised that his incautious exclamation when he had bumped into D'Arcy had certainly given him away to the junior.

"I—I excuse you!" he muttered thickly.

"Can I tell Taggles so, so that I shall not be weported for comin' in late?"

"Yes," muttered Cutts.

"Thank you vewy much, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus cheerfully.

And he dodged past Cutts and ran on towards the school, feeling very elated. He was certainly late for locking-up, but his meeting with Cutts had stood him in good stead.

CHAPTER 5.

Desperate Measures!

GERALD CUTTS stood in the darkness of the footpath for a full five minutes after D'Arcy had gone.

He was breathing hard, and his face

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was pale under the dark shadows of the trees. Not until he was quite certain that the junior was at a distance did the captain of St. Jim's move from the spot.

A red glow appeared in the distance down the long, dark path, and Cutts knew that it was the glow of a cigar.

He moved towards it. "Is that you?" he called out, and this time he did not add the name. He had learned caution.

"It's me!" came back Lasker's voice. "Good!"

Cutts joined him under the trees. Dimly he made out the dingy, black-guardly face behind the red glow of the cigar-end.

"Did you meet anybody on the path, Lasker?" he asked.

Lasker muttered an oath. "A kid ran into me and knocked me over," he said—"one of the kids at your school, Master Cutts."

"He recognised you?"

"Yes."

"Hang him!" muttered Cutts. "What rotten luck that he should be late out this evening!"

Lasker peered at him curiously. "Wot's the matter?" he asked.

"What's the 'arm?' You're captain of the school, ain't you, and you can keep a kid in order, I suppose? You think he'll tell about you?"

"No; but—well, it can't be helped. Come into the trees here; I've got to speak to you, Lasker!"

"Tain't a little game down there, then?" asked Lasker, indicating the distant Green Man with a backward movement of his head.

"No; I've no time for that now, nor inclination, either. It's something important," said Cutts, leading the way from the footpath. "Come with me!"

Lasker wonderingly followed the Fifth Former of St. Jim's under the trees. Cutts did not pause till they were some distance from the footpath, and safe from all possible eavesdroppers. Then he stopped under an old oak.

"Well, what's the game?" asked Lasker, at last.

"I want you to do something for me—to help me, Lasker," said Cutts, sinking his voice to a low tone. "I'm in a rotten fix!"

Lasker's face set hard in the dark. "I'm afraid I haven't any tin to lend, Master Cutts. If I had—"

Cutts broke into a scornful laugh. "You idiot! Do you think I'm trying to borrow money of you?" he said contemptuously.

"Then it ain't that?"

"Of course not!"

"I'm quite at your service, Master Cutts," said Lasker, his wonder increasing.

"I'll make it worth your while," said Cutts. "I'm in funds now. I've had a lot of luck with cards lately. I've got plenty of money, as far as that goes."

"It generally goes pretty fur!" said Mr. Lasker sententially.

"You know I'm captain of the school," pursued Cutts. "Kildare cleared off some time ago, and I got in his place. It's the place I want, and I'm making a good thing out of it in many ways."

Lasker chuckled. "I understand," he said.

"Well, I've suddenly heard to-day that Kildare is coming back."

"Oh, that's bad!"

"He will be at St. Jim's on Wednesday, and then I've got to step out and make room for him—he becomes captain of the school again."

"And then certain little games will have to stop," Lasker remarked. "It



will mean money out of your pocket, Master Cutts."

"Yes—if he comes!"

"Didn't you say he was coming?" said Lasker, in surprise.

"Yes, he's coming—unless he's stopped!"

"I don't quite catch on, Master Cutts," said Lasker. "'Ow is 'e goin' to be stopped? 'E can't be stopped, can 'e?"

"You see," said Cutts, without answering the question, "if I could keep the place, say, for the rest of the term, I could make myself safe in it. I'm getting to be popular—I'm getting more of the fellows into my own set—and a good many seniors owe me money, and have to dance to my tune. By the end of the term, I think I should be able to defy Kildare; to keep the captaincy although he was back—you see? It's a question of preventing him from coming back now—or for a few weeks."

"But—but—"

"That's where I want you to help me," said Cutts, almost in a whisper. "Kildare is not to reach the school on Wednesday!"

"You don't mean anything violent?" muttered Lasker, his eyes staring wide in the gloom.

Cutts gave a savage laugh.

"Is that anything new to you?" he demanded cuttingly. "I seem to remember that you were sent away to the stone jug for three months once for being concerned in a case of robbery with violence."

Lasker scowled.

"I don't say I haven't had a 'and in some things," he said. "But—but this is serious. What do you want me to do?"

"Nothing serious. You don't suppose I'm idiot enough to want to hurt the chap, do you?" snapped Cutts. "I'm not quite a fool. I want him kept away from St. Jim's for the rest of the term. Suppose he were crocked—"

"Crocked?" said Lasker.

"He arrives at Lancaster to-morrow. His people live there. He's been away in Ireland at his uncle's place, you know. Well, if he were laid up when he arrives at Lancaster, he would, naturally, be taken home to his pater,

and he would stay there till he was well—see?"

"I see."

"I tell you I'm desperate!" Cutts went on, in a low voice. "I won't lose what I've won—for the sake of a few weeks! And I'm making a splendid thing out of it! I've got half the Sixth and the Fifth to come to my bridge parties already—and you know I'm no fool with the cards! Can't you see what it means? Next term I shall have such a backing in the school that Kildare couldn't touch me. If he comes on Wednesday, I lose at one blow all I've gained. He can't come!"

"If he was laid up," Lasker repeated reflectively. "Laid up in wot way, Master Cutts?"

Cutts shrugged his shoulders.

"How should I know? That's more in your line than mine! I've learned just when he's coming. He will be at Lancaster by the twelve o'clock express to-morrow morning. You've been in Lancaster—you know the station is half-a-mile outside the town, and on a lonely road."

"I know."

"It will be in broad daylight, of course; but—but you know your own business better than I do, Lasker."

"You ain't particular wot 'appens, so long as he's laid up for a few weeks?"

"Exactly!"

"And what's it worth to you?" asked Mr. Lasker in a businesslike tone.

"Five quid down, and fifteen more to follow if he doesn't arrive at the school before the end of the term."

"And expenses?" asked Mr. Lasker.

"It may be expensive."

"And expenses," said Cutts.

"You must be making a good thing out of the young gents who think they know how to play bridge, Master Cutts!" said Lasker, with a chuckle.

"Never mind that!" said Cutts sharply. "I can afford to pay for what I want done, and that's all that concerns you!"

"Quite so," said Lasker calmly.

"Five down, you said. Where's the five?"

"Can I rely on you?"

"You bet!"

"There you are, then."

A five-pound note changed hands. The day before that banknote had belonged to Smith major of the Sixth Form; but in the evening Smith major had played bridge with Cutts, and the banknote had changed hands.

Mr. Lasker tucked the note away into his pocket with great satisfaction.

"It's a go, sir!" he said. "You rely on me!"

"Mind," said Cutts hastily, and his voice was a little husky, "only do what is necessary to keep him at his father's house for a few weeks. Don't—don't do anything idiotic!"

"I know how much my neck is worth, thank you!" said Lasker, with a grin.

"You're going to have your money's worth, and nothing more."

"That's right!"

"Good-night, Master Cutts! See you again to-morrow?"

"Same time and place," said Cutts.

"Good!"

They parted.

Cutts of the Fifth walked back to St. Jim's, with a hard, set face, his eyes glinting.

His heart was beating rather faster than usual. He knew and fully understood what a desperate step he was taking, and what a terrible punishment it might bring upon him if it should become known. But how could it become known? Even if Lasker failed,

if he even betrayed him, he had only to deny all knowledge of the man. A lie would cost Cutts very little. And with his own conscience Cutts could settle matters very easily; his conscience was a remarkably elastic one.

Not for one moment did he relent.

He was captain of St. Jim's, and he meant to remain captain of St. Jim's—even at the cost of a crime.

CHAPTER 6.

Gussy's Idea!

TOM MERRY & CO had succeeded in getting in just before the school gates were locked.

Figgins & Co. went to their own House, and the other fellows to the School House, where they waited for the return of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"The silly ass will get into trouble, of course!" Blake growled, feeling angry with his chum because he was concerned about him. "Taggles will report him, and Cutts will be down on him. There goes the bell for call-over, and Gussy will miss it!"

The juniors went into Hall for calling-over, and certainly Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did miss it, and he was marked down as absent by Mr. Railton, who was taking the names.

"Where has the duffer got to?" said Monty Lowther, as they came out of Hall. "By the way, Cutts wasn't at calling-over, either. If he's out, he mayn't drop on Gussy, after all. Taggles will report him to Railton."

"Let's go down to the gates," said Blake.

They strolled out into the dusky quadrangle. The bell was ringing at the gate, and Taggles, the crusty old porter, came, grumbling, out of his lodge. The light above the gate glimmered upon the elegant form of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, visible through the metal bars.

"Here he is!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, deah boy, here I am," said Arthur Augustus. "Pway huwwy up, Taggles, old man! I want to come in!"

"Which I shall report yer!" growled Taggles, as he inserted the key into the lock.

The big bronze gate swung open.

Arthur Augustus walked in calmly.

"Pway don't twouble to weport me, Taggles!" he remarked. "I have permish fwom the captain of the school to remain out aftah lockin' up."

"If you got a pass, you got to show it, Master D'Arcy!"

"I haven't a pass, Taggy; it was a verbal permish. But you know vewy well that you can take my word," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "Howevah, I wefer you to Cutts when he comes in!"

Taggles grunted, and relocked the gates, and the swell of St. Jim's walked away with his chums. They were distinctly puzzled by his statement to Taggles.

"Do you mean to say that you've met Cutts?" asked Blake.

"Yaas."

"And he excused you for being late?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Cutts must have been drunk or dreaming, then!" said Manners.

"What's the meaning of it?"

Arthur Augustus explained to his astonished chums what had happened.

"So Cutts excused me for bein' late, on my undahtakin' not to mention to Mr. Waiton about the meetin' with Laskah!" grinned Arthur Augustus. "Of course, I shouldn't have mentioned it, anyway, as I am not a sneak; but I thought that one good turn deserved another, you know, so I put it to Cutts."

"Meeting Lasker, is he?" growled Tom Merry. "Pretty sort of thing for the captain of St. Jim's!"

"He won't be captain of St. Jim's much longer, that's one comfort," said Digby.

"Bai Jove, I'm hungwy, you know!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We haven't had tea yet, you know. I trust some of you fellows have got some tin! I'm stony bwoke!"

"There's a registered letter for you," said Herries.

"Oh, good! That's my fivah at last!"

The registered letter proved to contain the long-expected fiver from Gussy's pater, and the whole crowd of juniors proceeded to the tuckshop to change it. They returned to Study No. 6 laden with good things, and crowded round the table to a late but unusually plentiful tea.

"I've got wathah a good ideah, deah boys," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, as they disposed of the tea.

"Boil it!" said Blake.

"It's a wathah wippin' ideah, you know!"

"Keep it dark!" said Monty Lowther.

"I wefuse to keep it dark. I have ovah four pounds out of my fivah. Do you know what you can do with four pounds?"

"Stand half a dozen feeds," said Manners.

"Wubbish!"

"Take us all on a giddy excursion in a motor-car next half-holiday," said Kangaroo. "We will all come."

"Wot!"

"Well, what do you want to do with the four pounds, anyway?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"You fellows are aware that old Kildare awwives at Lancastah to-morrow by the midday expwess?"

"Darrell said so," agreed Blake.

"What about it?"

"Lancastah isn't such a fearful distance fwom here, you know. It is wathah unfortunate that to-morrow isn't a half-holiday, but I was thinkin' of puttin' it to Mr. Waiton—"

"Puttin' what?" said Blake.

"Asking him for permish for some of

(Continued on next page.)

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us to have a little wun to-morrow. Now that I have four pounds to spare, I—"

"They've got to last till Saturday," said Blake. "We're all nearly on the rocks."

"The futuah can take care of itself, deah boy. Besides, we can bowwow some money frowm Tom Mewwy, if necessary. That's all wight. Now, what I was thinkin' of is this—if two or three of us could get permish to take a little wun to-morrow, how wip-pin' it would be to have a car out, and wun ovah to Lancastah to meet Kildare at the station!"

"My hat!"

"Take a motor-car fifty miles to meet a chap at a station!" said Kangaroo.

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard that as a compliment to Kildare, and it will show him how awfully keen we are to have him back. And it will be a vewy enjoyable wun—if we can get leave."

"If!" said Herries.

"Well, Wailton is wathah an old sport, you know, and he's as pleased as Punch at Kildare comin' home again. I wathah think that he will give us leave if I put it to him vewy nicely. Of course, I shall have to do the talkin'. You know that in a delicate mattah like this, it wequiah a fellow of tact and judgment—"

"It would be a jolly nice run-out, if Gussy wants to waste his filthy lucre in that way," Blake remarked thoughtfully; "and it would make Cutts waxy, too. I know it gets on his nerves to see us so keen about Kildare coming back."

"Yaas; I was thinkin' of that, too. The fact is," said Arthur Augustus, with a beatific smile, "I'm thinkin' of this as a first-wate joke on Cutts. I'm goin' to ask him to put in a word with the Housemaster for me."

"He won't!"

"Yes, he will, because he will be afwaid that I shall put in a word with the Housemaster for him—about Laskah, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He ought to be punished, you know, for thinkin' I could possibly sneak about him," the swell of St. Jim's went on. "Of course, he ought to know that a D'Arcy would be uttably incapable of sneakin', in any possible cires."

"But if he knows we are going to meet Kildare, he won't get us leave," said Blake, with a shake of the head. "That's the one thing that will make him risk anything rather than let us out."

"But I shan't tell him that, deah boy!" chuckled Arthur Augustus, with a sage nod of the head. "I'm only goin' to tell him that we want leave to go for a wun in the mornin', that's all. That's enough for Cutts. I shall tell Mr. Wailton it is to meet Kildare, you see, but not Cutts. We'll tell him aftahwards. And watch his face!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gussy, old man, you're a genius!" said Tom Merry. "It will be worth tons of toffee to see Cutts' face when we tell him that we went to meet Kildare. But, I say, how many of us are going?"

"We'll have a four-seatah."

"That's you and us," remarked Monty Lowther.

Blake sniffed.

"It's Gussy and us!" he said. "Dash it all, the motor-car belongs to this study, doesn't it? You Sholl chaps can keep off the grass."

"Now, look here, Blake—"

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"Peace, my infants!" said Arthur Augustus. "You can toss up for it, you

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know. That's weally the best way to settle it. Thwee of you can come with me."

And the juniors settled it that way, and the chance favoured Tom Merry, Lowther, and Jack Blake. So the party that was to meet Kildare at Lancaster Station was constituted, if they could get leave. And that depended upon their old enemy, Cutts of the Fifth.

CHAPTER 7.

Cutts Comes in Useful!

THERE was no little party in Cutts' study in the Fifth Form passage that evening. Cutts had more serious things to think about than auction bridge and relieving his friends of their superfluous cash.

His arrangement with Mr. Lasker gave him plenty of food for thought. He had done his best now—or his worst—to make his position secure, but he knew that he had not covered every chance. Lasker might fail, something might go wrong; he might have had all his trouble for nothing. But if Eric Kildare escaped that danger which awaited him on his arrival at Lancaster, Cutts was not at the end of his resources.

Still another day would elapse before Kildare came to St. Jim's, and in twenty-four hours much could be done.

Cutts meant to fight the matter out to the last ditch, as it were. There was no hesitation in Cutts' mind. What he had won by cunning, he intended to keep by any means in his power, fair or foul.

But although Cutts had no little party in his study that evening, he was not left unvisited. Soon after his return from the meeting with Mr. Lasker there was a tap at his door, and Arthur Augustus came in.

Cutts scowled at him; he was not pleased to see the junior. Taggles had mentioned D'Arcy's late return to him, and Cutts had told him that it was all right; but he was bitterly exasperated by the necessity of letting the swell of St. Jim's go scot-free.

"Well, what do you want?" he snapped.

"Good-evening, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus gracefully. Arthur

Augustus did not like Cutts, and made no secret of the fact that he strongly disapproved of him, but he never failed in courtesy.

"Tell me what you want," said Cutts, "and then clear off!"

"Certainly, deah boy. I twust I am not the fellow to intwude where my pwesence is not desired."

Arthur Augustus closed the door of the study, carefully adjusted his eyeglass in his eye, and turned it upon Cutts.

"I have come to ask a favah, Cutts," he remarked.

"Then you can ask elsewhere!" said Cutts, pointing to the door. "Get out!"

"I wequiah permish to take a little wun with some of my fwiends to-morrow mornin'. It is weally enjoyable to get a wun in the mornin', instead of turnin' up in the beastly Form-woom, you know. I dare say that you have noticed that yourself, Cutts."

"I haven't thought about it. Get out!"

"No; pewwaps not. You generally take your little wuns of a night, don't you?" Arthur Augustus remarked innocently.

Cutts set his teeth.

"Howevah, I weally want permish for a wun to-morrow mornin', you know. I twust you are not goin' to be a beast about it, Cutts."

"You know I can't excuse you from lessons," said Cutts, eyeing him savagely. "You will have to ask the Housemaster."

"Yaas, I am quite aware of that; but I thought you might put in a word for me, you know."

"Well, I won't!"

"If you speak to Mr. Wailton, and ask him to give leave for four of us to take a little wun in the mornin', I'm sure he'll say all wight. You have been gettin' on wippingly with Mr. Wailton. Of course, he doesn't know you as we do."

Cutts' scowl became almost ferocious. "Will you get out of my study, or are you waiting to be pitched out?" he demanded, rising to his feet.

"I will wetiah, if you wrequest it, Cutts. I suppose I shall have to go to Mr. Wailton myself," said D'Arcy, with dignity. "If I should happen to mention anythin' about Mr. Laskah—"

"What?"

"Are you gettin' deaf, deah boy? I wemarked that if I should happen to mention anythin' about Mr. Laskah, he—"

"Hold on!" said Cutts, as D'Arcy laid his fingers on the handle of the door.

Cutts thought quickly. His meeting with Mr. Lasker had to be kept a secret, for more reasons than the swell of St. Jim's thought of. If anything went wrong in the affair at Lancaster, and it came out that Lasker had assailed Kildare, it must not be known that the man had been in conference with Cutts the very night before the attack took place.

"Well?" said Arthur Augustus politely.

"I—I will speak to Mr. Railton, if you like," said Cutts, with an effort. "Of course, I don't promise that it will be any good."

"I twust it will be some good, Cutts, as if you fail to obtain the permish I wequiah, I shall have to speak to Mr. Wailton myself."

Cutts ground his teeth.

"Wait here," he said. "I'll go to Mr. Railton at once!"

"Thank you, deah boy!"

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Cutts left the study, and Arthur Augustus reposed his elegant form gracefully in the armchair, to wait for his return. He did not have long to wait. In ten minutes Cutts re-entered the study.

D'Arcy's eyeglass turned upon him inquiringly.

"Well, deah boy?"

"It's all right," said Cutts.

"You've got the permish?"

"Yes. I—I put it to Mr. Railton the best I could—a little holiday as a reward for good conduct," said Cutts. "You can go to-morrow morning."

"And my friends?"

"You can take one fellow with you; I couldn't get leave for more than one. You didn't want me to make Railton suspicious, I suppose?" said Cutts savagely.

"That is wathah unfair, Howeveh, I suppose I must be satisfied," said Arthur Augustus, rising. "Thank you vewy much, Cutts!"

"Now get out!" said Cutts, between his teeth.

"Good-night, deah boy!"

Cutts did not reply to that salutation. Arthur Augustus sauntered from the study and returned to his own quarters. His chums met him there eagerly.

"Well?" asked half a dozen voices at once.

"It's all wight, deah boys. Cutts has played up all wight. But I can only take one fellow with me—that's the best that can be awganged."

"H'm!" said Blake thoughtfully. "The Shell chaps will have to stand out, then."

"No fear!" said Tom Merry. "I was just thinking that you would have to stand down, Blake."

"Now, don't be funny!"

"Twy the penny again," suggested Arthur Augustus.

The penny was tried again, and the lot fell upon Tom Merry. The captain of the Shell smiled a satisfied smile.

"Good egg!" he said. "I'll look after you, Gussy, and we'll give old Kildare a stunning welcome."

"Yaas, wathah! I'm sowwy we can't take the bwass band in the car," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "But it—"

"But I'll take Blake's bugle," said Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And so it was settled.

Tom Merry and D'Arcy were to go to meet Kildare at Lancaster Station the next day. It would be a pleasant surprise for Kildare, and a pleasant run for the two juniors; but the cream of the affair was that it had been arranged by means of Cutts, and that Cutts would be in a towering rage when he learned for what object his influence had been used. The juniors little thought of how enraged he would be, however, and what reason he would have.

CHAPTER 8.

On the Road!

TOM MERRY and Arthur Augustus were looking particularly cheerful the next morning.

They were free after morning chapel, and it was very pleasant to be free that sunny morning, when their less fortunate schoolfellows were going into the Form-rooms for lessons as usual.

They saw Cutts that morning, but he did not speak to them. Cutts passed very quickly, with a scowling brow.

Cutts knew nothing of the intended trip in the motor-car. If he had known that they intended to have a car out, he

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might have thought of Lancaster, but they had been very careful to keep that dark.

Indeed, on second thoughts, Arthur Augustus had decided not to tell even Mr. Railton that they were going to Lancaster, in case the Housemaster should mention it casually to Cutts.

They had the required permission, and it was not really necessary to tell the Housemaster anything; and, as D'Arcy sagely observed, Cutts was a very sharp beast, and in the circumstances a still tongue showed a wise head.

The two juniors were to cycle over to Wayland, where the car would be hired at the garage. Arthur Augustus, who generally did things in style when he was in funds, had often had a car out from the Wayland garage, and he was well known there.

So while the rest of the Fourth and the Shell were marching into their respective Form-rooms, Tom Merry and D'Arcy were as free as air and enjoying their unaccustomed freedom immensely.

"Bai Jove, this is all wight, you know!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as they walked round to the bikeshed. "Cutts is wathah a useful beast, afiah all, isn't he?"

"Quite useful!" grinned Tom Merry. "Buck up with that bike! We haven't any time to waste. It's a jolly long run over to Lancaster, you know, and we've got to get to Wayland first."

"Yaas, wathah! We'll scorch like anythin'!"

They wheeled their machines out of the shed and down to the gates, kissed their hands to Taggles, who frowned portentously in response, and mounted and rode away to Wayland town.

The two cyclists covered the ground quickly.

It did not take them long to arrive at Wayland town, and they jumped off their machines at the garage.

"Here we are, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, wheeling his machine into the building. "Now we shan't be long!"

Arthur Augustus very quickly arranged for a car, and it was not long in being got ready. Leaving their bicycles in the garage till they should return, the two juniors entered the car, and the chauffeur "tooled" it out of the garage, and they went speeding away down the old High Street of Wayland.

Out of the old market town the car sped along through lanes.

"Bai Jove, this is wathah bettah than the Form-woom, I considah," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, with great satisfaction.

"And better than construing Cæsar!" said Tom Merry, with a laugh.

"Yaas, wathah! If I were head-mastah in a school," said D'Arcy sagely, "I should awwange for the chaps to have little wuns in a car ewevy mornin', you know. I think that would be a distinct improvement!"

"Go hon! Won't old Kildare be surprised to see us?" said Tom Merry, with gleeful anticipation. "We can pick him up at the station, you know, and run him home."

"Yaas, deah boy, that's what I was thinkin'. And we can have a little talk to him in the car, you know, and explain to him how we've been twyin' to keep Cutts in ordah and to save St. Jin's fwom goin' to the beastly bow-wows, you know."

There was no doubt that Kildare would be glad to see them, not only on account of their noble selves, but on account of the car. Lancaster Station was a good distance from the town,

and, being a very quiet and unimportant place, there might not be any means of transit from the station. When Kildare found a handsome motor-car ready to convey him and his belongings to his home he would bound to be pleased. So the juniors anticipated, at all events.

Hoot-toot!

Arthur Augustus glanced carelessly back along the lane at the sound of a motor horn behind them.

A taxi-cab was speeding after them from the direction of Wayland.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus a little indignantly. "They're twyin' to pass us—a blessed taxicab, you know, and we're in a car! Can't possibly allow that!"

"No fear!" said Tom Merry promptly. "We'll race them!"

"Yaas, wathah! Let her wip!"

And D'Arcy directed the chauffeur to put on speed. The car increased its pace, but the taxi was evidently a good one, and it came racing on, overhauling the car ahead.

Arthur Augustus turned his eye upon it curiously.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated suddenly.

"What's the matter?"

"It's that wascal Laskah!"

"Lasker!" said Tom Merry, looking back at the taxi.

The taxi was closed, but the man inside was looking out of the window just then, and the two juniors saw his face clearly. It was the billiards-sharper of Ryelcombe. He was calling out to the driver. He drew his head back and disappeared from view.

"Must have done pretty well out of some mug at the Green Man, I should say," Tom Merry remarked. "It will run him into a pretty penny, a run like that in a taxi, with the clock ticking as fast as you can wink!"

"Yaas, wathah! It's wathah odd, too," D'Arcy remarked in a thoughtful way. "I've often used the taxis in Wayland, and there are only thwee, and I know all the dwivahs. I know that cab, but the dwivah must be a new man; I haven't seen him before. Pewwaps our twiend Laskah has it out for the day, and has a twiend dwivin'. Anyway, he's not goin' to pass us; that's too much cheek! Let her wip, chauffuah!"

The chauffeur let her rip.

The car was buzzing along now considerably in excess of the speed limit, but as the road was open and clear that did not matter very much.

The taxicab hung on, out-distanced, but still going strong.

"Beatin' them!" said D'Arcy, with a satisfied glance backwards.

"Yes, rather!"

"We're half-way to Lancaster now," the swell of St. Jim's remarked. "I suppose that wottah Laskah is goin' there. Wathah surpwisin' that he didn't take the twain—that wide may wun him into pounds."

Hoot-toot!

The car slackened down.

"Keep it up!" called out Arthur Augustus. "Pway don't let that cheeky cad ovahtake us, dwivah!"

"Right, sir!"

The excitement of the race was affecting the chauffeur, too. He had a motorist's natural dislike for being passed on the road. The car sped on as fast as before, though the road was now full of sharp turns and followed a somewhat steep incline. The juniors looked back—they were dropping the taxicab at last, and they felt an exulted sense of victory.

"Beaten hollow!" grinned Tom Merry.

"Yaas, Laskah won't be able to keep his end up with us," said Arthur Augustus. "I weally considah— Oh, my hat! Gweat Scott!"

"Oh crumbs!"

There was a terrific jarring of brakes, and the car rocked and reeled. Round the bend in the road in advance came lumbering a market cart, in the middle of the road, with a sleepy horse plodding on, and a sleepy driver nodding in his seat. The chauffeur had taken too many chances. He jammed on the brakes and turned the car into the high, grassy bank beside the road just in time.

Bump, bump, bump!

For a moment it was like an earthquake to the juniors; then the car stopped half-way up the sloping, grassy bank, with one wheel in the air. The carter looked sleepily at them and plodded on with the market cart, perhaps under the impression that motor-cars always did that kind of thing.

"Bai Jova!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, springing out of the car. "What wotten bad luck! No bones bwooken, howevah. Is there any damage done, dwivah?"

The chauffeur jumped down.

"I'll see, sir."

"Don't blame yourself; it was weally my fault," added D'Arcy graciously. "It is wathah unforch, as we are pwessed for time, but it can't be helped. We were takin' wathah too many wisks, I suppose. Nevah mind! See if we can get on."

"Here comes the taxi," said Tom Merry, as the chauffeur proceeded to examine the car.

"Oh, wotten!"

The taxicab from Wayland came whisking along the road. Lasker's face could be seen looking from the window, and he grinned at the sight of the car stranded on the grassy bank. That grin had a most exasperating effect upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and he so far forgot the repose of Vere de Vere as to shake his fist at the grinning billiard-sharper.

The taxi vanished round a bend, going towards Lancaster.

"Well, what's the damage, deah boy?" said Arthur Augustus. "Don't say we're stwanded."

"I can put it right in twenty minutes, sir."

"Twenty wats!" groaned Arthur Augustus. "We shal be late for Kildare's twain, I'm afwaid. Pway buck up!"

The chauffeur bucked up.

But the twenty minutes was too narrow an estimate. It was well over half an hour before the chauffeur, dirty and oily, announced that all was finished. Then the car was gently persuaded back to the road again.

"Looks as if we shall miss Kildare," said Arthur Augustus gloomily, as they stepped in again. "Still, it's a long woad fwom the station to Lancaster town, and we have to pass through Lancaster to get to the station, so we may pick Kildare up on the woad."

Tom Merry nodded.

After taking so much trouble, it would be cruel luck to miss Kildare at the station, after all. They could only hope for the best as they sped onwards.

CHAPTER 9.

A Sudden Attack!

KILDARE stepped out of the train. The big, handsome Sixth Former of St. Jim's was looking quite fit and well after his long journey. He had a travelling bag in his hand; it was large and it was heavy,



There was a terrific jarring of brakes, and the car rocked and reeled. Round the bend, in the middle of the road, came a market cart! But it was too late to stop the speeding car, and the chauffeur turned it into the high, grassy bank just in time to avoid a collision.

but he carried it without an effort, declining the services of a porter.

Kildare was looking very cheerful that sunny morning.

His uncle, of whom he was very fond, was recovering fast now from a long illness, and Kildare had left him convalescent. That was enough to make him cheerful. And he was coming back to the old school and his old chums.

He was to pass the rest of that day and the night at his parents' home, and the next day he would be amid his old surroundings at St. Jim's. No wonder his handsome face was as bright as the sunshine itself.

He walked out of the station with his quick, elastic step. Outside the station he was pleased to see a taxicab.

Sleepy old Lancaster did not boast many taxicabs, and Kildare was glad to see one there. He was naturally anxious to get home as quickly as possible, and he was not inclined for a long walk with a heavy bag.

The taxi-driver was standing beside his cab, and he came towards Kildare at once and touched his cap. He was a powerfully built man, and he wore motor goggles.

"Taxi sir?"

"Yes," said Kildare. "Abbey Road, Lancaster—as fast as you can."

"Yes, sir."

The bag was tossed into the taxi, and Kildare followed it. The driver took his seat, and the cab spun away from the station.

It was an unfrequented road, shaded on both sides by big elms.

Kildare leaned back in the cab and looked about him with great satisfaction as the cab sped on. The countryside looked pleasant in the winter sun, and his heart was very light.

But half-way from the station to the town, in the loneliest part of the road,

there came a sudden jarring of brakes, and the cab stopped.

Kildare half-rose.

"What's the matter?" he asked, as the driver jumped down.

"I'm sorry, sir; I can't go on," said the driver, after a few minutes.

Kildare frowned a little.

"How far are we from Lancaster?" he asked, glancing round. "About half-way, I think."

"Less than that, sir; it's only a short walk now," said the driver. "Will you leave your bag with me? And I'll bring it on afterwards if you don't care to carry it."

"No; I'll take it," said Kildare. "It's all right."

"I'm very sorry—"

"Oh, that's all right! It can't be helped."

Kildare jumped out of the cab and took his bag. He glanced at the taximeter and paid the amount due, with a tip in addition, and then walked on with long, springy strides in the direction of the town.

The taximan looked after him with a very peculiar expression.

Kildare turned a bend in the road; and then the chauffeur remounted into the cab, and apparently without any difficulty whatever drove into a side lane and stopped his cab there out of sight.

The breakdown had been a pretence; and Kildare, utterly unsuspecting, was stranded, on foot and alone, on the country road.

Not the slightest suspicion that he had been tricked entered Kildare's mind as he strode on.

The pretended accident had seemed natural enough, and he did not dream for a moment that the taxi had been waiting specially for him at the station, and that the whole incident had been

planned in advance by Mr. Lasker. He was thinking of anything but Mr. Lasker just then.

He strode on rapidly towards Lancaster.

In one place the lane narrowed, and passed under a thick clump of elms and oaks, of which the branches met over the road, making it dusky even in the morning sunshine.

Kildare plunged out of the bright sunshine into the shade of the thick trees, and for a moment his eyes were dimmed by the change.

It was at that moment that there came a sudden rush of feet, and three figures leaped out from among the trees beside the road.

Three men, each with a handkerchief tied across his face to conceal it, and each with a heavy cudgel in his hand, rushed straight at Kildare.

The attack was so sudden, and so utterly unlooked-for, that it was no wonder that Kildare was taken by surprise.

The three scoundrels were almost upon him when he realised that he was being attacked.

It was then that the quickness of thought and the agility of body that he had learned on the footer field stood him in good stead.

The nearest ruffian was delivering a sweeping blow when the captain of St. Jim's leaped back just in time.

His backward spring carried him three feet—the blow missed its mark and the ruffian overbalanced himself, staggered forward and fell on one knee.

One of the men behind him bumped into him and staggered. The third ran straight on at Kildare, striking out with his cudgel.

But the Sixth Former of St. Jim's had his wits about him.

The meaning of that lawless ambush he did not know—his assumption was that he was attacked by a common gang of footpads—but whatever it might mean, there was no doubt that the scoundrels meant mischief, and that he had to fight for his skin.

The sunny, good-humoured expression was gone from Kildare's face in a second. His look hardened, his eyes gleamed like blue stones, his teeth came tight together.

With tiger-like agility, he dodged the sweeping blow of the cudgel, closed on the man, and drove his right fist home on the heavy jaw.

The ruffian dropped like a log, with a gasp of anguish.

But the other two were coming on fast now, and Kildare knew that bare fists were no use against heavy bludgeons, wielded by unscrupulous hands. With three to one against him, and the three armed, there was no shame in running, and it was his only chance of escaping bodily injury.

He sprang out into the road and ran. "After him!" panted one of the rascals, and if Kildare had been nearer, he might have recognised the voice of Mr. Lasker.

Kildare dashed down the road, and in a few seconds he was out of the shadow of the trees, and in the broad, open sunlight.

That the footpads would dare to follow him far at midday on the high road was not likely. He dashed on at top speed, not even dropping his bag. He did not intend to leave that as a booty for the supposed thieves.

Lasker and his companion dashed after him, and the third man, whom Kildare had knocked down, scrambled

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to his feet, and followed as fast as he could.

But in half a minute or less, Lasker saw that the St. Jim's senior would beat them easily in a foot-race. They had no chance whatever with him there. But Lasker was desperate.

He paused, swung his bludgeon into the air, and took aim. Next moment the heavy weapon flew through the air.

It caught Kildare behind the knee, and he staggered forward, his right leg numbed by the shock, and fell upon his hands.

"Pile on him!" muttered Lasker, between his teeth.

And the three ruffians closed in on their dazed victim before he had a chance to rise. At that moment there

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came a sudden sound on the lonely road.

Toot, toot!

Down the road, from the direction of Lancaster, a motor-car came tearing.

CHAPTER 10.

A Scoundrel Well Punished!

TOM MERRY and his companion were feeling anxious after their long delay on the road.

They had none too much time for the journey from Wayland, and the delay had made it impossible for them to get to the station to meet Kildare.

Their only hope now was to meet him on the road. But the car had to slacken speed in passing through the town, and their hopes sank to zero.

"We shan't catch him," said Tom Merry, looking at his watch. "It's nearly half-past twelve now, Gussy. Unless he walks from the station—"

"He may do that, deah boy."

"Then we shall spot him on the road. But otherwise—"

"We'll keep on as far as the station, anyway; and if we don't pick him up, we'll wun wound to his house afterwards and see him," said D'Arcy. "Aftah comin' all this way, we're bound to speak to the old chap, you know."

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "Of course, he may have walked. If he has, he can hardly be in Lancaster yet, and we shall meet him on the road."

"I twust so."

The car passed out of Lancaster, and buzzed along the road towards the station at an accelerated speed.

Tom Merry and D'Arcy watched the road ahead, hoping to catch sight of Kildare. If he had walked from the station they were sure of meeting him.

Tom uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Kildare!"

Then he gave a yell.

For a moment the juniors could scarcely believe their eyes.

The well-known form of Kildare of the Sixth had suddenly appeared from under the trees overhanging the road, far ahead of the car, running.

Why he was running had puzzled Tom for a moment, till he saw three figures, three men with handkerchiefs tied across their faces, burst from the trees in pursuit.

What happened next passed in a flash.

Lasker & Co. had no eyes for the distant car. They were thinking only of their victim.

Tom Merry and D'Arcy saw the bludgeon hurled, saw Kildare fall in the road, and saw the three ruffians rushing to pile on him.

"Footpads, bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy.

"Faster!" shouted Tom Merry. "Faster, for goodness' sake!"

The car simply leaped forward.

And the chauffeur, with quick intuition, sounded his horn loudly.

The sudden blasts of the motor-horn warned Lasker & Co. that they were not alone upon the road, and just as they reached Kildare's fallen form they paused to look along the road.

The motor-car was sweeping down upon them, Tom Merry and D'Arcy standing up in it with blazing eyes.

Another few seconds and the brutal work would have been done.

But at the sight of the oncoming car Lasker's companions weakened. To attack Kildare alone under the shadow of the trees was one thing. To carry out the attack in broad daylight, with the eyes of three witnesses upon them, was quite another.

For a second there was a tense pause.

Then two of the rascals bolted for the trees beside the road, scrambled over the palings, and disappeared.

Only one hesitated, and that was Lasker.

He was on the very edge of success when this interruption came. But he was more "game," or a more thorough rascal, than his companions. He did not run. Quickly he calculated the distance of the car, and the time it must take to reach him, and then he hurled himself at Kildare.

One savage blow and his work would be done. Mr. Lasker had "outed" more than one person in his chequered career, and he knew just where to hit without entailing too serious consequences for himself.

But that pause, when the motor-horn was heard, was enough for Kildare.

The St. Jim's fellow was already on his knees to rise.

Lasker came rushing upon him with his bludgeon sweeping in the air, and Kildare watched for the coming blow.

It came, and Kildare threw himself aside, and the blow grazed his shoulder instead of crashing upon his head. The bludgeon came down with such force that it struck the ground, and the concussion jarred Mr. Lasker's wrist painfully.

Kildare was on his feet the next second, but his leg was numbed and it gave way under him, and he sank down on one knee again.

Lasker had backed away, but as Kildare sank helplessly on his knee he came on again savagely.

With a shrieking of brakes, the car rapidly slowed down, and Tom Merry and D'Arcy leaped out, without waiting for it to come to a standstill.

Arthur Augustus lost his footing and rolled into the road, gasping; but Tom Merry ran on like a deer.

He ran right into Mr. Lasker as he was hitting out, and dragged at him, and the rascal had to turn his attention to Tom Merry instead of Kildare.

He muttered a savage curse as he shortened his arm to bring the bludgeon down upon Tom Merry's head.

But he had no time for that.

Tom's clenched fist came up, hard as iron, and seemingly as heavy as a hammer, and caught Mr. Lasker fairly under his chin.

The rascal reeled back with a gasp, and fell, and before he had a chance of recovering, Tom Merry was upon him. The cudgel had fallen from Lasker's hand, and he was down upon his back, and Tom Merry's knee was on his chest.

Arthur Augustus and the chauffeur were upon the scene the next moment, and three pairs of hands were grasping Lasker at once.

He struggled fiercely.

"Collah the wottah!" panted Arthur Augustus.

"Got him, sir!" said the chauffeur, fastening his grasp upon Mr. Lasker's collar. "He won't get away."

"Hold him!" said Tom Merry, and he sprang to help Kildare.

Kildare rose painfully to his feet, with the junior's assistance. He leaned heavily upon Tom Merry's shoulder.

"Thank you, kid!" he said, breathing hard. "You came along in the nick of time. But how on earth do you happen to be here? You ought to be at school."

"We came to meet you, deah boy," said D'Arcy.

"We were going to pick you up at the station," explained Tom Merry, "only we had bad luck on the road, and we were late."

"It was jolly good of you to come!" said Kildare. "And jolly lucky for me! My hat! My leg hurts. Keep that rotter tight. The others have got away."

"We've got this cad all wight, deah boy! He won't get away in a huwvy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We'll see who he is, too."

He jerked the handkerchief from the face of the hapless rascal, then he uttered an exclamation of wonder.

"Laskah, bai Jove!"

Mr. Lasker scowled furiously. He was a helpless prisoner now, and he had ceased to struggle. His scheme had failed, and he had the pleasant prospects before him of being taken in charge and prosecuted for attempted robbery with violence. It was a decidedly bad ending to his little scheme.

"Lasker!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "The chap who passed us on the road

in a taxicab. Why, he must have come over especially for this, Kildare, to lay for you."

Kildare looked puzzled.

"Blessed if I can see why!" he said. "I've got nothing special about me that's worth stealing. He wouldn't get much more than enough to pay the taxi fare from Wayland, I fancy."

"Well, that's what he did, anyway.

He passed us on the road," said Tom.

"In a taxi, you say?"

"Yes."

"I took a taxi at the station here," said Kildare. "It broke down halfway, and I had to walk."

"My hat!"

The St. Jim's fellows looked at one another in astonishment. It was pretty clear now that the attack on Kildare was not a footpad affair, but a planned scheme from the beginning.

Why had Lasker come over in a taxi to ambush Kildare? What could his object have been? The proceeds of a robbery could hardly have paid for the expense he had been put to, and there would have been four to divide the loot, including the man who had driven the cab.

"Well, this beats the band!" said Tom Merry. "The fellow must be dotty!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Kildare sat down on the bank and rolled back his trouser-leg to examine the injury he had received. There was a huge bruise behind his knee, but no worse damage was done. The timely arrival of the juniors had saved him from serious hurt.

"Bad?" asked Tom anxiously. Kildare shook his head.

"No; only a bump, though a pretty bad one. I shan't be able to walk for a bit."

"That's all right. We're going to take you home in the car. That's what we've come for," said Tom Merry.

"Shall we take this scoundrel in the car, too, and hand him over to the police? He ought to be locked up!"

Mr. Lasker

turned very pale.

"Ave mercy on a pore chap, young gentlemen!" he whined. "I—I was 'ard up, and I wasn't going to 'urt the young gent."

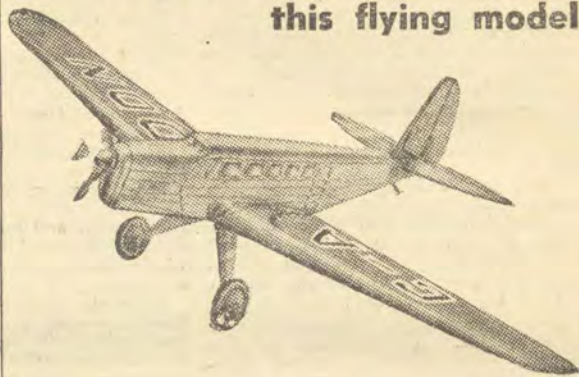
"You lying cad!" said Tom. "You were piling on him with that cudgel."

"I swear—"

"Chuck that!" said Kildare curtly. "I don't want to be bothered with prose."

(Continued on the next page.)

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cuting you. But you ought to be punished. What did you do this for?"

"I—I've 'ad bad luck, and I was 'ard up!" whined Mr. Lasker. "I've 'ad cruel luck on 'osses, and—and I was led into this. A pal of mine says 'e's got a good thing on, and asked if I would take a 'and. I didn't know wot it was till I got 'ere this mornin'."

"I don't believe that!" said Tom Merry. "I believe you were the leader."

"Which I swear as 'ow I wasn't!" protested Mr. Lasker. "I'm a pore man. I ain't got the dibs to 'ire a taxicab for 'alf a day for a game of this sort. Why, even if we'd got Master Kildare's bag and his watch we shouldn't 'ave made much out of the job, arter payin' so much for that there cab."

"So you were going to rob me?" said Kildare.

"We was 'ard up!" pleaded Mr. Lasker.

"Then how did you know Kildare would be here to-day at this time?" asked Tom Merry quietly. "He's been away for weeks. Who told you that he was coming back to-day?"

Mr. Lasker's jaw dropped for a moment, but he recovered himself quickly.

"I—I didn't know," he said. "You see, it was a game of my pals. It was only by chance that we 'appened to drop on Master Kildare. The idea was to drop on some passenger walkin' 'ome from the station, one of the rich gents wot comes down from the city. But Master Kildare was the only passenger wot come, so it 'appened to be 'im."

The St. Jim's fellows regarded him doubtfully. His explanation sounded lame, and yet it seemed impossible that he had known that Kildare was coming by that train, and that he could have had any special object in waylaying the Sixth Former of St. Jim's.

Why should he have taken so much trouble to injure a fellow whom he barely knew by sight, and with whom he had never had any connection? Probably his explanation was true, that the whole affair was a clumsy attempt at highway robbery.

"Well, what are you going to do with him?" said Tom Merry. "He ought to be put in prison!"

"Yaas, wathah! Thwee years penal servitude, or somethin' like that!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy severely.

"Don't be 'ard on a pore chap! I'll—I'll never 'ave a 'and in anythin' of the kind again!" groaned Mr. Lasker. "I've 'ad a lesson, I 'ave. I won't never try this game agin, you take my word!"

Kildare hesitated.

The rascal had failed, after all, and, according to his own account, he was not the worst of the gang. And Kildare did not want his homecoming to be clouded by the trouble of a prosecution, even of a rascal like Lasker.

"I'll leave it to you, you scoundrel," he said, after a pause. "You can be taken to Lancaster and handed over to the police, or you take a thorough hiding now. Which do you want?"

Mr. Lasker wriggled painfully. He did not want either.

"I'll—I'll 'ave the 'idin', sir," he muttered. "But don't be too 'ard on a pore chap."

"Roll him over!" said Kildare. "I'll give him such a wallop that he won't want to play the game again!"

"Yaas, pewwaps that is the best way, deah boy," agreed Arthur Augustus.

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"Ovah with him, Tom Mewwy, and sit on his beasty head."

Mr. Lasker was rolled over in the grass beside the road, and Tom Merry held his collar, and D'Arcy stood on his legs. In that position Lasker was very favourably placed for the wallop that was to be the punishment. Kildare cut himself a stout stick from a tree by the roadside, and came limping towards the outstretched Lasker.

Then the stick rose and fell with rapidity and force, and clouds of dust rose from Mr. Lasker's garments, and yells of anguish from Mr. Lasker himself.

Thwack, thwack, thwack, thwack!

"Oh! Ow! Yow! Ow!"

"Go it, deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Pile in! Give him a couple of hundred!"

Thwack, thwack, thwack, thwack!

Mr. Lasker yelled wildly, partly with the pain of the castigation, and partly with apprehension at the idea of having a couple of hundred of the heavy thwacks.

After the stick had fallen twenty times or so, Mr. Lasker began to feel that he would have preferred, after all, to be locked up.

"Stop it!" he shrieked, writhing frantically in the grasp of the juniors.

"Chuck it! I'll 'ave the law on yer! 'And me over to the pelrice if you like—ow! I won't 'ave any more of it—yow!—leggo!—stop-pit!—yaroooh!"

Thwack, thwack, thwack, thwack, thwack!

"Elp! 'Elp!"

Fifty heavy cuts were Mr. Lasker's portion. He would probably have received more, but Kildare's arm was getting tired.

The St. Jim's senior ceased at last, breathing hard. Mr. Lasker by this time was in a state of weeping anguish and misery.

"I think that will do," said Kildare.

"Bettah make it a couple of hundred, deah boy. I'll take a turn with the stick, if you like, if you are tired."

"Ow!" roared Mr. Lasker. "Don't give me no more! Yow!"

"And then Tom Mewwy can take a turn—"

"Ow, ow, ow!" gasped Mr. Lasker. "I've 'ad enough, young gents! I won't never do nothin' of the kind no more. Ow!"

Kildare laughed.

"I think he's had enough," he remarked. "Let him go. Now scoot, you scoundrel, and you'd better keep out of armslength of me in the future."

Mr. Lasker was allowed to rise. He staggered to his feet and limped away down the road, groaning.

CHAPTER 11.

Tom Merry Sees Light!

"N OW we'll take you home, Kildare, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Thanks!"

Kildare and the two juniors took their seats in the car, and the chauffeur drove away.

Mr. Lasker had disappeared up the road towards the station, in the direc-

tion of the waiting taxi. He was not likely to enjoy his run back to Wayland, especially if he sat down in the taxi.

But the St. Jim's fellows gave no further thought to Mr. Lasker.

He had been baffled in his rascally attempt upon Kildare, and he had been soundly thrashed as a punishment, and they dismissed him from their minds.

It was a very agreeable run in the car to Lancaster.

Kildare's leg was still painful, but he bore that quietly, only too glad that the arrival of the juniors had saved him from more serious injury.

He asked them many questions about St. Jim's as the car buzzed on, and the juniors explained how anxious they were to have him back, to save the whole school from completely going to



As Kildare strode on towards Lancaster, three men concealed by handkerchiefs, and each with a heavy cut. The attack was so sudden it was no wonder.

the bow-wows, a fate that threatened St. Jim's—according to Tom Merry and D'Arcy—under Cutts' regime.

As Kildare was to become captain of St. Jim's again on the morrow, and as Cutts would then be under his authority, the juniors did not say much about Cutts himself; they would have considered that in the light of "sneaking," Kildare would find out about Cutts' little ways himself if he wanted to.

But they explained with great eloquence that matters were really in a very bad state, and that St. Jim's wasn't what it had been, and that the only thing that could prevent the school from sliding away to the bow-wows was the prompt return of Kildare, and his resuming his place as captain of St. Jim's.

Kildare listened to all they said attentively, and though perhaps he did not fully agree with all their views, he probably realised as clearly as they did that his presence was really wanted at the school.

The car stopped outside Kildare's home at last, and the Sixth Former

took the juniors in with him, and they stayed there to lunch. Kildare grinned as he opened the two telegrams that were waiting for him. Tom Merry and D'Arcy spent a very pleasant couple of hours with Kildare's people, and then the car bore them away once more in the bright afternoon.

"I wegard our little twip as a success, deah boy," Arthur Augustus remarked, as the car ran on swiftly towards Wayland.

Tom Merry nodded.

"A bigger success than we expected," he said. "If we hadn't come up when we did, Kildare would have been badly hurt."

"And he wouldn't have been able to come to St. Jim's to-morrow," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a sage

kind of thing; but highway robbery isn't in his line at all, I should say—not as a regular thing, anyway. It's queer. It must have cost them money to hire that taxi for pretty nearly a whole day. And there were four of them altogether, it seems, to divide what plunder they might have got from Kildare. Then robbery on the high-road in the broad daylight is a risky bisney! Gussy, old man, I've thought it out, and I'm sure that Lasker was lying."

"He would be more likely to lie than to tell the twath, I suppose," agreed Arthur Augustus. "But what—"

"He said that they dropped on Kildare by chance—that they would have dropped on any passenger who had happened to come away from the station then—"

"That's so."

"Well, I don't believe it. It's too thin. And it won't wash. Lasker is no fool; and if he was trying the business of a motor bandit, like the chaps we read of in the papers, he would put a little more common sense into it. It would be safer after dark, and he could have found a better-paying victim than Kildare. Kildare's only a schoolboy, after all, and not likely to have much tin about him."

"Yaas; but they did go for him, you know."

"Exactly, and I think they came over here specially to go for him," said Tom Merry.

D'Arcy shook his head.

"Why should they, deah boy? They couldn't have anythin' specially up against old Kildare, could they? He hardly knows Laskah."

"Somebody else has something up against Kildare," said Tom Merry quietly. "Somebody else would be jolly glad if Kildare was crooked, and couldn't come back to St. Jim's this term!"

Arthur Augustus started.

"Do you mean Cutts?"

"Yes, I mean Cutts."

"Gweat Scott! But he—"

he couldn't!" Arthur Augustus stammered. "My deah chap, a St. Jim's fellow couldn't have had a hand in such a wascally bisney!"

"One doesn't like to think so," said Tom. "But look at the facts. Don't you remember, Gussy—you found Cutts meeting Lasker secretly last night?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Of course, he may have met him only about some of their rotten betting business—"

"That's what we thought, deah boy."

"Only it looks jolly suspicious. Cutts met Lasker last night, and Cutts is simply wild at the idea of Kildare coming back. To-day Lasker and a gang of roughs are all ready for Kildare here, and if they came over specially for him, as it seems, somebody must have told them he would come by that train. Who could have told them, excepting Cutts?"

"Bai Jove!"

"I know it seems a pretty rotten thing to think of anybody," said Tom, colouring a little; "but it looks to me like a proved case. Cutts is rotter enough. We know the rotten trick he

played on Dig once; we know he's a gambler and a blackguard, and we know he's dead-set against Kildare coming back. We know he tried once to sell the first eleven match, because he had bets against the team. He's rotter enough for this, and it looks pretty clear against him."

Arthur Augustus pursed his lips very thoughtfully.

"It looks vewy cleah, the way you put it," he admitted. "But—but there isn't any pwoof, deah boy."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of accusing him!" said Tom. "It's no good trying to nail Cutts down; he's as slippery as an eel. But if we're satisfied that he's put up this job on Kildare, we've got to keep our peepers open, to see that he doesn't play the same game again before old Kildare gets to St. Jim's to-morrow."

"Oh, my hat! Kildare hasn't a single suspich, deah boy!"

"And he would laugh at the idea if we told him we suspected Cutts—if he didn't get waxy with us," said Tom. "Old Kildare is as unsuspecting as a baby. He can't look after himself, so we're going to look after him."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus heartily. "We'll look aftah him, and see that he doesn't come to any harm. And we'll fwustwate Cutts' knavish twicks, wathah!"

They discussed the matter at full length during the run back to St. Jim's, and as they discussed it little circumstances and incidents came into their minds which more than confirmed Tom Merry's dark suspicion.

The car arrived in Wayland at last, and Arthur Augustus settled the bill, and the juniors took their bicycles from the garage and rode back to the school. And when they reached the school they made their way at once to Cutts' study.

CHAPTER 12.

Cutts Hears News!

LESSONS were over for the day at St. Jim's. Cutts of the Fifth was in his study, in a troubled and uneasy frame of mind.

He felt restless, and his usual coolness seemed to have deserted him for the time.

He knew that long before this either Mr. Lasker had succeeded, or he had failed—either Kildare was laid up at home, unable to leave his bed, or else he was safe and sound, and booked to arrive at the school on the morrow.

Cutts would not know what had happened until he saw Mr. Lasker that evening, and the suspense was irritating and exasperating.

There was also the possibility that Kildare, attacked by the gang of roughs, might have put up a good fight, and in consequence might have been more severely injured than was intended by his rival at St. Jim's. That possibility was a very worrying one to Cutts, and he was anxious to see Lasker and learn exactly what had happened. But until evening it was not safe to seek the delectable society of Mr. Lasker.

There was a knock at his door, and Tom Merry and D'Arcy came in.

Cutts scowled at them angrily. In his present mood he was not inclined for any company, least of all for that of the juniors he detested.

"Don't come bothering me now!" he growled. "Get out!"

"We've got to report to you, haven't we?"

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out from among the trees beside the road. Their faces
his hand, the three ruffians rushed straight at Kildare.
St. Jim's senior was taken by surprise.

shake of the head. "That would have been wotten. Why, the old chap might have been laid up for weeks if we hadn't awvived in time, you know!"

Tom Merry's brow was deeply wrinkled. He was thinking hard.

"It's jolly queer!" he said at last.

"What's queeah, deah boy?"

"About that attack on Kildare. What do you think Cutts would say if he knew about it?"

Arthur Augustus chuckled gleefully.

"He would be awfully watty, I fancy. He would give a term's pocket money for Kildare to be ewoked, so that he couldn't come back to the school this term, I wathah think!"

"So do I," said Tom Merry, in so significant a tone that D'Arcy turned his head and looked at him very curiously.

"What have you got in your bwain now?" he inquired.

"I've been thinking all the time," said Tom gravely. "There's more in this bisney than meets the eye, Gussy!"

"Yaas?"

"That man Lasker is a billiard sharper and a racing tout, and that

we?" said Tom Merry. "We've come back, Cutts."

"I can see you've come back," growled Cutts. "Now clear off!"

"Then you don't want to know what happened at Lancaster?"

Cutts jumped clear of the floor.

Both the juniors were watching him keenly, and Tom Merry's shot had been so sudden that Cutts could not possibly guard against it. His face went quite pale, and the startled look, almost of terror, that came into his eyes more than confirmed Tom Merry in his suspicion.

"Lancaster!" muttered Cutts.

"Yaas, deah boy!"

"You've been to Lancaster?"

"Certainly!" said Tom Merry. "That's where we were going, you know."

"I didn't know," muttered Cutts. "How could you go to Lancaster? It's a great distance from here. Do you mean to say that you've biked fifty miles and back?"

"Oh, no! We left our jiggers in Wayland, and had a car out—"

"A car!" murmured Cutts.

"Yes. You see, the idea was to meet Kildare at Lancaster Station."

Cutts sank limply into a chair.

"T-t-to meet Kildare!" he stammered.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You didn't tell me that," said Cutts, between his teeth. "You young bounders! Why didn't you tell me you were going to meet Kildare? Not that it matters," he added hastily, "where you went, or whom you met. However, you should have told me."

"Well, we're telling you now," said Tom Merry blandly.

"Did you meet Kildare?"

"Yes."

"You—you met him?"

Cutts seemed scarcely able to speak the words. He knew now that his precious scheme with Mr. Lasker had "gone agley."

"Yaas; we wan him home in the car," said Arthur Augustus. "He is all wight, Cutts, exceptin' for the bump on his leg."

"A bump on his leg," said Cutts, trying to speak calmly. "Has he had an—an accident?"

"Not exactly an accident," said Tom Merry. "He was assaulted by a gang of roughs on the road from the station, and we came up just in time to prevent him from being badly hurt."

"Oh!"

Cutts' eyes gleamed with hatred for a moment. So the plan had failed, and the juniors were responsible for the failure. If looks could have slain, Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus would have come to a sudden termination of their careers there and then, on the carpet in Gerald Cutts' study.

"So—so Kildare was—was hurt?" gasped Cutts at last.

"Only a bwuise on the leg, deah boy. We considahed that we ought to weport the occuwwence to you, as captain of St. Jim's—pwo tem," Arthur Augustus explained politely.

The "pro tem" made Cutts snap his teeth. Certainly his captivacy would not last much longer with Kildare unhurt and returning to the school on the morrow.

His keen eyes searched the faces of the juniors. Did they suspect anything? Their looks were innocent, however.

"Very well," muttered Cutts. "That was quite right. By the way, what became of the—those rascals who assaulted Kildare? I hope they didn't get away."

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"Unfortunately, deah boy, they all got away but one," said D'Arcy. "We managed to collah one of the wascals—the leadaah of the gang."

Cutts' heart stood still.

"You—you captured one?"

"Yaas, wathah! A chap you know, deah boy, as it happens. Wathah a wemahkable coincidence, isn't it?" said D'Arcy blandly.

"What nonsense!" said Cutts. "How could I know such a person?"

"But you do, deah boy."

"D'Arcy!"

"His name is Laskah!"

"Lasker!"

"Yaas; the chap you were meetin' last night, you know."

Cutts' face was white as chalk now.

"You—you are telling the truth?" he stammered blankly.

"I decline to answah that question," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "I wegard it as an aspersiun upon my personal honah!"

"You say you caught Lasker among the gang?"

"Yaas."

"And—and handed him over to the

"Hold on!" said Cutts. "Did you say you had handed Lasker over to the police?"

"I didn't say so," said Tom.

"What did you do with him, then?"

"Oh, we gave him a hiding, and let him go!"

Cutts drew a deep breath. He was saved, then!

"You let him go?"

"Yes."

"That was rather a foolish thing to do," said Cutts, master of himself again at last. "I don't know whether it amounts to breaking the law, even. You should certainly have had him taken in charge by the police, and charged with what he had done."

"Yes; it's rather a pity, when I think of it," agreed Merry. "But it's too late now. Still, if you think it ought to be done, Cutts, I dare say you know where the man can be found, as he's an acquaintance of yours, and you could telephone to the police now in Rylcombe to look for him and arrest him. We'll leave it to you."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, with a smile. "We'll leave that mattah in your hands, Cutts, deah boy!"

"I—I'll think about it," said Cutts. "You can leave it to me, as—as you say. Now buzz off! I'm busy!"

"Right-ho!"

The two juniors left the study. Not till the door had closed behind them did the false calmness drop like a mask from Cutts' face, and then he gave rein to the fury that was raging in his breast.

Guessing pretty accurately Cutts' state of mind, the two juniors walked away cheerfully down the Fifth Form passage.

"I wathah think we have beaten Cutts this time," Arthur Augustus remarked, as they came into the juniors' quarters; "and we have bowled the wothah out, deah boy. He was in a blue funk when he thought that Laskah had been awwested."

"It's clear enough now," said Tom Merry.

"But we have put the stoppah on, deah boy."

"How do we know? Kildare won't be here till some time to-morrow, and Cutts may have another try," said Tom abruptly.

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that!"

"We've got to see the cad doesn't do Kildare any harm till he's safe here," said Tom. "He seems to me to be desperate enough for anything. If he's gone so far, he may go farther. He's got to be watched."

"Yaas, bai Jove!"

"We'd better tell the fellows about it, and consult them about what's to be done," said Tom Merry. "Bring Blake and Herries and Dig into my study, and we'll have a jaw over tea."

"Wight-ho!"

Ten minutes later the chums of the School House were discussing tea and Cutts' manifold sins in Tom Merry's study, and holding a council of war.

And if Cutts could have heard the juniors in council he would have realised that the task he had set himself was harder than he had anticipated, and that the chances were now against him in his struggle to retain the captaincy of St. Jim's by desperate measures.

CHAPTER 13.

Knox Asks Questions!

DARKNESS had fallen upon St. Jim's.

Lights gleamed from the windows. Most of the fellows were in their studies, busy with their preparation.



The quadrangle was in deep gloom. All fellows were supposed to be in their Houses now—New House or School House.

But there were two juniors of the School House who were not indoors.

They were Tom Merry and Jack Blake.

For all the risk of trouble with their respective Form-masters in the morning, the two juniors were leaving their preparation undone that evening.

They had, as Blake said, something more important on hand than prep, though perhaps their Form-masters would not have agreed with them.

In the darkness that lay upon the school, the Shell fellow and the Fourth Former were in cover under the old trees near the school wall, where it bordered the high road. They were on the watch.

The council of war in Tom Merry's study had resulted in the decision that Cutts of the Fifth was to be kept under surveillance. All the Co. fully agreed with Tom Merry that the evidence against Cutts was conclusive. The evidence that he had had a hand in the attack upon Kildare on the Lancaster road would not have satisfied the Head, and would probably not have convinced Kildare. But it was conclusive enough for Tom Merry & Co., knowing and distrusting Cutts as they did.

It was important, therefore, to know whether Cutts would be baffled by Lasker's failure, and give up his scheme, or whether he would make another attempt.

That he could personally take part in any rascally attempt upon Kildare was scarcely possible. If he laid further plans, it could only be through Mr. Lasker and his associates. He would meet Lasker again, and plot another scheme with him. And if he did, the juniors meant to know all about it.

If Cutts left the school to meet Lasker, the juniors intended to know it, and for that reason Tom Merry and Blake were keeping watch.

Cutts, as captain of St. Jim's, had a key to the private gate, which was used by masters and prefects, and if he left the school that was the way he would go. There was no need for him to break bounds as the juniors did. He was free to come and go as he pleased. And Tom Merry and Blake were keeping their eyes on that little gate as they stood in the shadow of the trees near the wall.

Whether to follow Cutts or not if he went out, they had not decided. The idea of playing the spy was very repugnant to them. But to save Kildare from a cowardly attack and possible injury, it might be justifiable. But it would be very difficult.

Cutts was a very wary bird, and not easily caught. If he were followed, it was extremely probable that he would discover the fact, and the juniors would thus be betraying their knowledge to him, and putting him on his guard.

It was quite dark when Cutts came along to the gates. The juniors saw his well-known form cross the radius of light from the School House windows, and then he disappeared under the trees.

They kept back among the elms, almost holding their breath. Cutts passed within a couple of yards of them.

They heard the click of the key and the gate opened. The Fifth Former went out, and the gate closed and clicked behind him.

Cutts was gone.

"Gone to meet Lasker," said Blake, in a tense whisper. "Of course, he would have arranged to see him again, to hear how he got on to-day. He didn't anticipate getting a report from you and Gussy first."

And Blake chuckled. Tom Merry chuckled, too. That report of the happenings at Lancaster must certainly have come as a surprise to Gerald Cutts.

"The question is, are they going to fix up another scheme for getting at Kildare on his way here to-morrow?" said Tom.

"That's what we want to know. But—" "It would be a bit difficult to shadow him, and hear what the rotters say to one another, and I don't like the idea—but—"

"I don't, either," said Blake. "But to help old Kildare—"

"Merry! Blake!"

It was a sharp, unpleasant voice ringing through the shadows of the quadrangle—the voice of Knox of the Sixth.

The juniors started. "The beast!" growled Blake. "He's spotted that we're out of the House, Tommy."

"Merry—Blake! Where are you?" "That settles it!" said Tom. "We can't scud off now—we should be missed at once. I fancy Cutts has warned Knox to keep his eye open for us."

(Continued on the next page.)

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"Do you think he suspects that we know?"

"Well, no; only he never takes chances. He doesn't think we know; but he's just as cautious as if he knew we knew," said Tom ruefully. "That's Cutts all over."

"Merry—Blake!"

Knox was evidently determined to find the juniors.

And if he did not find them, he would at least advertise to all the school that they were out of bounds, and due punishment would be meted out to them when they turned up.

The idea of following Cutts had to be abandoned. Tom Merry and Blake circled away through the trees, and dodged into the School House, leaving Knox of the Sixth still seeking them in the dusky quadrangle.

Tom Merry was in his study with Lowther and Manners, hard at work upon his preparation, when Knox looked in. The Sixth Former scowled at Tom.

"So you're here!" he said.

"Here I am!" said Tom cheerily. "So glad to see you, Knox! If you knew what a pleasure it was to a chap to see your cheerful chivvy you'd often give us a look in—I know you would!"

"I'm sure of it!" said Monty Lowther solemnly. "You're such a kind chap, Knox—and so fond of us. We like to see your face—it's as good as going to Madame Tussaud's—and cheaper!"

"You've been out of the House, Merry!" said Knox savagely.

"Have, I?" said Tom innocently.

"You know you have!" exclaimed Knox.

"Well, if you know I have, then there's no use telling me," said Tom calmly. "It really seems to me a bit of superfluous information, Knox. You're taking a lot of trouble for nothing."

"Where have you been?"

"Oh where and oh where have you been?" sang Manners softly.

"Find out!" said Tom. "I'm not going to satisfy your curiosity. I don't approve of curiosity among Sixth Form chaps."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Knox looked as if he would commit assault and battery upon the spot. But the Terrible Three were rather a rough handful to tackle, and Knox thought better of it. He went out and slammed the door instead. The Terrible Three smiled at one another.

"Knoxy was rather ratty!" Manners remarked.

"Yes, rather! I suppose he's gone to call on Blake now to ask him where he's been!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

That was indeed Knox's intention. He kicked open the door of Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage without ceremony and stepped in. The chums of the Fourth were sitting round their study table, solemnly preparing their next morning lessons. They did not even look up as Knox came in, being apparently too deeply engrossed in their work to have heard the kick at the door.

"Blake!" rapped out Knox.

"Hallo!" said Blake affably, glancing round. "Welcome, little stranger!"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass upon the angry senior.

"You were out after the House was closed, Blake!"

"How do you know that, Knox?" asked Blake, with interest.

"I looked round the House for you, and you weren't indoors!" snarled

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Knox. "I want to know what you've been up to?"

"Isn't he a regular Sherlock Holmes?" said Blake, with enthusiastic admiration. "He knew I wasn't indoors, so he deduced that I was out of doors. If he had known that I was indoors, he would have deduced the fact that I wasn't out of doors. Some chaps can do these things, you know, and Knox is one of them."

"I regard it as a wonderful exhibit of unusual brawn power," remarked Arthur Augustus. "Can you do any more things like that, Knox?"

"I shall report you to the House-master!" said Knox.

"Go on!" said Blake. "You'll have to prove it! Report away! But you will look an ass if it turns out that I was in the box-room helping Manners to develop his blessed films!"

"Were you in the box-room?"

"I didn't say so. I might have been—or I might have been on the roof, or up the chimney!" said Blake humorously.

"If you want to report to Railton, go ahead, and I'll explain to him where I was! I'm not going to explain to you!"

Knox's wrath boiled over, and he charged at the chums of Study No. 6. They were on their feet in a twinkling, and Blake caught up a ruler, Herries a poker, and Digby an inkpot, and Knox paused just in time, scowling at them furiously.

"Well, what are you stopping for?" asked Blake sweetly. "Come on! Don't be backward in coming forward, you know!"

"Pway come on, deah boy! We're weady for you!" said Arthur Augustus. "Don't mind us, you know!"

Slam!

Knox was gone.

Blake stepped to the door of the study and opened it. He looked out and called after the furious senior:

"You've forgotten something, Knox!"

Knox turned back in the passage, under the impression that he had left something or other behind in the study.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"Your manners!" said Blake blandly.

Then he closed the door of the study and returned contentedly to his preparation. As for Knox, he strode away, with feelings that could not be expressed in words; and he found some slight solace and satisfaction in cuffing Levison of the Fourth as he passed him in the passage.

CHAPTER 14.

The Last Chance!

"IT wasn't my fault, you can bet on that!" said Mr. Lasker. "I did my best. If them kids hadn't come along just at the wrong time, it would have been done." Cutts gritted his teeth.

Mr. Lasker was at the meeting-place, under the trees by the footpath in Rylcombe Wood, waiting for Cutts when he arrived there.

Lasker was in an anxious mood.

He had failed, though, as he tried to explain, by no fault of his own. But he did not want to offend Cutts. Cutts was too valuable an acquaintance for Mr. Lasker to want to offend. He was desperately anxious to make Cutts of the Fifth understand that he really had done his best, and that he had only been defeated by untoward circumstances.

"Course, I didn't know that they were comin' there," said Mr. Lasker defensively. "'Ow was I to know? You didn't warn me that they was goin' to meet 'im."

"I didn't know myself!" said Cutts

savagely. "If I'd known anything about their intentions, I'd have taken good care they didn't leave the school."

"It was just bad luck, then," said Mr. Lasker. "I 'ad the plan all cut and dried. We took a taxi over to Lancaster Station. Kildare comes out, and naturally he takes a taxi—I counted on that—and that taxi breaks down 'arf-way to Lancaster, leaving him to walk the rest—alone. There was three of us, hidin' ahead of him on the road, ready to pounce on him. I 'ad Jerry Baker and Bill Wylie with me, both good boys at that kind of game. He was quick, and he managed to run; but we was right on to him ag'in when the car came tearing up. Then it was all over. Jerry and Bill cut and run. I put up a fight, and they laid me by the 'eels."

"Lucky they didn't hand you over to the police!" growled Cutts.

Mr. Lasker drew a deep breath.

"It was lucky," he admitted. "I might have got a good stretch. 'Course, I shouldn't 'ave said a word about you, Master Cutts!"

Cutts was not quite so sure about that, but he did not say so. Fortunately for both of them, Mr. Lasker had escaped any personal dealings with the police.

"You see, it wasn't my fault, sir."

"Never mind whose fault it was," snapped Cutts. "That doesn't matter much now. The trouble is, you've failed, and Kildare is coming on to the school to-morrow, just the same."

"I s'pose so," agreed Mr. Lasker.

"Then how is he going to be stopped?"

Mr. Lasker coughed.

"You ain't chuckin' the game at this stage, then, Master Cutts?"

"Of course not! I'm going to fight to the finish. It will be time enough to get out of the captaincy when I'm shoved out. There's still a chance. I've asked Darrell about Kildare's plans; he's had another letter from him to-day. Kildare is coming on by train from Lancaster to-morrow afternoon."

"The local train?" said Mr. Lasker thoughtfully.

"Yes, of course!"

"Ain't many passengers in that, as a rule," said Lasker.

"What do you mean?"

"I've travelled on that line pretty often," explained Mr. Lasker. "I've noticed that it's always half-empty. And in the early afternoon the train's generally emptiest of all. I suppose Master Kildare will travel first class?"

"I suppose so," said Cutts. "Why?"

"Then the chances are that he'll be alone in the carriage."

"Well?"

"Looks like our chance, sir," said Mr. Lasker. "It's easier to deal with a chap in an empty railway carriage than on a public 'ighway."

"Oh!" said Cutts.

"S'pose a couple of fellers got into the carriage at the last moment, along with our young gentleman?" said Mr. Lasker, in a low voice. "It's a good run between the stations—we 'ave twenty minutes after leavin' Lancaster without a stop. Lots of things can 'appen in twenty minutes."

Cutts breathed hard.

"A lick over the 'ead with a life-preserver, Frinstance," said Mr. Lasker cheerfully. "Quite an easy thing to do, you know. Takes the young gentleman quite by surprise, too. Don't know what's 'appened to him till he wakes up, hours arterwards. The train slows down at Beechfield level-crossing, sometimes waits there. Chaps can slip out of the carriage and walk away. Passengers sometimes get down there, you know. Master Kildare stays in the train, laid

out. They find him at the next station. Discover his name and address on him and send him home."

"It sounds all right," said Cutts. "But after what's happened to-day, Lasker, you'll be suspected of having a hand in it."

Mr. Lasker grinned.

"I shan't have a hand in it," he said. "I'll instruct Jerry Baker and Wylie. They can do the trick, and I'll take care to show myself in public all the afternoon, so that my alibi will be all right."

"Can you rely on them?"

"You bet!"

"Kildare doesn't know them by sight?"

"No; they had handkerchiefs across their chivvies to-day when we laid for 'im. 'Sides, they can make up a bit, you know, and wear different clothes."

"It seems all right. Mind, see that they don't do too much harm. You understand?"

"That's all right. They ain't the kind to risk their little necks," said Mr. Lasker, with a grin. "You leave it to them."

"If it's all right I'll make it a fiver each for them," said Cutts.

"Good!" exclaimed Mr. Lasker. "What train does Mr. Kildare come by?"

"He leaves Lancaster at three."

"The regular local. That's all right. It's a go, Master Cutts."

"It's the last chance," said Cutts. "The fellows have a scheme of meeting Kildare at Wayland Junction with a motor-car and bringing him to St. Jim's in a sort of triumphal procession. So he won't come on the local from Wayland to Rylcombe. He's got to be tackled between Lancaster and Wayland, if at all."

"And that's where we'll nail him," said Mr. Lasker.

"Well, I rely upon you," said Cutts. "The juniors can't interfere again to-morrow, at all events."

And they separated, after a little further talk.

Cutts' heart was lighter as he walked back to the school. The first blow had missed its mark, but the second should not miss. The attack in the railway train was much safer and surer than Mr. Lasker's first plan. Shut up in a railway carriage with a pair of ruffians, Kildare would have little chance of resistance, and no chance of escape. This time the plan could scarcely fail.

Cutts came back into the school and met Knox as he entered the School House.

"You kept an eye on the juniors?" he asked, as he met the Sixth Former.

Knox nodded.

"That's all right," he said. "Two of them were in the quad at the time you went out."

"When I went out?" Cutts exclaimed, with a start.

"Yes; Tom Merry and Blake."

Cutts bit his lip anxiously.

"You didn't give them a chance to follow me?"

"No fear! I looked for them and found them in their studies. They may have been going to follow you, but I nipped that in the bud."

The Fifth Former drew a deep breath of relief.

"Good!" he said. "You don't know whether they were watching for me out there?"

"No. Anyway, I stopped them if they were. But what's on?" asked Knox. "Have you been fixing up a new wheeze?"

"Yes. And this time I think it will be all right," said Cutts, lowering his

voice. "To-morrow, when Kildare comes—"

"Hold on! Don't tell me anything about it," said Knox hurriedly. "I'd rather not know any of the details. I'd rather know nothing, thanks!"

Cutts' lip curled contemptuously.

"That's as you like," he said. "Anyway, I think it will be all right. I don't think there's much danger of Kildare shifting me out of the captaincy this term."

"Oh!" said Knox.

And he walked quickly away, nervously anxious to know nothing of the details of Cutts' scheme. Cutts shrugged his shoulders and went to his study. There was a bridge party in Cutts' quarters that evening—the "smart set" of St. Jim's having quite a gathering, as it was the last night before Kildare's return, after which their peculiar little games would have to come to an end.

At the end of the play Cutts of the Fifth had made enough out of his visitors to help pay the expenses of the peculiar methods he was adopting for retaining the captaincy of St. Jim's, and that was a source of considerable satisfaction to Cutts of the Fifth.

CHAPTER 15.

Looking After Kildare!

"A BWASS band is my ideah," said Arthur Augustus firmly.

"The School House band is my idea," said Monty

Lowther.

"Wats!"

"Same to you!"

Morning lessons were over on Wednesday, and the St. Jim's chaps were eager for the arrival of their old captain, Eric Kildare.

All sorts of schemes had been mooted for giving Kildare a rousing welcome. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had stuck to the idea of a brass band. A brass band playing "See the Conquering Hero Comes" would be very effective, according to Arthur Augustus.

Darrell of the Sixth and several other seniors were to meet Kildare at Wayland and bring him to the school in a hired car. All St. Jim's, from the Sixth Form down to the Second, wanted to celebrate the occasion.

Only Cutts and his friends failed to partake of the general satisfaction.

Cutts, however, was keeping a smiling face. He professed to be awfully pleased at Kildare's return, and he said he was quite ready to hand over the captaincy to the old skipper of St. Jim's. He said he had done his best to fill Kildare's place, according to his ability, but he knew that old Kildare was a better man for the job, and he was glad that he was coming back.

Cutts played his part so well that most of the fellows pronounced him a sportsman, and said that he was acting most handsomely. In Cutts' place, a good many fellows would have been annoyed by Kildare's return, and would have shown it. There was no doubt that Cutts was taking it as few had expected he would.

Of the anxiety in his heart Cutts gave no outward sign, and only Tom Merry & Co. guessed what his real thoughts were like.

While most of the Saints discussed the reception to be accorded Kildare, Tom Merry and his chums were thinking of the more serious matter of Kildare's personal safety.

The fact that Cutts had gone out the previous evening, presumably to meet Mr. Lasker, seemed to indicate that the Fifth Former had not struck his last



Thwack, thwack, thwack, thwack! The stick in Kildare's hand rose and fell with rapidity and force, and yells of anguish rose from Mr. Lasker. "Go it, deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Give him a couple of hundred!"

blow. Did some fresh danger await old Kildare on his journey to St. Jim's that day? That was the question that troubled the Terrible Three.

Certainly any attack would be a risky proceeding in broad daylight; but then, that was what had happened on the Lancaster road.

After reaching Wayland Kildare would be safe enough. If there was an attack it would take place between Lancaster and Wayland Town.

That was to say, it would take place on the railway. There was nowhere else that Kildare could be got at. He would drive from his home at Lancaster to the station, and he would be accompanied at least by a chauffeur, and probably by his father, too. Another highway attack was not probable; but in a little-frequented local train the rascals might make another attempt.

"We've got to see old Kildare through," Tom Merry said determinedly. "I suppose it's not really likely they'll try again; but they might, and we can't afford to leave anything to chance."

"Rather not!" agreed Lowther.

"The trouble is, that if we told Kildare his danger, he would only laugh. He wouldn't believe for a second that Cutts was rotten enough to scheme such a thing."

"That's pretty certain," said Manners.

"So it's no good warning Kildare. A crowd of us could go over to Lancaster and come with him in the train," Tom Merry remarked thoughtfully. "But—ahem!—the head prefect might not feel exactly pleased to be accompanied by a crowd of junior kids."

And Lowther and Manners nodded assent. Kildare was very kind to the juniors, certainly; but it was not really likely that he would be specially keen to make one of a party otherwise composed wholly of Fourth Formers and Shell fellows.

And if he suspected that the juniors had come to take care of him and look after him, it was highly probable that Kildare, with the dignity of the head of the Sixth, would be considerably

nettled. He might regard it, as Tom Merry remarked, as sheer "cheek."

"Only we can't leave him to the mercy of those rascals," said Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No fear! We're going to look after him. Look here! Suppose a couple of us cut across to Lancaster, in time to travel by the same train as Kildare?"

"The fare's rather steep," Lowther remarked, "and all the cash seems to be going in celebrations. But never mind."

"Well, only two of us," said Tom. "The others can take care of the celebrations while we're gone. You'll have to stay, Monty, if you're going to have the band out to greet Kildare—you're the conductor. Manners and I will go over to Lancaster, and we'll travel back by the same train."

"Kildare mayn't like it," said Manners dubiously.

Tom grinned.

"I've got an idea about that," he said. "Kildare won't know."

"But if we're in the same carriage, he—"

"As a rule, there's only one first-class carriage on that train. We can get in the moment the local train comes into the station. It always stays there some time, you know. By the time Kildare gets to it, we can be out of sight."

"Out of sight?" repeated Manners.

"Yes; under the seat!" said Tom coolly.

"Oh, my hat!"

"It won't be comfy, I know," admitted Tom. "But it's up to us to look after old Kildare till he's safe here, and we can't let him suspect we're looking after him, or he'll be ratty. That seems to me the only way."

"Oh crumbs!" said Manners. "A long run under the seat of a railway carriage."

"And suppose Kildare spots you?" said Lowther.

"He won't."

"Suppose you get some dust in your nose and sneeze?" suggested Lowther cheerfully.

"Oh rats! We shan't!" said Tom.

"Suppose he puts his foot under the seat and biffs you on the crumpet—"

"Look here," roared Tom Merry, "stop your idiotic suppositions. I think it's a jolly good idea, anyway!"

"Oh, all right, I'm on!" said Manners reluctantly. "Unless Monty would rather go, and leave me to conduct the band."

"Thanks, no!" said Lowther quickly. "I don't like travelling under seats. I mean, I'm really needed with the band, you know. I couldn't think of deserting them!"

"Well, I think—"

"Never mind what you think, Manners, old man," said Tom Merry briskly. "It's a go! We'll tell the other chaps, and I'll point out to them that we can't take a crowd. They'll all want to come, of course!"

Curiously enough, Tom Merry had no difficulty on that point; the other fellows did not seem keen to come. Blake & Co. agreed that it was a good wheeze, and so did Figgins & Co. of the New House. Neither Blake & Co. nor Figgins & Co. seemed at all anxious for a railway journey under the seat, even in a first-class carriage.

They agreed with wonderful unanimity that the matter couldn't be left in better hands than Tom Merry's. Arthur Augustus was a little doubtful whether they would do any good without his directing presence, but the thought of the damage to his clothes decided him, and he, too, agreed that Tom Merry and Manners were the very chaps for the job.

So while the rest of the Co. were busy with the preparations for the great reception, Tom Merry and Manners left the school immediately after dinner, and took the train for Lancaster.

Their train arrived at Lancaster a quarter of an hour before the "local" was booked to depart for Wayland. The local was already in the station, and the two Shell fellows immediately singled out the solitary first-class compartment and stepped into it.

"Did you bring your ruler?" asked Tom, feeling in his pocket for a thick ebony ruler he had placed there, in case a weapon should be wanted.

"Yes, rather!" yawned Manners.

PEN PALS

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PEN PALS COUPON

5-12-36

Two men came into the station and glanced towards the train. Both of them had soft hats pulled well over their foreheads. One of them made a gesture towards the first-class carriage, and then they took up a position near it, and lighted cigarettes.

"Two passengers for this carriage, it looks like," Tom Merry remarked.

"Kildare would be safe enough with two more passengers in the carriage," said Manners. "Suppose we don't—"

"Rats! They may be the very johnnies who are going for him."

"Ahem!"

"There's Kildare!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

The well-known form of the old captain of St. Jim's appeared at the entrance to the platform. A white-haired old gentleman was with him, and the juniors recognised Kildare's father. They came towards the train.

"Cover!" said Tom Merry.

Tom dived under one seat and Manners under the other.

A few moments later the carriage door was opened, and Kildare stepped in. So far as he could see the carriage was empty. Kildare put his bag on the rack and sat down. His father stood at the open door, chatting with him. The guard came along to close the door, and then the two men on the platform made a sudden run for the carriage and jumped in.

The door was slammed. Mr. Kildare shook hands with his son through the window, and the train rolled on.

Kildare sat down and drew a book from his pocket. The other two passengers sat opposite him, the St. Jim's senior scarcely glancing at them.

Lancaster was left behind, and the local train rolled on through the countryside, with two passengers, at least, in a state of discomfort.

CHAPTER 16.

Juniors to the Rescue!

TOM MERRY and Manners had not expected to be comfortable in their peculiar position. But they had not expected to be quite so uncomfortable.

They were wedged under the seats at full length, with hardly room to breathe, and it was very dusty and cold.

And they had the agreeable prospects of an hour and a half in the same position, unless something happened, or unless they got "fed-up" and showed themselves, after all.

They found themselves wishing that something would indeed happen.

And ere ten minutes had passed the "something" happened, and with dramatic suddenness.

Kildare was reading his book, almost oblivious of the presence of his fellow-passengers, when there was a sudden movement on the part of those two gentlemen.

They exchanged a quick glance, and each of them felt in his pocket, and then rose to their feet at the same instant.

Kildare noticed the movement, and glanced up from his book. What he saw as he glanced up came as a big shock.

The two rascals had jerked out short, thick cudgels from their pockets, and were almost upon him.

It was so sudden an attack that Kildare was naturally taken by surprise; but he was by nature quick and alert. He leaped up, hitting out blindly with both fists.



One of his assailants fell back on his seat, gasping; the other staggered in the carriage, and both the cudgels missed their mark.

"You scoundrels!" exclaimed Kildare hotly.

"By gum! At him, Jerry!"

Kildare was grasped by a pair of powerful arms and forced down upon his seat. He struggled furiously, but the man who had seized him was more than a match for him, and he could not get loose. The other man recovered himself, and grasped his cudgel for a brutal blow.

The blow was coming, and he was held fast and could not avert or elude it.

The outbreak had been so sudden that the two hidden juniors as well as Kildare had been taken by surprise.

But that was only for a moment.

Then Tom Merry and Manners scrambled out, dusty and breathless, from under the seat, grasping the heavy ebony rulers with which they were armed.

Kildare's attackers did not see them for the moment, as they had their backs to the juniors. But as the man with the cudgel raised was about to bring down his weapon on the defenceless Kildare Tom Merry leaped on him from behind. Next moment the man who was holding Kildare received a stunning blow across the head from Manners' ebony ruler, and his grasp relaxed, and he slumped on the floor, with a groan.

The other ruffian was struggling desperately to free himself from Tom Merry's grip. But before he could do so Manners' ruler came down on his head with stunning force, and he staggered back, with a yell of agony. As he staggered Tom Merry's clenched fist caught him under the chin, and he dropped across his comrade.

Kildare was on his feet now, panting. "You—you kids!" he gasped, in utter amazement.

"Pile on them!" shouted Tom Merry.

The two rascals were struggling to their feet. It was no time for explanations. Kildare, Tom, and Manners piled on the rascals at once, and they

were jammed down on the floor in the carriage again. Tom Merry and Manners knelt on them, keeping them down.

"My hat!" exclaimed Kildare. "What on earth does this mean? And how did you two kids get here?"

"We came to look after you," said Tom Merry.

"You cheeky young beggar!" said Kildare, laughing. "It was jolly lucky you did, all the same. But how could you possibly have known that I should be in danger? It seems like a miracle."

"After what happened yesterday—"

"I suppose these are the two rotters who got away," said Kildare. "I don't see why they should go for me again in this way. And how in the name of all that's wonderful did you fags know anything about it?"

"Fags!" said Manners indignantly. "I like that, when we've just saved you from being crocked!"

Kildare laughed.

"Ahem! I mean you fellows," he said. "How did you know?"

"That's better," said Tom Merry.

"Well, we knew. I suppose we'd better tell you. There's somebody at St. Jim's who doesn't want you to come back and shift him out of the captaincy."

Kildare started.

"Do you mean Cutts of the Fifth?"

"Yes."

"You can't mean that he had anything to do with this?"

"We jolly well do," said Tom.

"Cutts ought to be sacked," growled Manners.

"It can't be true," said Kildare. "These rotters have it up against me because they were beaten yesterday, that's all!"

"Well, we'll see what they say when the police take them off at the first station."

Kildare hesitated.

"If you and us over to the perlice you'll be bringing disgrace on your school when we tell all we know," panted Jerry Baker defiantly.

"You bound!" said Kildare between his teeth. "Do you mean to imply that—"

"You and us over to the perlice and you'll see."

The train slackened down at the level-crossing. Kildare seemed to make up his mind.

"Let them go. I give you one minute to clear off, you scoundrels!" said Kildare sternly.

He opened the carriage door. Jerry Baker and Bill Wylie did not need bidding twice. The reluctant juniors released them at Kildare's order, and they jumped out of the carriage and darted away from the railway track and disappeared.

Kildare closed the carriage door and turned to the two Shell fellows quietly when the train moved on again.

"You didn't like letting them go?" he asked.

"They ought to have been locked up!" growled Tom Merry.

"And Cutts ought to be shown up," said Manners bluntly.

"I can't believe it of Cutts," said Kildare slowly. "It's too rotten!"

"Then why did you let those rotters go?" demanded Tom Merry.

"I—I— Well, it may be true—and it would be a fearful disgrace for the school," said Kildare. "If Cutts planned this he has failed—and I shall be safe at St. Jim's in an hour or two. I'm sure you two juniors don't want to

(Continued on page 28.)

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BREAKING-UP DAY AT GREYFRIARS FINDS THE CHUMS OF THE REMOVE ALL SET FOR A HAPPY HOLIDAY TOGETHER.

HARRY WHARTON'S HOLIDAY PARTY!

A Joke on the Nabob!

TICK, tick, tick!
Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove at Greyfriars, looked puzzled.

The Remove, the Lower Fourth Form, had just come into the class-room, and the juniors had taken their seats, when that loud and aggressive tick, tick, ticking fell upon the ears of the Form-master.

Mr. Quelch glanced up at the clock, but the sound evidently did not proceed from that. It was a strident tick that could only be made by a cheap clock. But where was the clock?

Tick, tick, tick!

The clouds gathered on Mr. Quelch's brow. The juniors of the Remove were trying not to grin, but without much success. Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, and Frank Nugent, who sat at the same desk, looked round towards Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, their Indian chum of the Lower Fourth. The dusky junior was opening his books, and seemed unconscious of the growing merriment in the class.

Tick, tick, tick!

Mr. Quelch's voice was deep and severe. The class were all attention at once, and the grins died away. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh looked up.

"Boys, someone has introduced a clock into the class-room!"

The juniors sat silent. Bob Cherry attempted to make signs to Hurree Singh, from whose direction the ticking seemed to proceed. The Indian chum did not comprehend them, but Mr. Quelch did.

"Cherry!"

Bob gave an inward groan.

"Yes, sir!"

"What were you making signs to Hurree Singh for?"

"I—I— Oh, nothing in particular, sir!"

"Hurree Singh," said the Form-master, "is it you who have introduced a clock into the class-room?"

"I, sir? Certainly not, sir!" said Hurree Singh, in his unique English.

"It seems to come from that desk," said the Form-master. "Is it you that have the clock, Bulstrode, Hazeldene, Skinner?"

"No, sir," said three voices.

"Then it must be you, Hurree Singh!"

"I can assure the honourable teacher sahib that the clockful timekeeper is not in my esteemed possession," said the nabob. "Can I do more than make the truthful statement with the open heart and clear conscience?"

"Come out before the class, Hurree Singh!"

The nabob rose to his feet.

"If I may speakfully address a word—"

"Stand out here!"

"With the great respectfulness, honoured sahib, I would point out that the stand-outfulness is an implied doubt of my honourable word," said the Nabob of Bhanipur, gently but firmly.

Mr. Quelch gasped.

"Will you come out here?"

"Certainly, sir!"

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By Frank Richards.

(Author of the grand long yarns of Greyfriars appearing every Saturday in our companion paper the "Magnet.")

And Hurree Singh walked out before the class.

Tick, tick, tick!

The ticking had not ceased for a moment, and it accompanied Hurree Singh as he moved. When he stood before the class the ticking was still close to his person. The Remove burst into an irresistible giggle. It was evident that the Nabob of Bhanipur had the clock about him, and equally evident that he was quite unaware of the fact.

Mr. Quelch fixed a terrifying glance upon him.

"Hurree Singh!"

"I am here, sir, awaiting your honoured remarks with extremely great attention."

"You have brought a clock into the class-room, and denied doing so."

"Please excuse me, sahib; a Nabob

Even a tiring train journey can have its funny side—as Harry Wharton & Co. prove when, en route for Wharton Lodge, they pull the leg of a crusty fellow-passenger!

of Bhanipur does not lie," said Hurree Singh, with great dignity. "I have stated with the plainfulness of the truth that I did not bring any clockful timekeeper into the honourable class-room."

"Cannot you hear the ticking now, boy, where you stand?"

"Yes," said the nabob, looking round him with a puzzled expression. "I can certainly hear the ticking, and it seems to proceed from the immediate vicinity of my honourable person, but I assure you—"

"Turn out your pockets!"

The nabob slowly obeyed.

From the pocket of the loose jacket he was wearing he produced a small cheap clock of the alarm variety. Everybody but the nabob had known it was there by the way the pocket sagged.

The nabob's expression of amazement at the sight of the clock made the Removites roar.

"Hurree Singh—"

"If you please, sir—"

Micky Desmond, the joker of the Greyfriars Remove, rose in his place. Mr. Quelch turned a freezing glare upon him.

"You may sit down, Desmond."

"Yes, sir," said the Irish junior. "But if you please, sir, it was I who put the clock in Hurree Jampot's pocket, sir."

"Oh, I see!"

"You see, sir, he's the Crocodile."

Mr. Quelch looked at Micky Desmond as though wondering whether he had taken leave of his senses.

"He is what, Desmond?"

"The Crocodile, sir. So I thought I'd put the clock into his pocket. But I didn't know he'd come into the class-room with it."

"Desmond—"

"May I speak, sir?" said Harry Wharton. "Desmond means that Hurree Singh is going to take the part of the Crocodile in a representation of 'Peter Pan,' which we are giving in the vacation. You know, sir, the Crocodile has swallowed a clock, and it ticks wherever he goes, and warns the pirate captain that he is coming."

Mr. Quelch's face relaxed a little.

"Indeed, Wharton! But that is no excuse for—"

"Begorra, sir, and I niver thought Hurree Jampot would bring it into the class-room!"

"Stop that clock at once, Hurree Singh, and put it under your desk," said Mr. Quelch. "I will take your word, Desmond, and overlook the occurrence."

"Have I the permitfulness to return to my honourable seat, sahib?" asked Hurree Singh.

"Yes!" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"I thank you with the hearty gratitude. It was quite without my knowledge that I brought the clockful timekeeper into the class-room."

"Yes, I understand. Go back to your place."

The nabob returned to his desk. The class were giggling joyously; but the giggle died away as Mr. Quelch took up a pointer with a businesslike air and glanced round.

The lesson proceeded in the midst of an owl-like gravity.

Generous of Bunter!

LAST lesson, and a jolly good thing, too!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as the Remove left the class-room that afternoon.

"Nothing more for some time."

"Ripping!" said Nugent.

"The joyfulness of the occasion is terrific!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "And all the morefully because we are going to enjoy such an exceedingly happy holiday at the dwelling of the esteemed Wharton."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I hope you'll all have a good time," he remarked. "Anyway, we shall be able to dig up some fun, and the 'Peter Pan' show will be a success, I think."

"Oh, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific!"

"We're off first thing in the morning," Harry Wharton remarked. "There are the boxes to pack, and all our props to put together. We shall have to take care to get the costumes safely to Wharton Lodge."

"True."

"And no more of your funny tricks, Micky," said Harry, with a warning look at Desmond. "There might have been a row over that clock-to-day."

"Sure, there was a row!" said Micky, with a smile. "I niver heard a

clock make a fearful row like that one before."

"It's all the better for the part," said Harry Wharton. "The tick has got to be heard whenever the Crocodile comes on the stage, and so it will have to be loud enough."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Inky will make a ripping Crocodile; and his chivvy won't have to be seen, so that will save all the trouble of making him up."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, Bunter! Were you speaking to us?"

"Yes, I was," said Bunter, in an aggrieved tone, blinking at the chums through his big spectacles. "It's a rather important matter, too."

"Oh, go ahead!"

"What I was think about is this—I'm expecting a postal order by the first post to-morrow—"

There was a general grunt from the Removites. They knew all about that postal order which was always coming for Bunter and which never seemed to materialise.

"Oh, get off that!" said Nugent. "Now, I—"

"I say, Nugent, do let me finish. I'm expecting a postal order to-morrow morning, and I think we ought to have a ripping spread to celebrate the holiday, you know. I should like to stand a feed to all of you—"

"Sure, and now you're talking!" said Micky Desmond. "We won't say no!"

"Certainly not!" said Bob Cherry. "It shall never be said that Robert Cherry, Esquire, refused a feed when it was free of charge."

"You can depend on all of us, Bunter," said Nugent.

"The dependfulness is terrific. I shall be happy to come and feedfully eat with the honourable and esteemed Bunter."

"I have had a jolly good many feeds from you fellows, and it's really time I stood one," said Billy Bunter. "I should have done so before, you know, only there has been some delay in my postal order coming."

"Yes, we've noticed that," said Bob Cherry.

"Still, it's all right now."

"Good!" said Harry Wharton. "Now let's get to the study and—"

"Just a moment, Wharton. There's one thing more."

"Well, what is it?"

"We shall be in a fearful hurry in the morning as we have to catch an early train, especially as we have to meet Miss Hazeldene first. Perhaps it would be better to get the feed over this evening instead of to-morrow morning."

"Good wheeze!" said Nugent heartily. "I'm pretty peckish now, as a matter of fact."

"Do you think it's a good idea, you chaps?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Then there's one more point. I'm stony until I get my postal order to-morrow morning. If one of you chaps will stand the bill, I'll settle with you then."

"When?"

"When my postal order comes."

Harry Wharton laughed, but the rest of the Removites glared at Billy Bunter as if they could have eaten him

"Do you mean to say that you're inviting us to a feed to pay the bill ourselves?" roared Bob Cherry.



"There are ten in this compartment already," said Hazeldene. "Boy, stand aside!" snorted the old gentleman, and he brought up his malacca cane and gave Hazeldene a poke in the chest with it. The Remove junior sat down suddenly in Bunter's lap—right on his bag of tarts!

"Oh, no, Cherry, nothing of the sort! I only mean that I can't settle till my postal order comes, and so—"

"Oh, rats! Cut off!"

"Come along!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "We ought to have known Bunter better."

"But I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, scat!"

And the chums of the Remove walked away.

Billy Bunter blinked after them disconsolately through his big spectacles, which had earned him the nickname of the Owl in the Greyfriars Remove.

"I really think they are rather selfish," he murmured. "I should have expected better treatment from Wharton, considering that he relies on me for my services in the dramatic and operatic society. It would serve him right if I refused to take the part of Nibs in 'Peter Pan' unless I'm better treated in the way of grub. Hallo, Hoffman! I say, Huffy, can you change a postal order for me?"

Hoffman, the German junior, felt in his pockets.

"I tink I change it if it not too pig," he replied. "I oplate you if I can, Punter. How much is te postal order for?"

"I expect it will be for ten shillings."

Hoffman stared at him.

"Ach! You expect! How you not know?"

"You see, the postal order hasn't come yet," explained Bunter. "I'm expecting it by the first post in the morning, and—Hoffman! Why are you going?"

The German junior was walking away.

"Really, everybody is very inconsiderate," murmured Billy Bunter. "I meant to be very generous when my postal order came, but I think I shall have to reconsider my intentions. It's no earthly good being generous in a selfish world like this. Hallo! Is that you, Meunier? I say, old fellow!"

The French Removite stopped.

"Vat you say, Buntair?"

"Can you lend me ten bob till— Why he's gone! The beast is worse than the German beast. They're all beasts. I think this is a beastly place. Well, I suppose I'd better get along to the study and see what kind of tea they've got."

And Billy Bunter, with a dissatisfied sigh, wended his way to Study No. 1 in the Remove, where the chums were rehearsing "Peter Pan."

An Interrupted Rehearsal!

IT had been Nugent's idea in the first place to present "Peter Pan," but the suggestion had not been readily adopted. The Wharton Operatic and Dramatic Company, consisting of the chums of Study No. 1 and two or three other fellows in the Remove, had had a try at a thrilling drama called "By Order of the Tyrant," but the great dress rehearsal in the Remove-room had ended in a scrimmage, and "By Order of the Tyrant" had consequently been dropped. Nugent's idea was revived, and "Peter Pan" was adopted.

Of course, it was not easy to assign the parts. There never was an amateur company in which every individual

member did not consider himself entitled to play the title role; and the Wharton Dramatic Company was no exception to the rule.

In the present case, each of the juniors was willing to take the part of the pirate captain instead of Peter Pan; and Harry Wharton, as general manager, had to come down heavy with the hand of authority.

Peter Pan was reserved for Harry himself, and Bob Cherry was contented with the part of Captain Hook. Nugent had to be satisfied with the role of Great Big Little Panther, the Indian chief; while Hurree Singh was unanimously assigned the role of the Crocodile, that agreeable animal who, having devoured one arm of Captain Hook, was always on the prowl looking for the rest of him.

Billy Bunter had claimed successively the parts of Peter Pan, Captain Hook, Great Big Little Panther, and the Crocodile, and had had to be content with that of Nibs, a member of Peter's band.

He consoled himself with the reflection that he would be on in the flying act, and that in a scene of that kind there was room for a fellow of real genius to distinguish himself.

Micky Desmond, whose smooth face and musical Irish voice made it easy for him to take a feminine part, had the role of Tiger Lily, the Indian maid. Wendy was to be played by Hazeldene's sister Marjorie.

Hazeldene was Gentleman Starkey, and Harry had taken the two foreign juniors into the company also, Hoffman being Nana, the dog who put the children to bed, and Adolphe Meunier taking the part of Tinker Bell.

Meunier had entered into the thing with all the vivacity of his Parisian nature. He had taken a bicycle bell to use for giving the well-known tinkle; and when he was practising, the buzzing of the bicycle bell rang through Greyfriars.

The cast, so far, used up all the members of the Wharton Operatic Company; for the minor parts there would be fellows at home who could be called upon. Harry could not take half the Remove home for the vacation, and he would have needed to do so to take a full cast for "Peter Pan."

Harry had just been reciting his speech in the children's bed-room when Billy Bunter arrived in the study.

"Hallo! You're just in time," said Bob Cherry. "You can begin now, and you'd better do all the speeches of the kids."

"I'm jolly hungry—"

"What the dickens does that matter? We're off to-morrow morning, and this is our last chance of a rehearsal before we go."

"That's all very well, but when are we going to have tea?"

"Blow tea!"

"I'm afraid my constitution will suffer if we don't have tea at the proper time. Nothing is so unhealthy as meals at irregular times."

"There's a cold sausage in the cupboard," said Nugent. "Jam it into his mouth and then he can make his speech."

"How can he make a speech with a cold sausage in his mouth?"

"Well, I'll do my best," said Billy Bunter, going to the cupboard and immediately commencing operations on the sausage, and then attacking some ham and tongue. "I'm sorry to keep you waiting."

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"You'll be sorrier soon," said Bob Cherry darkly. "I'll give you one minute before I start on you!"

"Really, Cherry—"

"Oh, shut up and be quick, ass!"

Billy Bunter opened his mouth to make an indignant reply, but on second thoughts, filled it with ham instead. Bob Cherry looked in earnest, and there was no time to be wasted.

Ting-a-ling!

The juniors started at the sound of a violent ringing of a bicycle-bell in the corridor.

"It's that ass Meunier—"

Ting-a-ling!

Bob Cherry opened the door and glared out into the passage.

"Meunier, you ass, keep that bell quiet—"

"I am Tinker Bell," said the French junior.

"Ass!"

"Ze bell ring ven I approach," said Meunier obstinately. "I play ze part to ze life. I zink you ze ass, Sherry!"

"You chump, you'll have the prefects on your neck in a minute if you make that unholy row here! There have been complaints already."

Ting-a-ling!

Bob Cherry caught the French junior by the shoulder and yanked him bodily into the study.

"Now keep quiet or I'll rub your head in the grate!" he exclaimed.

"I zink zat I rubs your head in ze grate first, Sherry!"

"Ass!"

"Cochon—"

"Shuttez vous up!" yelled Bob Cherry, in a new and original variety of French. "Holdez le tongue. Keepez votre mouth shut!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Nugent. "You understand that, Meunier?"

"I understand not—"

"Oh, be quiet, all of you!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Let's get to business!"

"I zink—"

"Bow-wow-wow!"

The sudden barking of a dog in the passage interrupted the discussion.

"My hat!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"What's that? It can't be Gosling's mastiff got into the house, surely!"

"Sounds like it."

"Bow-wow-wow! Gr-r-r!"

"By Jove, it is!" said Harry Wharton. "Let's have a look—"

"Keep the door shut!" said Billy Bunter nervously. "I say, you fellows, that dog's dangerous, you know. Don't open the door!"

"Sure, and ye're afraid, ye gossoon!"

"Nothing of the sort, Desmond. There are very few fellows braver than I am. But it's no good running unnecessary risks."

There was a bang at the door, and it opened. The broad, grinning face of Fritz Hoffman presented itself to view.

"Bow-wow-wow!"

"You ass!" exclaimed Hazeldene.

"We thought it was Gosling's mastiff got into the house."

Hoffman chuckled.

"I vas Nana te dog," he explained. "I parks mit meinself to keep up te character, because I vas Nana te dog."

"Yes, but draw a line somewhere. We don't want to have the prefects down on us. They're not too fond of this study now."

"Bow-wow-wow!"

Ting-a-ling!

"Ach! Stop tat row, Meunier!"

"Sherman ass! I vas Tinker Bell."

"You vas vun idiot to make such a fearful row mit a picycle pell, I tinks."

"You vas Sherman peeg—"

"Vat you call me!"

"Sherman peeg!"

"I tinks I trash you for tat—"

"I zink zat no Sherman peeg able to trash Frenchman!"

"I soon show you—"

"I zink—"

The foreign juniors rushed at each other simultaneously. But the chums of the Remove rushed between them.

Harry Wharton seized the German junior by the collar and slung him away, and he bumped against Bunter, and the two went to the floor together.

Bob Cherry gripped Meunier by the shoulders and dragged him down on the hearth-rug, and sat on his chest.

"Now then, you silly bounders, keep quiet!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "If you want to row, go into the gym. You're not going to row in this study!"

"I trashes him—"

"I punishes him—"

"Will you shut up—"

"I say, you fellows, where are my spectacles? That utter idiot, Hoffman, has knocked them off, and I'm afraid they will be trodden on. If they are broken I shall expect you to pay for them. I say—"

"There they are, under your nose, ass!"

"So they are, Nugent," said Bunter, picking up his spectacles and putting them on. "Fortunately they are not broken. If they had been I should have expected—"

"Let me get at tat French pounder to—"

"Let me get at zat Sherman peeg—"

"You silly asses, we'll sling you both out if you don't shut up!" exclaimed the exasperated manager of the Wharton Operatic Company. "Do you think we are going to have two members of the cast punching one another's noses?"

"Zat is all ver' well, but—"

"I trashes tat—"

"Sherman peeg!"

"French peast!"

The two juniors wriggled themselves loose, and rushed at one another again. They were locked in tight embrace the next moment, and went reeling and trampling round the study.

"Chuck them out!" shouted Bob Cherry.

The chums of the Remove laid violent hands on the struggling aliens. They were hurled towards the door. At the same moment the door opened and Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars, looked in.

"What is all this thundering row about? Ow—"

Hoffman and Meunier, still struggling furiously, bumped right into the captain of Greyfriars, and sent him reeling across the passage. Wingate was brought up against the opposite wall, and the two juniors rolled at his feet. The captain of Greyfriars gasped for breath.

"You young rascals!" he roared.

"What do you mean by this? I—"

"Ach! I tink—"

"Ciel! I zink—"

Whatever Hoffman and Meunier might "tink" or "zink," they did not stay to give it utterance. Without wasting a moment, they took to their heels and vanished down the passage. Wingate looked into Study No. 1 again.

"There has been too much row in this study!" he exclaimed. "I've had complaints from all sides. You can go into the Common-room till bed-time. Off you go, and I'll turn out the light."

"But, I say, Wingate—"

"Don't say anything. Cut off!"

"But—"

"Look here, do you want to be sent

to bed at once?" asked Wingate angrily.

"No; but—"

"Cut off, then!"

There was no help for it; the juniors had to obey. They filed out of the study, and the light was turned out, and the last rehearsal of "Peter Pan" was thus cut short abruptly.

Off for the Holidays!

THE faces of the Greyfriars juniors were bright and cheerful as they came out of the House the next morning to mount into the small motor-coach which was to bear them and their luggage to the station.

At Friardale they were to take the train, but before doing so, they would be joined by Hazeldene's sister Marjorie, who was to change there to join her brother and the party for Wharton Lodge.

The coach had rolled into the green

"Now, then, make an effort, Gossy!"

"It seems 'eavier than hever!" gasped the porter. "I can't get it along!"

The juniors standing round chuckled.

It was not surprising that Gosling could not get the trunk along, for Bob Cherry, instead of helping him, was holding it back with both hands.

"Oh, make an effort, Gossy!" said Bob Cherry encouragingly. "You're not half-trying, you know."

"Wot I says is this 'ere—"

"Oh, make an effort!"

"You hain't a-'elping!"

"I'm helping now."

Bob Cherry gave the trunk a push, and the porter went staggering forward. Then he pulled it back, and Gosling stopped.

"You don't seem to be getting on, Gossy."

"You young himp!"

"My hat! Hark at him, you fellows! That's what he calls gratitude for a

"Blame Gossy! I gave him a helping hand."

"You ass! Pick those things up, you fellows."

The articles were crammed into the trunk again. The lock was broken, but the lid was jammed down and fastened with a strap, and the trunk was lifted into the coach. Other trunks joined it, and the juniors took their seats in the vehicle. Gosling stood looking at the juniors very expressively.

"No good, Gossy," said Bob Cherry, in a chiding tone. "You can't expect a tip after busting a fellow's trunk in that reckless way."

"I should say nottully," said Hurree Singh. "The recklessness of the esteemed Gosling is only equalled by the crimsonness of his honourable nose and the waterfulness of his respected eye. I attribute his clumsiness to the drinkfulness of his beastly habits."

"You young varmint!"



The juniors standing round chuckled as Bob Cherry, instead of helping Gosling, held the trunk back with both hands. "It seems 'eavier than hever!" gasped the porter. "Oh, make an effort, Gossy!" said Bob. "You're not half trying!"

old Close, and drawn up before the School House. Gosling, the porter, was busy carrying down bags and boxes. The Wharton Operatic Company were going off for the vacation a little earlier than the rest of the school, and a crowd had assembled to see them go.

Billy Bunter came out with a lunch-basket slung over his shoulder. The Owl of the Remove did not mean to risk getting hungry in the train.

Gosling, the porter, appeared with a big trunk on his shoulders. Gosling always made the most of his work, for the sake of exciting sympathy and getting tips, and he affected to be hardly able to deal with the trunk.

"Is it very heavy, Gosling?" asked Bob Cherry, with a sympathetic tone in his voice, and a twinkle in his eyes.

"Hawfully 'eavy, Master Cherry!" gasped Gosling.

"Shall I help you?"

"Thank you, sir!"

Bob Cherry took hold of the trunk behind.

helping hand!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Catch me helping him again!"

"Wot I says is this 'ere—"

"Oh, get on! You're lazy; that's what's the matter with you, Gossy. I'll give you one more shove, and then you'll have to manage for yourself."

And Bob Cherry gave one more shove, and Gosling staggered, and the box went with a crash on the stone steps. It crashed from one step to another, and burst open as it touched the ground. Shirts, collars, and other articles were distributed over the ground.

"My word!" gasped Gosling.

"You've done it now!"

"You've done it, you mean!" said Bob Cherry. "I never saw such a clumsy ass in my life. Fortunately, it isn't my box. I should be tempted to kick you severely if that were my box, Gossy!"

"Wot I says is—"

"It's my box, though!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Cherry, you ass—"

Harry Wharton laughed as he drew five shillings from his pocket and tossed the coins to the incensed porter.

"There you are, Gosling!"

The porter's face cleared at once. Five-shilling tips were not common at Greyfriars, even among the fellows of the Sixth. Gosling stowed the coins into his waistcoat-pocket, and was comforted.

"Thank you kindly, sir! You're a gentleman, you are!"

"The admiration of the worthy Gosling is cheap at five shillings," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "I imagine that the esteemed Wharton would have become a nobleman in his estimation for the trifling sum of ten shillings."

The driver took his seat, and the coach moved off. Loud cheers from the Remove followed it.

Harry Wharton's face flushed a little and his eyes sparkled as he listened to

them, and waved his hand in reply to the waving caps of the Removites.

He had not been long at Greyfriars, but what a change had come over himself and his prospects even during the short period of his career there.

It was safe to say that, on his first coming to the school, there had not been a more unpopular fellow at Greyfriars.

Even Hazeldene, once called the cad of the Remove, had not been so heartily disliked by his Form-fellows as Wharton, the "outsider."

Harry Wharton had won the affection and respect of his comrades. He had won it by first winning a victory over himself. Sometimes, perhaps, the old obstinacy, the old, uncertain and wayward temper, showed itself, and seemed to hint that the passionate nature was still there, but slumbering. But Harry was popular now, and was hailed almost unanimously as captain of the Remove.

The coach rolled out of the gates of Greyfriars, and the shouts of the Removites died away. Under the branches of overhanging trees they drove on towards the country village, nestling at the foot of the hill.

"I say, Wharton, is my necktie straight?" asked Bob Cherry suddenly.

Harry Wharton stared at his chum for a moment in astonishment. Bob Cherry was never known to care whether his necktie was straight or not; and, as a matter of fact, it seldom was straight.

Bob could no more keep his necktie straight than he could keep his cap from going on the side or the back of his head.

"Well, no," said Wharton, "it isn't straight; but, as it never is, that needn't bother you, Bob. It looks all right—and like you."

Bob laughed uneasily.

"You might give it a shove for me," he said.

"Oh, I'll do that!" said Nugent; and he took hold of Bob's necktie and gave it a shove.

"Thank you, Nugent!" said Bob Cherry. "Is it all right now?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"That's according to how you want it," he replied. "It's not so straight as it was before."

Bob Cherry turned red.

"Nugent, you chump—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Nugent.

"I'll chuck you out of the coach if you start being funny with me!" growled Bob Cherry. "Put it straight for me, Wharton, there's a good chap."

Harry Wharton put the offending necktie in its place. It was doubtful if it would stay long there, however.

"That's better," said Bob. "Thank you, Wharton! I hate an untidy chap, you know."

Harry stared, as well he might.

"Oh, don't you catch on?" chuckled Nugent. "Bob is thinking of Miss Hazeldene, whom we're going to meet at the station."

"Oh, I see!" Wharton comprehended at last. "All right, Bob, old chap. I'll give your necktie another shove before we get out of the coach."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry's colour deepened. But the reminder that they were to meet Marjorie at the station was not lost on the juniors. Each of them, with the exception of Hazeldene, made furtive efforts to make himself look a little more tidy than usual. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh took off his silk-hat and gave its glossy surface an extra polish with his sleeve.

The coach soon reached Friardale and turned into the station yard. Harry

Wharton looked at his watch as it halted.

"Miss Hazeldene's train comes in in five minutes," he remarked. "Ours doesn't leave for nearly ten. We shall have plenty of time. Will you fellows see to the luggage while I go over the other platform and wait for Miss Hazeldene's train?"

Bob Cherry grinned.

"I was just thinking of asking the same question," he remarked.

"Curious!" laughed Nugent. "So was I!"

"Faith, and it's meself that was going to do the same thing!" exclaimed Micky Desmond. "We'd better all go."

Harry laughed.

"I suppose so. Jump down."

The juniors alighted from the coach. The luggage was conveyed to the platform and labelled, and the chums crossed the station to wait on the other platform for Miss Hazeldene's train to come in.

Bob Cherry groped for his necktie as the juniors waited.

"I say, Wharton, is my necktie straight?" he whispered.

Harry glanced round.

"No."

And he looked up the line again.

"Well, you might give it a shove," said Bob reproachfully.

"There you are."

"Is it all right now?"

"Ripping!"

Bob Cherry moved away to get a view of his necktie in a looking-glass over an automatic machine. Bunter was at his side in a moment.

"Going to get some chocolate, Cherry? It's a very good idea, in case you get hungry in the train, you know. You can get chocolate and butterscotch and chocolate-cream in this machine. I'll carry them all, if you like. I don't mind in the least."

Bob Cherry pushed Bunter aside and squirmed in his attempt to view the troublesome necktie in the tiny glass.

"I say, Cherry—"

"Oh, shut up!"

"If you want some chocolates—"

"I don't, ass!"

"Well, I do. I've only got silver, so will you give me some pennies? I say, Cherry, are you deaf? Will you lend me some pennies?" bawled Bunter.

There was a shriek of the train whistle down the line. Bob Cherry turned hastily away, and Bunter remained looking at the automatic machine with an extremely disappointed expression. A general movement of interest went through the juniors. The train was coming into the station.

En Route!

"MARJORIE!" A pretty, girlish face was looking from a carriage window. Hazeldene dragged the door open, and there was a rush of the juniors towards the carriage. But they stood back to allow Hazeldene to assist his sister to alight.

The girl smiled sweetly at the juniors and shook hands with all in turn. Adolphe Meunier was bowing to the platform in his excessive Parisian politeness, and Bob Cherry gave him a dig in the ribs that made him gasp.

"Ciel! Why you poke me for?" muttered the French youth.

"Have you got a pain?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"Ze pain? Certainly not."

"Then what are you twisting yourself up like that for?"

"Cochon! I was bowing viz myself to ze lady."

"Oh, I see! Do you always bow like that?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Always, in la belle Paris."

"And don't you ever bust anything?"

Adolphe did not deign to reply to this frivolous question. Marjorie was already walking away with Harry Wharton on one side and her brother on the other. Bob Cherry followed, looking rather wistful.

"I say, Nugent," he whispered, "do you think it's noticeable about my necktie?"

Nugent grinned.

"My dear chap, it's all right! If it's a little crooked, it matches your features better, you know. They're not designed according to artistic rules."

Bob Cherry turned red.

"Oh, let my features alone!" he growled, with such unusual tartness that Nugent looked at him again very curiously.

"Hang it, Bob! You're not getting ratty over a little chaff, surely?" he said.

"Oh, no! I didn't mean to be ratty. But, I say, Nugent, old chap—h'm—"

Bob Cherry broke off, his colour deepening to crimson. Nugent looked at him in surprise.

"What's the matter, Bob? Are you ill?"

"No, of course not! You know I'm never ill!"

"Then what's the matter?"

"Nothing."

They walked on in silence. Of all the faces there, only Bob Cherry's usually sunny countenance was anything like grave. Nugent looked at him out of the corner of his eye.

"I say, Bob, what's the matter, old chap? Have you been eating something that's disagreed with you?"

"Oh, rats!" said Bob Cherry tartly. And Nugent, more and more surprised, gave it up.

The juniors reached the up platform. The train was not yet in, and they chatted cheerfully as they waited for it.

"I have been studying the part of Wendy," said Marjorie. "I don't know how I shall do it, of course; but I am very nearly word-perfect now."

"I am sure it will be a success—Wendy's part, at least," said Harry. "It was too bad over the other play, after you had the trouble of learning up your part. But it led to too many rows, and we had to take 'Peter Pan' instead."

Marjorie smiled.

"I was glad of the change. 'Peter Pan' is ever so much better, and I like Wendy's part very much. I suppose you are Peter Pan?"

"Yes," said Harry.

The train was signalled. Bob Cherry gave a grunt, and Nugent looked quickly at him. He was surprised at the sombre look on his chum's face.

"You're quite right, Nugent," said Bob, with a forced laugh.

"I believe I usually am," said Nugent, with a grin. "But what are you referring to at the present moment, Bob?"

"Oh, I was thinking of your remark about my features."

Nugent coloured.

"I was only joking, Bob. I can't understand you to-day. What do you mean by taking a little bit of chipping so seriously?"

"I'm not," said Bob Cherry. "It's true, you see. I never was a beauty, or

clever, either, like Wharton, for instance. He's good-looking, isn't he?"

Nugent glanced at Harry Wharton as he stood talking to Marjorie. Certainly Harry looked very handsome then, with his athletic, well-proportioned figure, his face glowing with health, and a sparkle in his eyes.

"Yes, he's a beauty," said Nugent. "Not bad looking, anyway; but I don't see that there's anything to grumble at in that, Bob."

"I wasn't grumbling."

"Then what the dickens do you mean, anyway?" demanded the puzzled Nugent.

"Nothing."

The train came in then and the talk stopped.

Harry had taken first-class tickets for the whole party. He handed Marjorie into the carriage and the juniors followed. The party pretty well filled the carriage. But just as the train was starting, a portly gentleman with a very red face and white whiskers essayed to enter.

"Sorry, sir, no room," said Hazeldene, who was standing by the door.

"Boy—"

"There are ten here already, and—"

"Boy, stand aside!"

"Rats!"

The old gentleman turned the colour of a turkey-cock with anger. He brought up a gold-headed malacca cane and gave Hazeldene a poke in the chest with the gold head of it, and the Removite sat down suddenly in Billy Bunter's lap.

The old fellow opened the door and jumped into the carriage, and a porter slammed the door behind him.

"Hah!" exclaimed the gentleman with the white whiskers. "No room, hey? In my young days, boys stood up to make room for their elders. Hah!"

The train glided out of the station. There was a wail from Billy Bunter.

"Vaseline, you ass, you've squashed my tarts!"

Billy Bunter had opened a bag of tarts the instant he had sat down. Hazeldene had plumped on his knees and squashed them over his trousers—and Hazeldene's.

"Vaseline, I'll punch your head! Ow! Look at that!"

"It's all that old boulder's fault!" exclaimed Hazeldene wrathfully. "What does he mean by shoving himself into a carriage where there isn't room for him?"

"Hah! In my young days boys made room for their elders!"

"It's no good telling us what boys used to do in the reign of King George the Fourth, sir," said Nugent.

The old gentleman glared. He had certainly seen at least sixty-five winters, but he did not date back to the days of the Georges.

"Boy, you are insolent!"

"Well, you see, sir, you're too numerous."

"In my young days—"

"You shouldn't have entered a carriage that was already full, sir, when there are others less full," said Wharton respectfully but firmly. "But now you are here you can have a seat."

"I shall insist upon having a seat."

"If we didn't choose to give you one, it wouldn't do you much good insisting," said Harry. "Squeeze up on that side, kids!"

"Oh, rats!" said Nugent. "You squeeze up on that side."

"Can't be did. I suppose you don't want to make Miss Hazeldene uncomfortable."

"Really, I—" began Marjorie.

Nugent looked daggers at Wharton.

"Of course not!" he exclaimed hastily. "We can squeeze up on this side quite easily, or Hoffman can stand."

"I not stand mit meinself for any old shentleman mit vite viskers perfore, ain't it!"

"Then Meunier—"

"I zink I prefer to sit viz myself on ze seat."

"Well, if a couple of aliens can't stand, it stands to reason that we can't," said Nugent. "Billy Bunter had better sit on the lunch-basket."

"I want to open it every now and then—"

"Couldn't you have one good tuck-in and then leave it for a bit?"

"Really, Nugent, you will make Miss Hazeldene think that I am greedy!"

"Which would be hard on you, of course!" said Harry Wharton.

"Really, Wharton—"

"Oh, squeeze up!" said Bob Cherry. "There you are, sir, there's room for you, if you can make it do!"

"In my young days, boys were always polite to their seniors."

"In my old days I intend to be always polite to my juniors, sir."

This answer rather took the white-whiskered gentleman aback. He sat down and drew out a newspaper and commenced to read as the train moved on.

On the other side of the carriage Harry and Marjorie were talking in subdued tones. Bob Cherry sat strangely silent, but the rest of the juniors were in a buzz of talk.

Pulling the Stranger's Leg!

"BOYS!"

The gentleman with the copper complexion and the white whiskers rapped out the word as suddenly as the popping of a champagne cork, and the Greyfriars lads all looked at him.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Did you speak, sir?" asked Nugent, with demure politeness.

"Yes, sir I did. I cannot read my paper in comfort while such a buzz of inane talk goes on in this carriage."

"It is regrettable and unfortunate that the talkfulness prevents the reading recreation of the esteemed old codger," said the nabob. "But the questionfulness arises—is a railway carriage the proper place for the esteemed sahib to read?"

"Sorry, sir," said Nugent, "but we can't help your troubles. You pushed yourself into a carriage that was already full, and you've only got yourself to blame."

"I insist upon your silence!"

"To the insisfulness of the honourable sahib we can only reply ratfully," said the Nabob of Blaniapur.

And the juniors all replied:

"Rats!"

The old fellow grasped his malacca cane and seemed inclined to commit general assault and battery upon the spot. He caught the glance of Marjorie Hazeldene and coloured a little, and laid down his cane and his paper.

"Very well," he said, "if you must make a noise, I will not read."

"Really, sir, I think you are a little unreasonable," said Harry Wharton quietly. "The carriage was full when

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you entered. But, apart from that, can you expect a party to travel without speaking a word, in order that you may read a paper? Isn't it asking a little too much?"

"In my young days boys never spoke without permission in the presence of their elders," rapped out the old gentleman.

"Then there's been a lot of improvements since your young days, sir," said Nugent.

"A set of young ruffians!" murmured the old gentleman, opening his paper again. "A set of young hooligans! Things are changed after fifteen years in India!"

He was evidently unconscious of speaking aloud, and the juniors grinned at one another. He laid the paper over his face and settled back in his seat for a nap. Bob Cherry's eyes suddenly twinkled.

He leaned across to Harry Wharton and whispered.

"I say, let's give him some more surprises, to show him how things have changed since his young days."

Harry grinned as he caught on to the joke at once. Bob Cherry took a matchbox from his pocket and put a couple of marbles in it and shook it up.

The sound was very much like the rattling of dice in a cup, and the old gentleman in the corner was observed to give a start under the newspaper.

"Highest number in three," said Bob Cherry, "for half-a-crown, mind!"

"I'm game!" said Harry Wharton. Bob rattled the marbles and pretended to throw. He kept his back partly turned towards the stranger, so that the old fellow should not see what kind of dice they were.

"Six!" exclaimed Bob. "There you are!"

Harry Wharton threw next.

"Five!"

"There you are again—double six!"

"That's good! My turn—nine!"

"Eight!"

"Rats! Only four!"

"I've won! Hand over the spondulicks!"

"Here you are, Bob!"

The old gentleman threw the newspaper aside and glared at the boys.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Weren't you asleep?"

"I was not, sir!" roared the veteran from India. "I was not asleep! I see that you are gambling. Is that one of the improvements among boys in modern times? If you do not immediately cease that blackguardly gambling I will report you to the police at the next station. Hah!"

"Of course, we expect you to keep it dark, like an old sport!"

"You young rascal!"

"Here, draw it mild!"

"You gambling young ruffians! I will have you flogged! I mean—by Jove, I'd have you flogged if I had you with my regiment in India!"

"Rather lucky for us you haven't, then!" Bob Cherry remarked coolly.

"But, mark my words, I will report you!"

"Oh, we'll chuck it, if you like," said Bob Cherry, putting the matchbox and marbles into his pocket. "You seem to be a lot behind the times in India. Fancy a fellow not knowing it's a common custom for schoolboys to play with dice for money!"

"He'll be surprised when he sees us drinking at the next station!" laughed Hazeldene.

"Hah! Drinking! I shall not be surprised! Disgraceful—disgraceful!"

"Got a cigar about you, Wharton?"

"No, I haven't got one left."

"Can you oblige me with a cigar, sir?" said Bob Cherry respectfully.

"No, sir!" roared the Anglo-Indian.

"I cannot oblige you with a cigar. Disgraceful! In my young days—"

"Let us listen respectfully, my worthy chums, to the narration of the manners and customs of the worthy sahib's young days," said the Nabob of Bhamipur.

"The Boy with an Enemy!"

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"Certainly!" chorused the juniors.

"Please tell us about the manners and customs in your young days, sir!"

But the kind attention of the Greyfriars juniors seemed to have the effect of drying up the sources of information respecting the old gentleman's young days.

He glared and muttered, and retreated behind his newspaper again, without enlightening them further, and the juniors chuckled as the train swept on through the countryside.

Harry Wharton and Marjorie resumed their discussion of the parts they were playing, and Bob Cherry began to sing, and the rest of the juniors joined in and kept time with their feet.

And so the last state of the Indian veteran was worse than his first. But there was no help for it, and he endured it as best he could until the train reached Fernbridge, the station for Wharton Lodge.

Little did the juniors guess that during their holiday they were to see a good deal more of the old gentleman whose leg they had pulled!

(The chums of Greyfriars have a rollicking time at Wharton Lodge, so don't miss their fun. Order next week's sparkling Christmas number to-day.)

SKIPPER AND SCHEMER!

(Continued from page 21.)

disgrace St. Jim's with a rotten case in the paper any more than I do."

"Well, there's something in that," admitted Tom Merry.

"Mum's the word—to oblige me," said Kildare.

And the juniors, to whom Kildare's wish was law, agreed that "mum" should be the word.

There was a shout of welcome when the train stopped at Wayland Junction and Kildare stepped from it. Darrell and a crowd of Sixth Formers rushed across the platform to greet him. They were surprised to see Tom Merry and Manners with Kildare, and still more surprised when Kildare asked leave to take the two juniors in the car that was waiting to bear him to St. Jim's.

Tom Merry and Manners were in high feather now. They had brought the captain of St. Jim's safely through—they had frustrated Cutts' rascally schemes—and they were eminently satisfied with themselves.

The big motor-car crowded with Kildare and his friends came up to the gates of St. Jim's in great style.

Nearly all the school had gathered there to greet the old captain of St. Jim's. The School House band burst into music, playing the "Conquering Hero."

There was plenty of noise, there was no doubt about that, and, amid a terrific blare of music and cheering, Kildare was escorted into his old school.

There was one heavy heart—one pale and enraged face that looked from a study window to see the triumphant return of the old captain of St. Jim's.

Cutts of the Fifth, a prey to rage and desperation, remained in his study, knowing that his last chance had failed him, that his last rascally scheme had missed the mark, that his day of power had come to an end. But in the general rejoicing nobody wasted a thought upon Cutts of the Fifth.

All that evening there was a great celebration at St. Jim's. Kildare had come into his own again, and Tom Merry & Co. rejoiced greatly.

And a crowd of fellows, School House and New House, in a state of wonderful friendship and cordiality, crammed Tom Merry's study at the great feast which took place there to celebrate the happy occasion, and the cheers that were given for old Kildare rang far across the quadrangle.

(Next Wednesday: "THE MYSTERY OF EASTWOOD HOUSE!" Look out for this great Yuletide yarn of mystery, fun, adventure and thrills—starring Tom Merry & Co. on holiday. It's a story in a thousand!)

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