

Grand Christmas Number

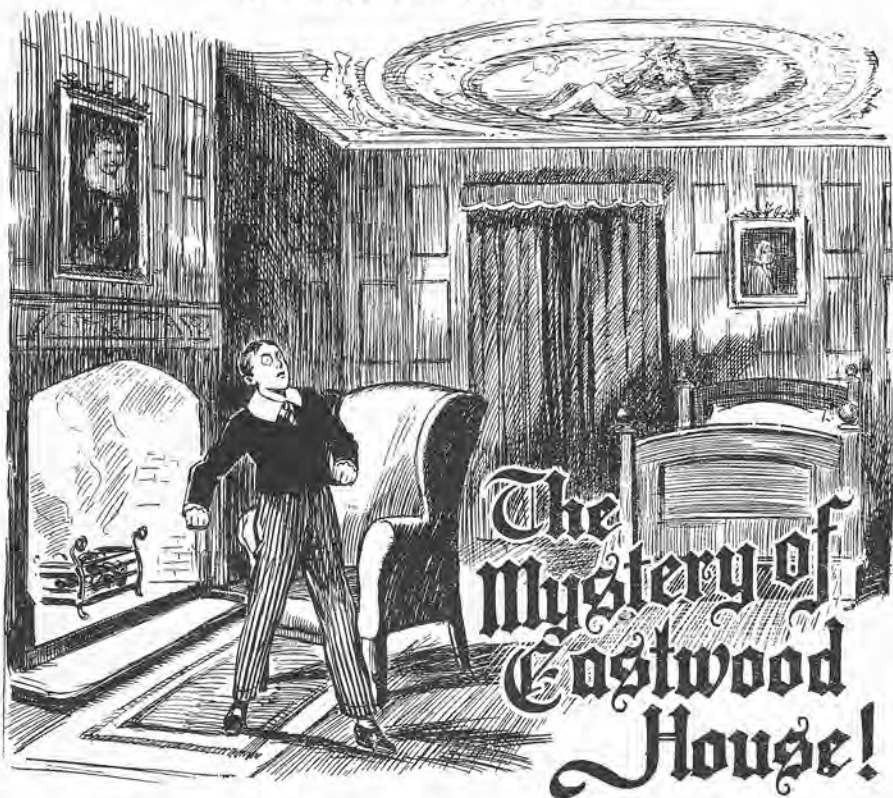
The

GEM

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**The Mystery of
Eastwood House**

What was the Mystery of the Painted Room? Arthur Augustus D'Arcy Solved It—and then Completely Vanished!



The Mystery of Eastwood House!

With a tremor running through him, and a cold sweat breaking out on his forehead, D'Arcy, reclining in the chair, gazed upward at the painted eye of Bacchus on the ceiling. Suddenly he sprang to his feet with a cry. "It is alive! It is alive! Good heavens!"

CHAPTER 1.

Waiting for the Feed!

STUDY No. 6 in the School House at St. Jim's presented an unusually festive appearance.

There was holly on the walls, and mistletoe over the door, and a spotless tablecloth gleamed upon the study table. And upon the tablecloth gleamed an enormous array of cups, saucers, and plates—mostly of different patterns. It was evident that the owners of Study No. 6 had borrowed, or raided, crockeryware from all quarters, in preparation for a "spread" of unusual dimensions.

The kettle was on the hob, and the fire burned brightly. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, spotlessly arrayed as usual, stood with his benignant smile of welcome upon his aristocratic face to receive his guests. All seemed to be ready for a really first-class feed—excepting the provisions. Of eatables there was not a

sign in the study. But so far as decorations and crockeryware and smiles of welcome went, everything was in the best possible order for the feast.

The study was already a little crowded. Blake, Herries, and Digby, D'Arcy's study-mates, were there, as a matter of course. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, the Terrible Three of the Shell, were the first guests to arrive

The shadow of the unknown hangs over Eastwood House. Lord Eastwood and his son, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, have mysteriously vanished! What has happened to them? That is the problem Tom Merry & Co. set themselves to solve.

from outside. Then Kangaroo had come in, followed by Reilly of the Fourth. Other guests were expected, and, of course, the feed could not begin till all had arrived.

But some of the guests who were already on the scene were wondering a little at the absence of the feed itself. It was very pleasant to look upon the Christmas decorations of Study No. 6, and the array of crockeryware was certainly imposing, and the spotless state of the tablecloth could not fail to strike all observers. But, after all, something more solid was required for a feed, and some of the guests could not help wondering where it was.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as the son of a noble lord, was generally rolling in money. It had been his idea to stand a really stunning feed in Study No. 6 to celebrate the breaking-up for the Christmas holidays, now close at hand. A good many of his chums were going home with him to Eastwood House for

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By Martin Clifford

the Christmas holidays, but not all of them could go. So the feed was really an excellent idea, and all of them were willing to do their best to make it a success by piling in with the greatest good will into the good things provided by the swell of St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy received his guests with a genial smile of welcome, and yet a close observer might have traced a slightly worried look upon his noble brow.

The mingling of a genial welcoming smile with a thoughtful worried frown had quite a peculiar effect upon his face, which his guests politely did not notice.

There were footsteps in the passage, and three juniors came into the study doorway—Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn of the New House.

They all wore their best smiles—such things as House rivalry and ragging were not to be thought of, of course, on an occasion like this. Fatty Wynn, especially, had a face like a full moon, so broad and beaming was his smile. His glance went mechanically to the table, and a slight shade came over his fat face as nothing but crockeryware met his eyes.

"Pway come in, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, smiling with an effort.

"I hope we're not late," said Figgins.

"Not at all, Figgys!"

"I tried to make Figgins come earlier," said Fatty Wynn. "But he was finishing some silly letter or other, and he wouldn't move. I hope we haven't kept you fellows waiting."

"Not in the least, deah boy!"

"Well, we're all here now," remarked Tom Merry.

"I haven't had any tea, so as to do justice to the spread," said Fatty Wynn confidentially. "That is, practically no tea—only some ham and eggs and cake and a few tarts."

"I'll help eat it, deah boy!"

"I'll help eat the feed ready, if you like," hinted Fatty.

"Thank you vewy much!"

Blake, Herries, and Digby looked out of the window, seemingly greatly interested in a fall of snow that had powdered the quadrangle with white.

For some reason the colour was deepening in the aristocratic visage of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Well, are we all here?" asked Kangaroo—otherwise Harry Noble of the Shell.

D'Arcy did not reply. He seemed busy with his thoughts.

"All here?" repeated Kangaroo, in surprise.

Arthur Augustus started.

"Sowwy, deah boy! Did you address me?"

"Yes; I asked you if we were all here."

"Not quite. I'm expectin' my minah, you know."

"I'm generally on time when there's a feed," said Figgins. "Better wait for him."

"Well," said Fatty Wynn, very thoughtfully, "I don't know about waiting for Third Form fags, you know. Fags don't count."

"Oh, let Gussy wait for his minor!" said Monty Lowther generously.

"Certainly!" said Kangaroo.

"Yaas, wathah—I mean, pway don't

roensh—that is to say—ahem!" Arthur Augustus' thoughts were evidently wandering. "Vewy warn wathah for this time of the yeah, isn't it?"

"Warn!" said Kerr, with a stare.

"It's snowing!"

"Is it weally? Yaas, that's what I meant to remark. It's wathah cold, isn't it?"

Kerr closed one eye to Figgins, and tapped his forehead in a significant sort of way, perhaps meaning to imply a belief that the swell of the Fourth was a little loose in that region.

"You fellows been playin' footer!" asked D'Arcy, with a great effort to make conversation.

"Yes," said Kerr, seriously and solemnly. "We generally play footer after dark, in the snow, you know."

"Do you weally?" said D'Arcy, who, troubled by some mysterious inward trouble, was too preoccupied to notice that Kerr's reply was in a sarcastic vein.

"How good! I twist you had a good game!"

"Ripping!" said Kerr, still sarcastic.

"Figgins scored fifty runs, and Fatty

"Bai Jove! That's good! Then he's come!"

"Yes, he's come and gone," said Lowther blandly. "It was this morning that I saw him, you know."

"You—you uttah ass, Lowthah—"

"Thanks! Are you always so polite to your guests, Gussy?" asked Monty Lowther imperturbably.

"Ahem! Sowwy, deah boy! I forgot! You see—"

Arthur Augustus was interrupted by the arrival of three somewhat inky juniors of the Third Form. They were Wally D'Arcy, Gussy's minor, and his bosom pals, Jameson and Curly Gibson. D'Arcy had not asked the latter two, as a matter of fact, but Wally had calmly assumed the right to bring his friends with him.

"Here we are!" said Wally, as he marched in. "All ready, eh?"

"Yaas!"

"Good! I'm hungry. So's Jameson, so's Curly. Why, where's the grub?" demanded Wally, staring round the study. It was evident that the manners and customs of D'Arcy minor were not modelled upon those of his elegant major.

"The—the grub?" stammered D'Arcy.

"Yes; where is it?"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Jack Blake, who had been staring out into the dusk of the quad. "Here's the giddy postman."

Arthur Augustus breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"Pway excuse me a few minutes, deah boys, while I wun down to see the postman!" he exclaimed. "I'm expectin' a lettah frow home."

"Right-ho!" said Fatty Wynn. "We'll get the feed ready while you're gone. Ow! Yow! What are you treading on my foot for, Figgins?"

Figgins gave his chum a ferocious glare, and Fatty Wynn comprehended. It dawned upon him that the great celebration depended upon the timely arrival of the postman. Arthur Augustus had hurried out of the study, and the juniors waited for his return.

He returned in two minutes.

He came back empty-handed, and with a really rich colour in his cheeks.

"Well?" said Blake.

"Well?" echoed Fatty Wynn, with a dreadful foreboding.

"Well?" growled Wally.

"I—I—I'm awfully sowwy, deah boys," stammered Arthur Augustus.

"Nothing to be sorry about," said Fatty Wynn anxiously. "It's all right—he's on with the feed!"

"I'm awfully sowwy—but—but—"

"But what?"

"But there won't be any feed!"



Wynn potted the red, and I made a grand slam."

"Did you weally?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Then a burst of laughter from all the fellows in the study recalled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to himself. He jammed his eyeglass a little more tightly in his eye and blushed.

"Ahem! I meant to remark—"

"I say, Wally will be pretty peckish when he gets here," said Fatty Wynn.

"Suppose we get the feed all ready for him? I don't mind helping. I like making myself useful, you know."

"Yes."

"Well, shall we get it ready, then?" said Fatty Wynn, puzzled.

"Yaas."

"Where's the grub?"

"The—the grub!" stammered D'Arcy.

"Yes. Where is it?"

"I suppose you fellows haven't seen the postman?" asked Arthur Augustus, changing the subject with startling abruptness.

"Yes, I have," said Monty Lowther.

CHAPTER 2.

Startling News!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY pronounced the words in a faltering tone.

A dreadful silence followed. It was broken by Fatty Wynn.

He groaned.

He did not mean to; but he really could not help it. He had been saving up his appetite, so to speak, for that extra special feed; he had been nourishing a first-class hunger for the special occasion.

And now there wasn't to be any feed, and the feeling of emptiness and disappointment combined brought that

involuntary groan to the lips of Fatty Wynn.

The other fellows felt the blow also.

Wally followed up Wynn's groan with a snort. He had brought Jameson and Curly Gibson to the study for something extraordinary in the way of feeds, not for a faltering explanation that there was to be no feed. Jameson and Curly were already glaring at him. Wally felt exasperated.

"Something gone wrong?" asked Monty Lowther, with elaborate politeness. Lowther could always be depended upon for sympathetic urbanity at dreadful moments like this.

"Yaas."

"So sorry!" murmured Manners.

"Too bad!" said Figgins.

"I weally can't undastand it," said Arthur Augustus, whose aristocratic countenance was assuming the hue of a well-boiled beetroot. "I have nevah known my patah fail me in this extraordinary way before. But the fivah has not come."

"Oh!"

"It was promised me this mornin'," said D'Arcy. "It was not merely a fivah that I asked for extwa, you know. If it had been, I shouldn't have counted on it. But the patah promised to send me this fivah to weach me to-day—two days before bweakin' up for the Christmas holidays. It ought to have awvived this mornin'."

"Oh!"

"But it didn't—nor this aftahnoon, eithah. I considahed that there was probably some delay owin' to the ewush in the Christmas post, you know, and that it would awvive for certain by this post, but it hasn't."

"Oh!"

"I know it's wotten," said D'Arcy feelingly. "I am extremely sowwy to disappoint you chaps. It's weally wotten. I feel that I am to blame, but it is weally most inexplicable that my govahnah should fail me in this way. He knows I was goin' to stand a partin' feed before bweakin' up, and yet he has not sent the fivah."

Wally snorted again.

"You ass, Wally, bringing us here to hear your blessed major gas," murmured Jameson, in a stage-whisper that was heard all over the study.

"And young Frayne will have wolfed all the sardines by this time," said Curly, with an unhappy grimace. "I thought we shouldn't want the sardines, but now—"

"Let's get out," said Wally.

"I am sowwy, you youngstahs."

"Oh, rats!" said Wally. "You are an ass, Cussy."

"Weally, you young wascal—"

"Br-r-r-r!" said Wally. And he marched indignantly out of the study with the other two fags, and Curly Gibson closed the door with unnecessary force.

"I am weally awfully sowwy, you chaps," said D'Arcy.

"Don't menah," said Figgins politely. "Accidents will happen in the best regulated studies. I hope your father isn't ill!"

Arthur Augustus frowned in a worried way.

"The fact is, deah boy, that I am afwaid he is, or else that there is somethin' w'ong at home, or he wouldn't have left me in the lurch in this remarkable way."

"Might have forgotten all about it," suggested Kangaroo.

"Inpossi. I wote to him yestahday. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,504.

and besides, it would be impossi, in the cires for a D'Arcy to forget a p'omise."

"The D'Arcys," said Lowther solemnly, "have first-class and well-established memories, which they brought over with the Conqueror."

"Sure, and it's hungry I am," remarked Reilly. "I've got five shillings, and anybody who feels inclined to come to the tuckshop with me can come."

And Reilly left the study, promptly followed by Fatty Wynn of the New House, Kangaroo followed, and then Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence melted away. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's distress was so evident that they forbore to give any expression to disappointment or indignation.

"If you chaps feel inclined to come over to the New House," said Figgins hospitably, "we've got half a tin of sardines and two rolls."

Figgins' generous offer was not jumped at. Figgins and Kerr took their leave. The Terrible Three remained alone in the study with the Fourth Formers, and the imposing array of crockeryware—no longer wanted.

"It's weally wotten," Arthur Augustus repeated.

"Horrible," said Blake. "You must excuse us, you fellows. Gussy is always putting his blessed foot in it, and this is only once more."

"Weally, Blake."

"Oh, all right," said Tom Merry. "I only hope it's only a case of forgetfulness, and that there is nothing wrong at Eastwood House."

"I fear there is somethin' w'ong," said Reilly, Augustus.

"But your matter would let you know," said Tom Merry.

D'Arcy shook his head.

"The matah is away," he explained. "My eldah b'woathah Conway is ab'ward with the matah at Cannes. But Pilkington ought to have informed me."

"Who's the Pilkington?"

"The butlah—our new butlah, and a weally wealliah old chap," said Arthur Augustus. "I should certainly have expected to hear from Pilkington if the patah was ill. I weally think I will send a wire to Pilkington, and ask him what is w'ong, if you fellows will excuse me."

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry. "You can send young Lynn or Toby with the wire. We're not quite stony in our study, and if you fellows would care to come to tea—"

"Hear, hear!" said Blake heartily.

"Now you're talking!" said Herries, with equal cordiality.

"Corn in Egypt!" said Digby. "I hope it won't be another feast of the giddy Barnabees like this, with nothing to eat!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Our board is frugal, but all are welcome," he said. "Better bring some of the cireks along with you; you've got all c'ers."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I will write the telegraph, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "But once more p'way allow me to apologise for the wotten fiasco!"

"Oh, that's all right!"

"You get the giddy wire written, and I'll call young Lynn," said Blake.

"Wightho! I trust some of you fellows can lend me some tin to pay for the telegraph. I am weally stony, you know."

"Heaps!" said Tom Merry cordially. "It will be a wathah long telegraph," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully, as he sat down to the table and drew pen

and ink and a sheet of impot paper from the drawer. "I must explain to the patah the weally awkward posish he has placed me in. Howevah, as you are comin' to Eastwood with me for the Christmas holidays, I will settle up with you at home, deah boy."

And Arthur Augustus wrote out his telegram. His chums grinned as they read it over his shoulder:

"Dear Pater,—I was very much disappointed at not receiving the remittance as promised for to-day. It has placed me in a very awkward position, as I had invited quite a number of friends to tea, and there was no feed. I really cannot understand it at all, unless you are ill, which I trust is not the case. Will you kindly telegraph me a fivah, and at the same time inform me whether there is anything wrong at home?—Your affectionate and anxious son, ARTHUR."

"You're going to telegraph all that?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Yaas. I have compessed it into as few words as poss, so as to save money, as we're in such beastly low funds, deah boy."

"Lucky you didn't write it at full length, then!" said Tom Merry. "You would have had to wait for the fiver to come before you could telegraph for it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Lynn, the boot-boy, was dispatched with the telegram and a ten-shilling note to pay for it. There was not likely to be much change.

Then the chums of the School House adjourned to Tom Merry's study.

Under the cheery influence of tea and toast and poached eggs, their spirits revived, but a cloud remained upon the noble brow of Arthur Augustus.

He persisted in thinking that the non-arrival of the fiver meant that there was something wrong in the household of Lord Eastwood, his noble pater.

The other fellows considered it quite probable that Lord Eastwood had forgotten all about the matter—indeed, as Manners feelingly remarked, they had all been through such experiences themselves.

But Arthur Augustus was not to be convinced.

He explained to his grinning hearers that it was utterly impossi for a D'Arcy to forget any engagement that he had made.

And he waited with anxiety for a reply to his telegram. But the reply did not come.

Tea in Tom Merry's study lasted a good while, but when it was over the reply to the telegram had not arrived.

"Somethin' happened to the patah!" said D'Arcy, with conviction.

"Then the telegram won't be opened," said Blake.

"Yaas. His secretwaty will attend to it and weply," said D'Arcy—or Pilkington. One of them ought to weply at once."

After tea the juniors descended to the doorway of the School House to wait for the expected reply. Tom Merry & Co. were curious, though they did not quite share Arthur Augustus' anxiety.

In the winter dusk a lad in the Post Office uniform was seen at last coming across the quad through the powdered snow, and he was heading for the School House.

"Here he is, deah boys!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"Master D'Arcy?"

"Yaas; it's for me! Hand it ovah!" Arthur Augustus opened the telegram.

Then he gave a sudden start, and uttered an ejaculation.

"Great Scott!"

"Bad news?" asked all the juniors together, with real concern.

"It's extraordinary!"

"But what is it?"

"It is very remarkable—"

"What's the news, you ass?" roared Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

Blake jerked the telegram away from the swell of St. Jim's and held it up for all the juniors to read. And they read it with wonder. It ran:

"Lord Eastwood disappeared three days ago. Am sending car to fetch you home at once.—PILKINGTON."

CHAPTER 3.

Gussy In Distress!

"DISAPPEARED!"

"Three days ago!"

"Great pip!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his famous monocle into his eye and stared blankly at the telegram. His aristocratic face had gone quite pale. Although he was sometimes a little severe upon his noble pater in the short-comings of sending fivers, he was deeply attached to his father, and the news was a great shock to him.

"Disappeared!" he murmured. "The poor old patah! I told you there was somethin' w'ong, deah boys! This is weally tewwible!"

"But—but how could he disappear?" said Tom Merry. "There must be some mistake. I suppose your man Pilkington isn't a practical joker, is he?"

"Certainly not! He is a very gwaave and weelible butlah—quite a pawgaw of butlahs. What can possibly have happened to the patah? The poor old patah!"

"It's rotten!" said Tom sympathetically. "But he must be found! Blessed if I can understand how he could disappear. You'll hear all about it from the chauffeur when the car arrives."

Arthur Augustus nodded, and moved away by himself. He was very much upset, and he did not wish to show it.

The Co. discussed the matter with great excitement. When the school broke up, they were to go home with D'Arcy to Eastwood House for the Christmas holidays; but, in the circumstances, the holiday was not likely to be the cheerful time they had anticipated. But they did not think of that. They were thinking of the distress of their chum.

The news was soon all over the School House, Arthur Augustus had retired to Study No. 6, not wishing to be the object of curious glances and questions.

Almost all the fellows were sympathetic. Levison of the Fourth suggested that Lord Eastwood had disappeared of his own accord, pointing out that he was a director of several City companies, and that City directors sometimes found it convenient to disappear. He suggested that a cablegram should be sent to the Argentine Republic to inquire for the missing earl. But Blake promptly bumped Levison on the floor, and Herries trod on him, and the cad of the Fourth ceased to make humorous suggestions.

In the absence of all particulars it was difficult to guess what had happened, or what was the state of affairs at Eastwood House. But the fellows who were to spend their Christmas holidays at Eastwood House consulted about the matter. Manners suggested

that, in the circumstances, D'Arcy might not care to be bothered with them.

"Possibly," Tom Merry agreed. "On the other hand, we might help him look for his pater. If he's really disappeared, the police must be looking for him. But I dare say we could do it a little better."

"Hear, hear!" said Monty Lowther.

"Let's put it to Gussy and see," suggested Figgins.

And the prospective guests of Eastwood House proceeded to Study No. 6 in a body. There was quite a crowd of them—the Terrible Three and Kangaroo and Figgins & Co. of the New House. The seven juniors found Arthur Augustus pacing up and down the study with a pale and distressed

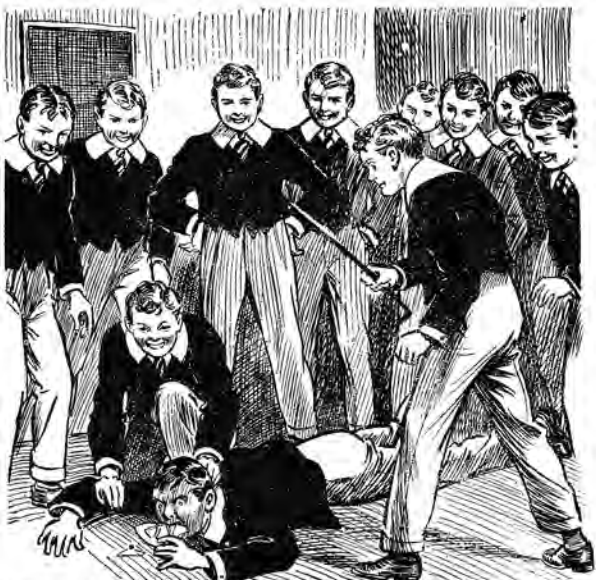
"No fear! But if we should be in the way—"

"But pewwaps you would not care for a vacation at Eastwood House in these misewable cires," said D'Arcy thoughtfully. "It would spoil your Christmas holiday. Of course, until the patah is found it won't be vevy jolly there. If you would wathah not come I shall not be offended."

"Rats!" said Blake.

"It's not that," said Tom Merry. "We'd like to come and help you look for your pater."

"Yaas, that's just what I was thinkin', deah boys," said Arthur Augustus eagerly. "If he has disappeared for three days the police must be lookin' for him, and as they haven't found him, it shows that it's time somebody else



"Ow, ow, ow! Leave off!" yelled Levison. "I—I—I'll eat it—ow!" Wally suspended operations with the cane, and the cad of the Fourth grabbed the paper and stuffed it into his mouth. The juniors looking on roared with laughter as Levison began to eat his own word!

face, and his eyeglass dangling forlornly at the end of its cord. Never had they seen their noble chum in such a state of distress.

"Cheer up, Gussy!" said Figgins kindly. "I dare say it won't turn out to be so serious when you know about it. The car must be here soon."

Arthur Augustus nodded. "Pwax excuse my bein' in this wotten distressed state, deah boys!" he said. "But I'm weally vevy much distressed about the poor old patah!"

"What do you think about our coming down to Eastwood?" said Tom Merry bluntly. "If you don't care for it, don't mind saying so. We shan't mind."

Arthur Augustus looked quite alarmed.

"My deah chaps, you're not goin' to desert me in this wotten posish?" he exclaimed.

took the mattah in hand. If you fellows don't mind sacceitlin' your Christmas holidays on my account, I should vevy much like you to come and help me."

"Done!" said Lowther.

"Right-ho!" said Kangaroo. "We're coming, then. And depend on it, we'll find Lord Eastwood all right. If he disappeared at Eastwood he can't be vevy far away, and we'll find him all right. It's a pity we can't come with you to-day."

"I was thinkin' of askin' the Head to let you come back with me in the car, deah boys."

"Herrah!"

"If you think it a good ideah, I will pwoceed to the Head at once and make the request."

"I'm afraid he won't see it, but THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,594.

there's no harm in asking," said Tom Merry. "Buzz off now, and if he says yes, we'll get our things ready to start."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Arthur Augustus left the study to proceed to interview the Head. Tom Merry & Co. waited anxiously for his return. He came back in about ten minutes with the cloud still on his brow. "Well?" demanded all the juniors eagerly.

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"Doctah Holmes is vewy much concerned," he said, "but he thinks that the police must be lookin' for the patah, and that they can handle the patah bettah than we can. He says I can take two of my friends with me, but he weakly cannot give permish for so many fellows to leave the school before breakin' up."

"Only two?" said Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"Yaas; two fellows in my own Form."

"Oh!" said the Terrible Three with one voice. As they were in the Shell, that barred them out.

Herries, Digby, and Blake exchanged glances.

"I'll tell you what!" said Herries. "I'll come and bring Towser with me."

"Towsah!"

"Yes. You know what a splendid bulldog Towser is at following a trail. He'll smell out what's become of Lord Eastwood in next to no time," said Herries confidently.

"Ahem!"

"Oh, blow Towser!" said Blake politely. "He'd never smell out anything but a steak or a red herring. Of

course, I'm one of the two, Gussy?"

"Yaas, de a h boy!"

"Then I'll be the other," said Herries. "I'll bring Towser, and—"

"Excuse me!" said Digby. "In the cires, I think I'd better be the other. You see Gussy will want looking after—"

"Yes; I'll look after him," agreed Herries.

"Now, look here, Herries—"

"Look—here,

Digby—"

"Toss up for it!" suggested Tom Merry.

"Yaas, that's a good ideah, deah boys."

And Herries and Digby tossed up for it; and Arthur Augustus was observed to breathe a sigh of relief when Digby won the toss. He had not been overjoyed by Herries' kind offer to bring Towser. As Arthur Augustus often remarked, Herries' bulldog had no respect whatever for a fellow's trousers.

"It's Blake and Dig," said Tom Merry, while Herries grunted. "Get your bags ready, you chaps; the car can't be long now."

"There it is, in the quad!" exclaimed Blake, as the sound of a car arriving was heard. And Arthur Augustus rushed downstairs to meet the Eastwood car.

the chauffeur stepped down, as Arthur Augustus came dashing out.

The chauffeur touched his cap to him. Arthur Augustus caught him by the arm in his excitement. In his anxiety for his father, the St. Jim's swell had quite lost the repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

"What has happened to my patah, Wuggles? Pway tell me at once!"

Ruggles was looking very grave.

"Lord Eastwood disappeared three days ago, Master Arthur," he said. "Nothing has been heard of him since. The police have been at Eastwood House, looking for him—and they're still looking for him; he ain't been found."

"By Jove! I ought to have been informed before!"

"Mr. Pilkington did not wish to worry you, sir, as you could not do anything," said Ruggles. "But when your telegram came to-day he sent me off with the car to fetch you."

"But how did the patah disappear? Was there an accident?"

"Nothing is known, sir. Lord Eastwood stayed up in the library after the rest of the house had gone to bed, and he was missing in the morning. His bed had not been slept in. A door was found open, and that was all."

"Gwast Scott! And has no trace of him been found?"

"Yes, sir; his hat was picked up in a field nearly a mile from Eastwood House. Excepting for that, there is nothing known."

"Then he must have left the house of his own accord, Wuggles?"

"So the police suppose, sir. But what became of him afterwards, nobody knows. Only—only—" The chauffeur hesitated.

"What—what? Quick, deah boy!"

"The servants say that the Eastwood ghost has been seen and heard since Lord Eastwood left, sir. That is all."

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus shuddered.

"What's that about the ghost?" said Tom Merry. "Don't let rot like that worry you, Gussy. Pull yourself together."

"I—I—I don't let it wowwy me, deah boy, but—luc— Arthur Augustus faltered. "You don't know the ghost story in our family, you see. There is a legend in Eastwood House that when the ghost of Sir Bulkeley D'Arcy walks, it means the death of the head of the family. Of course, there's nothin' in it; but—my patah has disappeared."

Blake squeezed his arm affectionately.

"Buck up, old son! We'll find him soon enough," he said. "We'll be ready in a jiffy, and get off in the car. Come and get your coat."

"Yaas, wathah!"

It did not take the three juniors long to get ready. Wally had gone off to the tuckshop with Jameson and Curly, and so far he knew nothing of the strange news from Eastwood House. Blake, Digby, and D'Arcy came out in their coats and mufflers, and their bags were placed in the car.

"Send us a wire to-morrow to tell us how you're getting on," said Tom Merry hopefully; "and the day after to-morrow we shall be with you, you know."

"And I'll bring Towser with me," said Herries

And the chuns shook hands and parted.

The car drove away and disappeared

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CHAPTER 4.

Levinson Eats His Words!

HE big Daimler car stopped outside the School House, and

in the gloom, leaving Tom Merry & Co. in a state of excitement and anxiety.

They would have greatly preferred to accompany their chum and help him in the attempt to solve the mystery of his father's disappearance; though, as a matter of absolute fact, it was not likely that they would succeed where the police had failed.

What had happened to Lord Eastwood?

Well the juniors remembered the stately, kind-hearted old gentleman who had welcomed more than once his son's chums to holidays at Eastwood House.

Would they ever see him again?

Had there been some terrible accident, and was the body of the kind old gentleman hidden under some frozen stream? Or had he been kidnapped? One of the two theories seemed certain. But which—and how—and why? It was an impenetrable mystery.

Their anxiety for their chum threw a cloud over the spirits of the School House fellows, and Figgins & Co. fully shared their feelings.

The Terrible Three were discussing the matter in their study an hour later, when Wally burst in. Wally was in a state of great excitement.

"Look here, what's all this about?" he asked. "What's this about my governor disappearing? I've just heard it from Levison. Levison says there's news that he's sloped with the funds of the South American Bank."

"The rotter!"

"I dotted him on the nose," said Wally, who showed signs of conflict. "I knew he was lying, of course. But what has happened? You chaps know, of course."

Tom Merry explained all he knew.

D'Arcy minor listened breathlessly.

"The poor old governor!" he exclaimed. "How rotten I wasn't here when the car came! And it's too late for a train to-night. But I shall jolly well buzz off in the morning and see what's going on, you bet!"

And Wally, looking much more serious than was customary with the reckless scamp of the Third, walked out of the study.

A little later, when the Terrible Three had finished their preparation and were coming downstairs, they heard the sound of uproar from the Junior Common-room. Wally's voice could be heard raised in tones of angry indignation, amid chuckles from other fellows.

The chums of the Shell hurried into the room.

Levison of the Fourth was standing before a paper placard pinned up on the wall of the Common-room. A number of fellows were grinning over the placard. It bore the words, in Levison's hand:

"NINEPENCE REWARD!"

"WHEREAS Lord Tommeddy has mysteriously Disappeared with the Funds of the Bank of which he was director, and whereas the Police have been unable to trace him:

"The above REWARD will be paid to anybody giving information leading to his discovery and conviction!"

"BY ORDER."

Wally was crimson with fury, and he was trying to get at Levison, but Crooke of the Shell and Mellish of the Fourth were holding him back.

"You cad!" roared Wally. "You rotten outsider! You worm! Leggo! Lemme get at him! I—I'll smash him! I'll—"

ACCIDENTS WILL HAPPEN!



"We're sorry, sir! We didn't know the gun was loaded!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to T. Stoneham, 25, Gnell Road, Godregraig, Swansea, Glam.

"What's the matter with you?" grinned Levison. "Lord Tommeddy isn't a relation of yours, is he, young shaver?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You mean that for my father, you rotten cad!" howled Wally, struggling to get away from Crooke and Mellish.

"Cap fit, cap wear!" chuckled Levison. "If your pater has disappeared with the bank funds, of course that might apply to him. But you said he hadn't."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lemme go! I'll smash him—"

"Take that rubbish down!" said Kerruish of the Fourth. "It's a dirty, caddish thing to make jokes about what's happened to D'Arcy's pater."

"Mind your own business," said Crooke.

The Terrible Three came in, and they marched upon the scene at once. Tom Merry caught Levison by the shoulder.

"You'll take that paper down, you cad!" he said.

"I won't," said Levison.

"Yes, you will!" said Tom, grasping him by the back of the collar and swinging him to the wall where the paper was pinned. "You're a lying cad, and you know that isn't true. You're going to eat our words! Take it down!"

"Grough! Leggo my collar!" mumbled Levison. "You're choking me, you idiot!"

"Will you take that paper down?"

"No!" howled Levison.

Tom Merry raised his right boot, and it came into violent contact with Levison's trousers. There was a roar of anguish from the cad of the Fourth.

"Ow! Oh! Yaroooop!"

"Now take it down!"

Levison was helpless in the powerful grip of the captain of the Shell. Suddenly he grabbed the placard down from the wall.

"Now you're going to eat your words!" said Tom Merry grimly.

"What do you mean?" snarled Levison.

Tom Merry pointed to the paper with his disengaged hand.

"There are your lies, written on that paper. Eat them!"

"Eat that paper? Are you dotty?"

"Not at all. You're going to eat it," said Tom Merry determinedly. "It

won't be nice—it's never nice to swallow one's own rotten lies—but you've got to do it. Wally, there's a cane in the corner. Get it!"

Crooke and Mellish had released Wally—under forcible pressure from Manners and Lowther. Wally grinned and ran for the cane.

Tom Merry exerted his strength, and twisted Levison over on the hearthrug, face downward.

"Now thrash him till he eats his words!" he said.

"What-ho!" grinned Wally.

The cane rose and fell with vigorous lashes.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Ow, ow, ow!" roared Levison.

"Yow—ow!" Crooke—Mellish—Gore! Lend a hand, you cads! Rescue! Ow!"

But Crooke, Mellish, and Gore did not lend him a hand. And the other fellows stood round grinning, not at all disapproving of the punishment of the cad of the Fourth.

Whack, whack, whack!

"We're waiting!" said Tom Merry.

Levison made a desperate effort, but he could not get loose, and still the dust rose from his nether garments under the lashes of the cane.

Wally was putting all his energy into it.

"Ow! Ow! Leave off!" yelled Levison. "I—I—I'll eat it— Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And he grabbed the paper and stuffed it into his mouth, amid roars of laughter from the fellows looking on. Wally suspended operations while the cad of the Fourth furiously masticated the unsavoury article of diet. Not until he had fairly eaten his words—with the paper they were written on—was Levison released.

"Now, buzz off, and keep your funny little jokes for a more suitable occasion," said Tom Merry, shaking a warning finger at him.

And Levison, choking with rage and with his unpleasant morsel, limped away. And there were no more jokes from Levison of the Fourth upon the subject of Lord Eastwood's mysterious disappearance.

CHAPTER 5.

D'Arcy's Homecoming.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS was silent as the big car rolled swiftly through the gloom.

Through long, dark roads, under shadowy, leafless trees, the motor-car rushed on, the powerful headlights gleaming out far ahead through the darkness.

Blake and Digby were silent, too.

They tried at first to cheer up their companion with hopeful words; but it was useless. Arthur Augustus replied only in monosyllables, and at last the two juniors ceased their good-natured attempts.

The swell of St. Jim's wrinkled his brows in troubled thought. His anxiety for his father was keen, and always there was a dread in his breast that something terrible had happened, and that he would never see him again.

If he was still living, where was he? If he had left the house of his own accord, as the findings of his last in the field seemed to indicate, where was he now, and why had he not returned? If he had been taken by force, then by whom—for what reason? Arthur Augustus tried to puzzle out these questions as the car rushed on at a fast speed.

mile after mile flew under the racing wheels, but the pace seemed slow to the anxious junior.

Would he never be home?

Easthorpe at last—the village near Eastwood House—where the juniors were to play the village team in a football match during the holidays.

Arthur Augustus was not thinking much about football now. Unless his father was found, his Christmas holidays were not likely to be happy ones. The car slowed down in the village street. Outside the Eastwood Arms, Mr. Bowker, the fat village constable, touched his helmet to Arthur Augustus as the car ran by, and, worried as he was, Arthur Augustus did not fail to raise his hat politely in acknowledgment of the salute. Then on up the road to Eastwood House—a pause at the park gates—and then up the drive, and Arthur Augustus was home at last.

The swell of St. Jim's jumped out of the car.

An imposing, florid-complexioned gentleman in whiskers came forward to meet him as he alighted. It was the estimable Pilkington. Upon Pilkington's florid face was a look of gravity and concern, which matched his stately manner and his respectable whiskers.

"Has anything been heard yet?" asked Arthur Augustus hastily.

The butler shook his head.

"I am sorry to say not, Master Arthur," he said sadly.

"The police—"

"They are not here now, sir."

"And nothin'—nothin'—has been heard—or discovered—nothin' at all?"

"Not yet, Master Arthur; but the detectives have hopes of finding his lordship soon," said Pilkington, with respectful sympathy. "Mr. Dodder, of Scotland Yard, is in charge of the case. He has been here several times, and I have taken the liberty, sir, of offering him a room."

"Quite right, Pilkington. Has my bwothah been told?"

"Lord Conway was informed by wire," said Pilkington. "But Lady Eastwood is not at present in sufficiently good health to be informed, and Lord Conway has, therefore, not started for England."

"All wight, Pilkington," said Arthur Augustus wearily. "Have some woome got weady for my friends—the othah chaps are comin' to-morrow."

"Certainly, sir."

"Come in, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "I was hopin' you'd come in wathah more cheery circe, you know; this is wathah wotten for you."

"Don't mensh!" said Blake. "We're here to make ourselves useful. We're going to start on the hunt at once."

"Yes, rather!" said Digby emphatically.

They were in the hall when they made those remarks. Pilkington turned round and glanced at them curiously.

But it was only for a second that the stately Pilkington allowed so common a feeling as curiosity to influence him. Then his face was wooden and expressionless again.

"The Painted Room has been prepared for you, Master Arthur," he said.

"Good! The next two woome will be for my friends, then. Come up with me, deah boys!"

And the juniors went upstairs. Pilkington turned on the electric light in the Painted Room.

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It was a large and handsome bedroom, with a balcony that gave a view of Eastwood Park in the day-time. The walls were of panelled oak, and the ceiling, which was of wood, was painted in the Italian style, with a blue sky and a scene from mythology. It was an old room, and its decorations dated from the days of Charles II.

In the centre of the ceiling, amid the grouping nymphs, a fat and jolly-looking Bacchus reclined under clusters of ripe, purple grapes—a figure more than life-like, with lips that seemed to grin, and eyes that seemed to wink, over the enjoyment of the foaming goblet he held in his hand. Round the figures and the grape-vine was painted the blue sky of Greece, and it was from that ceiling that the room derived its name.

"This is a jolly room, Gussy!" said Blake, glancing up at the painted ceiling. "You've changed your quarters. You weren't in here the last time we came down."

"No; why have you changed the room, Pilkington?" asked D'Arcy. "Why didn't you get my old quarters weady for me?"

"I'm sorry, sir, but your old room is out of repair," said Pilkington. "There has been a fall of plaster from the ceiling, and the chimney is out of order. In the circumstances, sir, I had this room prepared."

"Vewy good, Pilkington; it's all wight. This is quite an histiwic chambah, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "The Lord Eastwood in the weign of George III was found dead in this room, so they say, killed by a sword-thrust, and the door was locked on the inside, and nobody knows how the othah chap got away. Of course, that's all wot—unless he let himself down with a wope from the balcony. Pway have suppah pweared, Pilkington!"

And the butler departed.

On either side of the Painted Room were doors communicating with the next apartments, and those were the rooms Blake and Digby were to occupy. But the rooms were not prepared for them yet, their arrival with Arthur Augustus that night being unexpected.

It had occurred to Jack Blake that the respectable Pilkington was not over-pleased to see their arrival with Arthur Augustus; perhaps not wishing to be bothered by guests in the house during the period of anxiety that followed Lord Eastwood's disappearance. But as Pilkington's wishes in the matter were not of any consequence Blake did not allow that to trouble him.

Supper was ready for the juniors when they came down, and both Blake and Digby were ready for it.

Arthur Augustus had very little appetite; indeed, he would not have eaten at all had not Jack Blake ordered him to do so, with all the authority of the leader of Study No. 6 at St. Jim's.

"You've got wot before you if you're going to find your pater," said Blake, "and you've got to eat. You know what Fatty Wynn says—lay a solid foundation."

Arthur Augustus smiled faintly.

"I feel wathah upset," he explained. "You'll feel still more upset if you don't eat," said Blake. "Now, pile into that chicken, and I'll watch you."

"I'd wathah not—"

"In the present circumstances, Gussy, especially as your guest, I should be very sorry to give you a thick ear," said Blake. "But I shall certainly give you one if you don't start on that chicken at once."

And Arthur Augustus grinned a little and started on the chicken.

It did him good, too, and a glass of wine after it brought the colour back to his cheeks.

Pilkington himself waited upon the juniors, and he did it superbly. There was no doubt that Lord Eastwood had a treasure of a butler in Pilkington.

During supper the juniors asked him incessant questions concerning the amazing disappearance of his master, and Pilkington gave them all the information that was known.

Lord Eastwood had stayed up writing in the library. The rest of the household had gone to bed. Pilkington, understood that his lordship had been busy with some papers relating to the Anglo-South American Syndicate, an enterprise of which he was a director. Papers relating to the syndicate had been found on the library table in the morning. His lordship had not gone to bed.

His room had been found unoccupied, his bed unslept in, by his valet in the morning.

But Pilkington had found a door open, which had certainly been locked as usual over night, and so it was evident that Lord Eastwood had left the house.

As he did not return the household became anxious for him, and when his hat was found at some distance from Eastwood House, Pilkington called in the aid of the police.

The local police discovered nothing, and Mr. Dodder, a prominent detective from Scotland Yard, came down to investigate.

Lord Eastwood's eldest son, Lord Conway, was kept informed by telegram, and he gave instructions for what was to be done.

That the earl had left the house of his own accord seemed certain, for how could he have been taken away by violence without a sound being heard?

But where he had gone since—that had become of him—was a mystery.

His colleagues of the Anglo-South American Syndicate were very anxious about him, and from them, and from many other gentlemen, Pilkington had received a whole sheaf of telegrams of inquiry.

It seemed that the affairs of the syndicate required Lord Eastwood's presence urgently.

"And is there no theory as to what has happened?" asked Arthur Augustus. "What does Mr. Dodder think?"

"That he has not confided to me, sir," said Pilkington, and if it had been possible to suspect the stately butler of sarcasm, Blake could have sworn that there was a sarcastic inflexion in Pilkington's voice.

But Arthur Augustus did not notice it. He would never have dreamed of suspecting Pilkington of impertinence.

"But what do othah people think?" asked D'Arcy.

Pilkington coughed. "There have been some unpleasant suggestions, sir, by persons unacquainted with his lordship's character," he admitted.

D'Arcy flushed.

"What evah do you mean, Pilkington?"

"Please do not make me say any more, sir. It would be an impertinence even to repeat the unpleasant suggestions that have been made."

"Tell me at once, Pilkington."

"Ahem!"

"I am waitin'!" said Arthur Augustus sharply.

"If you insist, sir—"



As Blake and Digby searched among the trees for a sign of the vanished Arthur Augustus, Dig uttered a sudden exclamation and stooped and picked something up from the ground. It was a handkerchief, marked with D'Arcy's monogram in the corner!

"Yass, I do—pway get on, and don't waste time."

"Ahem! Well, sir, it has been suggested—I hardly like to continue—"

"You are wastin' time."

"Ahem! Well, sir, it has been suggested—people will talk scandal, sir," said Pilkington apologetically—"that—that—"

"That what?" demanded Arthur Augustus, exasperated.

"That Lord Eastwood has disappeared of his own accord, sir," said Pilkington reluctantly; "that it has something to do with the affairs of the Anglo-South American Syndicate, sir, and that he could return if he wished. Of course, it is an infamous suggestion, and I am sorry you have compelled me to mention it, sir."

"The wottahs!" said Arthur Augustus, breathing hard through his nose. "The uttah wottahs! But I only wish I could think it was true, and that the patah was weolly safe and sound all the time."

"We're going to find him," said Blake determinedly.

Pilkington's eyes turned upon him. "You, sir!" he said; and then added at once, "Pray excuse me, sir, for speaking."

"That's all right," said Blake. "We're going to find him. Tom Merry and the rest will be here to-morrow, and we'll simply ransack the whole country for him if necessary."

"I trust you will be successful, sir," said Pilkington respectfully. "It would be very gratifying to Mr. Dodder if you could assist him."

This time Blake felt certain that the serious and solemn Pilkington was speaking sarcastically, and he felt an inclination to bestow his boot upon the

stout and stately person of the butler.

He had an uncomfortable feeling that Pilkington, under his solemn reserve and almost obsequious respect, was laughing at them up his sleeve. Such a thought would never have occurred to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who simply could never have realised that a servant could be capable of making fun, to himself, of his master or his master's friends. If Arthur Augustus had had any experience of the servants' hall he would have been very much enlightened on that point.

"Let's begin," said Blake.

"Yass, wathah! You can go to bed now, Pilkington, if you like," said Arthur Augustus. "We're goin' to start lookin' for my patah."

"Ahem! To-night, sir!"

"At once."

"Perhaps I can be of some assistance, Master Arthur," Pilkington suggested respectfully. "If you will allow me to help, it will be very gratifying to me."

"Vewy good," said D'Arcy. "Come on, deah boys! We will go to the libwawy first, and begin at the beginnin'."

And the juniors rose from the supper table to begin their quest.

CHAPTER 6.

In the Dead of Night!

PILKINGTON led the way to the library.

Exactly what they were going to do, or how they were going to do it, the chums of St. Jim's did not know.

But one thing was certain. They could not rest until they had made an attempt, at least, to penetrate the mystery of the disappearance of Lord Eastwood.

The discovery that idle tongues were gossiping about his father's disappearance made Arthur Augustus keener than ever.

The household were all in bed at that late hour, with the exception of the butler and D'Arcy and his guests.

How to begin the quest they did not know. As D'Arcy said, they had to be guided by "circs." Arthur Augustus prided himself a little on his abilities as an amateur detective, and he had a vague hope of finding a clue of some sort.

The library was a vast apartment, book-lined from floor to ceiling, and where there were no books, the walls were of panelled oak, that gleamed in the electric light.

Pilkington stood in an attitude of respectful attention while the juniors began to search for clues.

"In such cases Sexton Blake genevally finds the ash of a cigarette or somethin'," said Arthur Augustus hopefully.

"H'm!" said Blake.

No such clue was discovered in the library.

After ten minutes of looking about them and pondering, the juniors had to admit that nothing was to be discovered.

In spite of themselves, they grew discouraged.

Lord Eastwood seemed to have vanished without leaving a trace

behind, and without a clue to follow. How could they hope to discover what had become of him?

"By the way, what was Wuggles sayin' about the ghost?" Arthur Augustus asked suddenly. "Tell us about that, Pilkington."

The butler allowed himself a slight smile.

"It was some nonsense, sir, of Henry's."

"Who's Henry?" asked Blake.

"The second footman, sir."

"Good! Go on. What did Henry see?"

"I'm afraid he saw nothing, sir, but he fancied he did. It was the night after his lordship's disappearance, sir, and it seems that Henry was uneasy, and came down to ascertain that all the doors and windows were locked. He asserts that he saw a dark figure in this room, that passed so close to him that he heard it breathe; but as he turned on the electric light, it vanished."

"That sounds like wot," said D'Arcy.

"I fear so. Henry's nerves must have been disturbed by the strange disappearance of his lordship."

"I will speak to Henry in the mornin'. So it was in this room that he fancied he saw the ghost?"

"Yes, sir."

"No trace of him left," said Digby. "Let's see the door that was left open. There might be finger-prints or something. They find out lots of things at Scotland Yard through finger-prints and things."

"Yaas, come on."

Pilkington led the way again. They passed from the library into the picture gallery, where fine old paintings glimmered from the walls, and the faces of a hundred and gone D'Arcys looked down upon their descendant.

At the end of the picture gallery was a door giving on a balcony, where there were steps to the terrace.

"This door was found unfastened, sir," said Pilkington. "His lordship must have left the house this way, as most convenient at the time."

The three juniors examined the door attentively. Pilkington stood with an expressionless face while they did so. He seemed to have no desire but to be respectfully useful, and yet Blake was certain that he was secretly regarding the whole proceedings as a foolish fancy of boyish minds.

And, indeed, if Pilkington looked at it in that light, it was not without some reason, Blake had to confess. What could they hope to discover, where a Scotland Yard detective had failed to find any clue?

Certainly they had found nothing here. Arthur Augustus looked doubtfully at his chums.

"You fellows gettin' sleepy?" he asked.

"No fear!" said Digby, manfully stifling a yawn.

"We're going to see this through," said Blake.

"Wight-ho! Then we'll get an electric torch and go to the place where my patah's hat was found. Is it far from here, Pilkington?"

"About a mile, sir."

"You fellows willin'?"

"Yes, rather," said Blake; and Digby nodded assent.

"Ahem! It is considerably past midnight, sir," hinted Pilkington. "Perhaps in the morning, Master Arthur."

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"You can go to bed if you like, Pilkington. Just tell us where—"

"Not at all, sir. I was not thinking of myself," said Pilkington in a pained tone. "I was thinking of your health, sir. I should be very pleased and gratified, sir, of having the honour of guiding you to the spot."

"Then get a torch, please."

"At once, Master Arthur."

Pilkington departed, and returned in a few minutes with an electric lamp. Then the four left the picture gallery, and descended the stone steps to the terrace, and the butler led the way with the torch across the grounds. They quitted the park, and followed the course of the river beyond, along the towing-path by the frozen stream. Then Pilkington turned from the river into a field.

Under a group of frosty, leafless willows he stopped.

"It was here, sir," he said.

Arthur Augustus took a deep breath of relief.

"Then it was some distance from the vivah?" he said.

"Certainly, sir."

"Then—then it is impos— that—"

"The river was frozen, sir, and the ice was unbroken," said Pilkington. "It was quite impossible that his lordship could have fallen into the river, sir."

"But what on earth could he have wanted in this lonely field?" said Blake, puzzled. "I mean, if he came here of his own accord."

Pilkington coughed.

"Have you any idea about it, Pilkington?" asked D'Arcy sharply.

"None, sir."

"You were thinkin' somethin'—what was it?"

"Ahem! The gossip I mentioned, sir. There is a road on the other side of the field, and the traces of a motor-car were found there. I am quite sure that it was a motor-car with which his lordship had no connection whatever; but you know how idle tongues will gossip, sir."

Arthur Augustus compressed his lips. He understood that everything pointed to a voluntary disappearance on the part of Lord Eastwood. Across the field was a short cut to a lonely road, where a motor-car might have been waiting.

"Bai Jove, there are footprints!" said Arthur Augustus suddenly, scanning the ground in the light of the torch.

"Yes, sir, nearly all the villagers have been here out of curiosity," said Pilkington gravely.

"Oh!"

There was evidently nothing to be done.

"Let us return, deah boys," said D'Arcy heavily.

And they walked back through the dark night to Eastwood House.

Pilkington carefully closed and locked the door of the picture gallery.

"The young gentlemen's rooms have been prepared, sir," he said.

"Yaas. I suppose we'd better go to bed, deah boys; there's nothin' more to be done to-night."

And the juniors went upstairs.

Bright fires were burning in the wide, old-fashioned grates in the three adjoining rooms. Arthur Augustus threw himself into an armchair before his fire.

"Not going to bed?" asked Blake.

"I—I don't feel sleepy, weally," said Arthur Augustus. "You chaps go to

bed, and I'll turn in as soon as I think I can sleep."

"Better turn in," urged Digby.

But D'Arcy shook his head.

"We'll sit up with you," said Blake.

"Wah! It's frightfully late now, and we've got to be up early in the mornin' to start again. I shall be all right, deah boys!"

And Blake and Digby, who were very tired and sleepy, went to bed.

The doors on either side of the Painted Room closed upon them, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was left alone.

The swell of St. Jim's sat before the fire, watching the leaping flames among the logs, and thinking.

What had become of his father?

That was the question that hammered his brain, and drove away all thought of sleep.

The house was still and silent.

It was past one o'clock, and still Arthur Augustus sat in the deep old chair, watching the dying embers.

The room was brilliantly illuminated by the electric light; the old panelled walls glimmered and gleamed in it. Arthur Augustus' gaze wandered to the painted ceiling, and he idly watched the graceful forms of the nymphs delineated there, and the jolly face of Bacchus, crowned with vine leaves.

The face of the god of wine seemed to grin at him, and the eyes to watch him with a derisive smile. Suddenly Arthur Augustus gave a violent start. It seemed to him that the painted eyes of Bacchus had actually moved—that they were actually living, and were watching him.

"Bai Jove, I suppose I'm gettin' dweamy!" he murmured.

He watched the painted figure in a fascinated way.

Was it imagination?

Could an eye painted by human hand gleam at him in that manner—watching him—watching him?

A shudder ran through D'Arcy's limbs.

The stillness of the house was oppressive. He wished that Blake and Digby had been with him still. What was the matter with him—was he half asleep and dreaming, or—or what was it? With a tremor running through him, and a cold sweat breaking out on his forehead, D'Arcy, reclining in the deep chair, gazed upward at the painted ceiling—gazed at the painted eye that was watching him, and suddenly he sprang to his feet with a cry.

"It is alive! It is alive! Good heavens—"

The light suddenly went out, and the room was plunged into darkness.

CHAPTER 7.

Missing!

BLAKE sat up in bed and yawned.

The clear, wintry sunlight was streaming in at the windows of his room.

It was morning—a cold, clear winter morning. There was frost on the windows, and outside the trees were powdered with white.

"My hat, it's late!" Blake exclaimed. He looked at his watch.

"Ten o'clock! Great Scott!"

He jumped out of bed.

The juniors had intended to rise very early that morning to recommence the search for the missing man. But they had gone to bed so late and tired that it was not surprising they had slept late in the morning. D'Arcy had given Pilkington instructions to knock at his door at seven o'clock, and he had intended to call his chums. But apparently sleep had claimed him.

Blake, shivering in his pyjamas, ran to the communicating door and opened it. He half-expected to see Arthur Augustus asleep in the chair before the fireplace, but the chair was empty.

"Gussy, old man, wake up!"

But the bed was empty.

Blake whistled.

"The young ass! He's gone out without calling me. I wonder whether Dig's up?"

He went to Dig's room. Digby was fast asleep in bed, sleeping the sleep of the just. Blake awoke him by the simple process of jerking off the bedclothes.

Digby gasped, and awakened immediately.

"Groooh! I say, 'tain't rising-bell!"

"You're not in the Fourth Form down now, fathead!" said Blake. "Wake up! It's past ten o'clock, and Gussy has gone out without us."

"Ow!" said Digby, rubbing his eyes. "All serene! Touch that bell for me!"

"Where is Master D'Arcy?" Blake asked the servant who brought the hot water; but the man did not know.

The juniors hurried through their toilet, and went downstairs. They were both a little anxious about D'Arcy. Their chum had been so disturbed the previous night, and so unlike his usual calm self, that they did not like his getting out of their sight like this.

"Just like Gussy to let us have our snooze out, but I wish he had called us," said Blake. "He will be getting into some trouble if we don't look after him."

"Blessed if I know where he can have gone to!" said Digby. "He must have slept in his clothes last night, and that he's never done before, you bet. Poor old Gussy must have been awfully upset to sleep in his clothes."

Pilkington, grave and urbane as usual, bade the juniors a respectful good-morning in the breakfast-room.

"Where is Master D'Arcy?" Blake asked.

"He has not come down yet, sir."

Blake jumped.

"Not come down?"

"No, sir. I knocked at his door at seven o'clock this morning, as he desired, but as he did not reply, I concluded that he did not wish to rise. He retired at a very late hour last night, sir, as you are aware," added Pilkington, with a respectful smile.

The juniors stared at him.

"Do you think D'Arcy is still in his room, then?" exclaimed Blake.

Pilkington looked surprised.

"Why, certainly, sir!"

"But he isn't!" exclaimed Blake excitedly. "His bed hasn't been slept in. He didn't go to bed last night at all."

"Good gracious, sir!" said Pilkington.

"I thought he had slept in the chair, and gone out early, and not come in," said Blake.

"I suppose he must have done so, if he is not in his room, sir," said Pilkington. "But it is surely very odd, for I do not think he has been seen downstairs. Perhaps I had better question the servants, sir."

"Please do!" said Blake.

The two juniors sat down to breakfast, while Pilkington went away to make inquiries for Arthur Augustus.

Blake and Digby were uneasy.

It seemed hardly possible that anything had happened to D'Arcy. Yet—

Of course, he must be about the house or the grounds somewhere, they reasoned. But after the mysterious disappearance of Lord Eastwood, D'Arcy's vanishing in this way made them feel very disquieted.

Excellent as the fare was on the breakfast-table, the two juniors did not enjoy it. They were too worried. They had nearly finished their breakfast when Pilkington came back, looking graver than ever.

"It is extraordinary!" he said.

"Where is he?"

"No one has seen Master D'Arcy this morning, sir. I have asked all the servants, and also the gardeners, and everybody about the house, but he has not been seen. Is it not curious that he should go out in this way without leaving a word? I presume he is searching for some trace of his lordship."

Blake felt his heart sink.

"Something's happened to him," he said, with conviction. "He wouldn't go off like that without leaving a word or telling us. It's impossible!"

"Something's happened!" repeated Digby.

"I have ordered the servants to look for Master D'Arcy, and have also spoken to the head keeper," said Pilkington. "Perhaps he may be found farther from the house. I

(Continued on the next page.)

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think he had some intention of revisiting the field where his lordship's hat was found."

"We'll look there first," said Blake. "Come on!" exclaimed Dig, jumping up from the table and leaving his rasher and eggs unfinished. "I know something's happened."

"You can find the place, young gentlemen?" asked the butler.

"Well, no," said Blake. "I don't know the way. Get somebody to show us."

"I will have that pleasure myself, sir."

"Come on, then."

In a quarter of an hour they were in the field they had scanned the previous night. But there was no sign of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

It was possible that the swell of St. Jim's was among the willows, examining the ground for tracks. They knew he had great faith in his powers as a Boy Scout.

But Blake and Digby searched through the frosty trees, and they did not find the swell of St. Jim's. But Dig uttered a sudden exclamation and stooped and picked up something from the ground.

It was a handkerchief, marked with D'Arcy's monogram in the corner.

"That's Gussy's!" exclaimed Dig.

"Then where is he?"

There was no sign of him. They searched along the river, and through the fields and the park, anxiously calling to their chum, Pilkington, looking very disturbed and anxious, left them, and returned to the house. It was possible that Arthur Augustus had some reason for his own sudden departure, and would return. But, in the circumstances, Pilkington declared that he had better telephone to the police in Easthorpe, and the juniors fully agreed with him.

All through the morning the search for the swell of St. Jim's went on.

The local police from Easthorpe, the gamekeepers, and others joined in the search, and about lunch-time Mr. Dodder, of Scotland Yard, arrived.

But the search was in vain.

Blake and Digby, tired out, and almost haggard with anxiety, gave up the search at last. There was no doubt about it—Arthur Augustus had mysteriously disappeared, even as his father had disappeared. The same mysterious fate had fallen upon both father and son.

Pilkington wired to Lord Conway, at Cannes, and Blake determined to send a wire to Tom Merry, at St. Jim's. He felt a keen desire to have his chums with him now. D'Arcy must be found, and the more there were to help in the search the better. Blake wrote out a telegram and asked Pilkington to send it to the post office.

The butler took the form, and hesitated.

"Pardon me, Master Blake," he said respectfully. "In the circumstances, it is desirable for a number of schoolboys to come here? Pray excuse my making the suggestion, but really—"

Blake stared at him. He did not like Pilkington, and he did not intend to be interfered with.

"You shouldn't have looked at my telegram," he said brusquely.

The butler made a deprecating gesture.

"Pray excuse me, sir. I really could not help seeing it as you handed it to me. If I may venture to suggest—"

"You mayn't," said Blake curtly. "I

want the fellows to come, and as quickly as possible."

A slightly obstinate look came over Pilkington's face.

"Excuse me, sir," he said smoothly, "but by Lord Conway's orders I am in charge of the house during my master's absence. I fear that the presence of a number of young boys holiday-making in the house would be inconvenient at such a time, as well as—if I may be allowed to say so—somewhat unseemly."

Blake flushed with anger.

"Do you think we shall feel much inclined for holiday-making?" he broke out. "We're going to look for D'Arcy, and find him."

"I think it would be better not," said Pilkington firmly. "I beg to repeat that I have Lord Conway's authority for taking the head of affairs here. I was about to suggest that perhaps you two young gentlemen might prefer to return to the school, or to your homes, until this matter is cleared up."

Blake was greatly inclined to plant an angry fist upon Pilkington's ample waistcoat, but he restrained himself. The man was acting within his rights, even if he was making himself unpleasant. It was easy, too, to understand that the staid and solemn butler would have been glad not to have had the house crowded with schoolboys.

Blake and Dig were there as D'Arcy's guests. But D'Arcy had gone now. If Pilkington, as he stated, and as was doubtless correct, was placed in charge of affairs by Lord Conway, he certainly had the right and the power to exclude the Christmas party unless some member of the D'Arcy family came on the scene.

And at that moment Blake remembered Wally.

Lord Eastwood was gone, his eldest son was at Cannes with Lady Eastwood, and now Arthur Augustus had disappeared. But Wally, though only a fag in the Third Form at St. Jim's, was a person of importance at Eastwood House in the absence of all his relatives. Wally would soon put this cheeky butler in his place—and Wally was just the person to do it!

Blake's troubled and thoughtful silence lasted some minutes.

Pilkington was the first to speak.

"At what hour shall I order the car for you, Master Blake?" he asked.

"You needn't order it at all," said Blake. "I'm not going. And to-day, too, Miss Cleveland will be here."

"Yes, Gussy said Cousin Ethel and her aunt were coming here to-day," said Digby.

Pilkington remained impassive.

"I have already wired to Miss Cleveland that, in the distressing circumstances, it would be as well to delay her arrival," he said calmly.

"What!" ejaculated Dig.

"It seems to me that you are taking a jolly lot on yourself, Pilkington!" said Blake hotly. "Do you understand that we are here as your master's guests?"

"Quite so, sir—quite so. And I am grieved if you think that I have exceeded my duty," said Pilkington. "I hope I shall be able to explain satisfactorily to Lord Conway on his return, if you should feel compelled to complain of my conduct, which I trust will not be the case."

"When is Lord Conway coming?" asked Blake abruptly.

"At present his lordship is unable to leave Lady Eastwood, as her ladyship is far from enjoying good health," said

Pilkington. "The date of his lordship's return is uncertain."

Blake set his teeth.

"Well, we're not going, and our friends are coming," he said. "So you can put that in your pipe and smoke it, Mr. Cheeky Butler! Go and eat coke!"

And Blake marched out of the room indignantly, followed by Dig, leaving Pilkington looking considerably annoyed. The two juniors left the house, Blake leading the way.

"Where are we going?" asked Dig, as he followed his chum.

"Post office," said Blake shortly.

"You're going to send that wire yourself?"

"Yes."

"But I—I say! Can they come, if Pilkington is really in authority in the house?" said Dig, hesitating. "We don't want to—run another man's house for him, you know. Lord Eastwood mightn't like our disregarding his butler. And—"

"I know. But I'm not going till Gussy's found. Pilkington's an old fool, and he doesn't like boys about the place, that's all. I believe he's glad of an excuse to get rid of us. Only he's jolly well not going to get rid of us so easily. And this afternoon there'll be a crowd of us to worry him, too," said Blake, with satisfaction.

And ten minutes later the telegram was dispatched. Then the juniors walked back to Eastwood House, regardless of all the Pilkingtons in existence.

CHAPTER 8.

Startling News!

COM MERRY & CO. came out of the dining-room in the School House.

They were looking unusually subdued.

Arthur Augustus had promised to send them a telegram to tell them how he was getting on at home, but the telegram had not arrived yet.

Figgins & Co. joined them in the quadrangle, looking very grave, too.

"Any news yet?" asked Figgins.

"No," said Tom.

"Time Gussy wired," Kerr remarked.

"I wish the Head had let us go with him yesterday. Still, we break up to-morrow morning."

"Wire may be coming now," said Kangaroo. "Let's get down to the gates and look for the post office kid."

They strolled down to the school gates. It was close upon time for afternoon lessons when the telegraph boy came in sight. He knew Tom Merry, and as he saw the captain of the Shell, he took a telegram out of his wallet.

"This is for you, Master Merry," he said.

"Thanks! News at last, you fellows." The juniors gathered round eagerly.

Tom Merry opened the telegram, and they all read it together.

Then there was a general shout of consternation, for the telegram ran:

"Gussy disappeared last night. No trace. Come down at once, and bring Wally. Butler cutting up rusty, so Wally must come. Urgent.—BLAKE."

"Gussy disappeared!" ejaculated Figgins. "Well, this is getting thick!"

"What on earth does it mean?"

"It can't be a joke," said Tom Merry, staring blankly at the telegram. "Blake wouldn't play such a joke as that. But how on earth can Gussy have disappeared?"

"It simply puts the lid on," said Kangaroo. "Anyway, one thing's certain—we've got to go, and at once!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Queer, that about the butler cutting up rusty," said Kerr thoughtfully. "I suppose that's why Blake wants Wally, to keep him in order."

"Let's find Wally!"

Wally was found on the football ground, with Jameson, Curly, Gibson, and Frayne of the Third. He looked considerably muddled.

"Wally!" called out Tom Merry.

D'Arcy minor came up at once as he saw the telegram in the Shell fellow's hand. He was anxious for news from home.

"Wire from Gussy?" he asked.

"No; read it."

Wally read the telegram, and gave a low whistle.

"Well, that beats it!" he ejaculated. "That fairly beats the band. What on earth has become of Gussy?"

"Come with us to the Head," said Tom Merry. "We've got to get leave to-day, instead of to-morrow, and you've got to come."

"What-ho!" said Wally. "I'll jolly soon put old Pilkington in his place, if he's making things unpleasant. He's a solemn old codger, you know, and he doesn't like boys—never was a boy himself, I believe. I never liked him. He complained to the pater once about Pongo getting into the music-room and

clewling up the music—poor old Pongo! I'll get some of this mud off, and we'll go to the Head."

The juniors lost no time in presenting themselves in the Head's study.

Dr. Holmes looked at them inquiringly.

"If you please, sir, we want to leave to-day, instead of to-morrow," began Tom Merry. "We are wanted at Eastwood House, sir."

"Ahem!" said the Head.

"Something's happened to D'Arcy, sir; he can't be found," said Monty Lowther.

"And we want to help look for him," said Kangaroo.

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"Very well, my boys; in those circumstances, you may leave by the afternoon train," he said. "You may go now and pack."

"Thank you, sir!" said Tom Merry joyfully.

And the juniors hurried away to pack.

"I'm going to take Towser," Herries announced, when they came down in caps and coats ready for the journey. "We shall need him to look for Gussy."

"Well, keep him away from Pongo, that's all!" said Wally, with a grunt. "Bring the beast, if you like. Not that he could track out anything that wasn't eatable!"

Wally took leave of his friends; Frayne and Curly were going home with Jameson on the morrow. The juniors

started for the station, Pongo and Towser glaring and sniffing at one another en route. Towser and Pongo were not good friends.

Tom Merry stopped in the village to wire to Blake, and then they caught the train. They started off, far from being in the high spirits that usually accompanied breaking-up for the Christmas holidays. Their anxiety about D'Arcy was keen.

The local train to Wayland crawled, and seemed to crawl more slowly than ever to the impatient juniors. But as Wayland they changed into the express, which steamed away at rattling speed through the frost-bound countryside.

Even now they could hardly credit the startling news of Blake's telegram. How had Arthur Augustus disappeared—in his own home, with his chums with him? It was amazing.

It seemed an age to the juniors before the express ran into Easthorpe at last and stopped. And as they poured out of the train, the first persons they saw were Blake and Digby.

CHAPTER 9.

Wally Puts His Foot Down!

BLAKE ran across the platform to meet his chums. His face was pale and troubled, showing only too plainly how deep and keen was his anxiety for his missing chum.

(Continued on page 16.)



"Hallo, Henry, old son!" said Wally, giving the stately footman a dig in the ribs by way of greeting as he entered Eastwood House with Tom Merry & Co. Henry's dignity deserted him a little, and he started back with a gasp. "Where is Pilky?" asked Wally.

I FELT I simply had to meet all you boys and girls this year and wish you a Merry Christmas myself. So here I am, "face to face" with you. I do hope you won't think it too much of a "check." (Dash those puns! That's the worst of listening to Monty Lowther's holiday quips!)

But there's another reason for my stepping out of the story in this unconventional way. For a long time I've wanted to do something about the requests you're always sending in to the Editor; and at last I've done it!

Before we broke up at St. Jim's, I held a meeting in the Junior Common-room and read out some of these requests to the chaps and asked them to bear them in mind during the vac. They did—and now I'm going to introduce them and get them to tell you what happened when they tried to carry out your wishes. Just to set the ball rolling, here's dear old Skimpole!

Berbert Skimpole.

Greetings, my good juveniles! At the meeting in the Common-room, Merry read out a request from Master James Rogers, of Farguay, that I should forget Professor Balmynumpkin this Christmas and set out to enjoy myself in the good old-fashioned way.

I am happy to say that I have succeeded in doing so! By a process of self-hypnotism I temporarily eradicated the learned professor from my mental consciousness. I then proceeded to a Christmas party, armed with a highly-coloured inflated rubber sphere, described by the vendor as a toy balloon, and also with a book of conundrums.

With the toy-balloon, I jocularly belaboured many juveniles about the eranium, thereby exciting considerable riability. With the aid of the book, despite the fact that my glasses kept slipping off my nose, I propounded conundrums that aroused great enthusiasm and mirth.

For example, I asked the guests: "Why did the chicken run across the road?"

Nobody found the answer:

"When it's a jar!" Again, I asked them:

"Why is a door not a door?"

And not one guessed the solution:

"To get to the other side!"

I think I may safely claim to have been

the life and soul of the party. I simply refused to allow the guests to play boring games of blind man's buff or postman's knock. I stood in the middle of the room and kept on with my conundrums instead—and thoroughly enjoyed myself. It would have been an evening of sheer unalloyed pleasure, I assure you—but for the fact that half-way through the evening somebody accidentally burst my balloon and deposited my volume of riddles on the fire.



Skimpole goes gay!

I sincerely hope that Master James Rogers is satisfied!

Thank you, Skimpole! If Master Rogers is not satisfied, he jolly well ought to be! And now here's the one-and-only Arthur Augustus! This way, Gus!

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

How d'y'ou do, deah boys an' gals! A wight mewwy Christmas to all of you, bai Jove! An' particularly to Miss Evvenda Twice, of Birmingham, who w'ote the Editah to ask if I couldn't twat Hexwiva's bulldog more kindly.

Let me assuah you wight away, deah gal, that I wouldn't dream of bein' unkind to any animal—even Towshah! The twuth about it is that it's Towshah who is unkind to me!

Howevah, since you requested it, I have

Tom Merry Step

made a special effort to be nice to the twvto this Christmas, an' this is what happened:

On the first mornin' of the vac., I offahed him a dog-biscuit. He weplied by twain' off half the wight sleeve of my jacket. The second day I offahed him a bone, an' he chased me out of the breakfast-room. The third day, I merely twied to play with him—an' he tore a piece out of my twousahs!

But I uttably declined to be beaten. On the fourth day, I waided the hall of Eastwood House an' wiggid myself out with a suit of chain mail and a shield. An' I'm pleased to say that I succeeded in givin' Towshah a biscuit an' a bone an' in playin' with him, too—without sufferin' the slightest inconvenience!

Still, a chap can't verry well make a vegal habit of weavin' medicinal clobber, can he? So I twist, my deah Miss Twio, of Birmingham, that you won't expect me to be too kind to



Give a dog a bone!

Towshah too often!

Good old Gus! He still stands by the old family slogan: "Noblesse oblige"—especially if it's a lady! But I must get on with the next introduction. Here he is! Don't look at his face too long, or it may spoil your Christmas! Ladies and gentleman! Let me present George Gore!

George Gore.

Grr-r-r-r! For two pins, I'd punch that cheeky ass Merry on the nose! Still, as it's the season of peace and good will, I'll leave it over till the New Year instead!

Let's get down to brass tacks. A cheeky idiot who calls himself "Fair Play" and writes from Claeton-on-Sea has had the nerve to say I'm too much of a bully! Me—a bully, you know! Why, the chap's wandering in his mind!

Let me tell him right away that I've never bullied in my life. If anybody says I have, I'll smash him to pulp, see?

But, just to oblige "Fair Play," I jolly well made up my mind this Christmas to be even more considerate and humane than usual. I've stuck to that resolution—here's the proof!

When I got home for the holidays, I found two youngsters singing anols outside the front door. Now any ordinary chap would have kicked 'em down the steps, wouldn't he? But not me! I didn't kick 'em down the steps till I'd given 'em a penny each!

Could soft-heartedness go further? Even "Fair Play" will have to agree that it couldn't! What's wrong with me really is that I'm far too meek and mild—that's the fact of the matter!

Well, here's wishing you a battle-scarred Boxing Day—and—ow! Yarooop!

So much for Gore! By the sound of it, he didn't care for his own particular brand of kindness when he got it himself in the shape of my boot! Ah! Here's someone you'll like a lot better—our old pal Monty Lowther



Gore's Xmas kindness!



to conduct this humorous Christmas characters tell what happens wishes of our readers.

Monty Lowther.

Old pals! I'm sorry to say so, but won't be long before you bring down my hair in sorrow to the tomb. This is a grave statement to make, but I've had a terrible blow, as the chap said when he dropped out of a hurricane.

Right up to the time when Tommy's his meeting in the Common-room, I imag-

that you readers looked on me as the star turn of St. Jim's and the funniest fellow in the Gem. But the truth seems to be that I'm less than the dust, if you'll excuse such a sweeping statement.

It was a letter from a chap called C. Groves, of Everton, that opened my eyes. "Editor," he wrote, "Monty Lowther's called humour gives me a pain in the nose. I can't stand his trips. What does he mean for?"

I suppose I'd better not answer "editor" or I shall be in the soup! But, joking aside, old pals, that letter hurt my feelings. I made up my mind the next I heard Tommy read it out that I'd never criticise like C. Groves any more and complain. I'd start being serious; I'd be funny.

So I swotted up a book called "A Thousand Little-Known Facts" to give a food for serious thought; and by the time I'd arrived at Gussy's place for his twarty I felt I could talk sanely and sober with the next man.

I tried it on Manners. "Are you aware, Manners, old chap," said gloomily, "that Mascagni took eight days to write the opera 'Cavaler Rusticana'?"

What do you think happened? I never guess. Manners looked at me and said to a howl of laughter!

I tried Blake. "Blake, old sport," sighed. "I'm sure it will surprise you to know that it has been computed by



The laugh's on Lowther.

Out of the Story



feature, in which various St. Jim's men, in order to carry out the tried to be "different."

ment statistician that there are to-day more than one thousand thatched cottages on the road from Land's End to John o' Gaats."

To my utter amazement, Blake promptly wiped his knees and shrieked with mirth! What went for Manners and Blake went for the rest, too. For a whole day I walked about with a face like a lemon, talking earnestly about serious topics; and every day thought I was indulging in obscure jokes, and laughed like the dickens!

After that, I decided to chuck it. I'd like to oblige C. Groves, of Everton; but I can't be serious for toffee!

So, as it's "snow" you, "hail" Christmas! May may it "rain"! May none of its measures be a "mist"! May none of its smiles be a "frost"! May—but I'd better go on or it's doubtful "weather" you'll admit!

Help! If Monty had stayed any longer, I might have got in a regular "jog"! But, thinking about the weather, chums, here's a tip which causes an earthquake every time he crosses the quad! Stand up and bow, Monty!

Fatty Wynn.

Don't take too much notice of that Schoolhouse chump! First is, he's jealous of my twelve stone!

What I've got to say won't take long. A doctor young lady called Miss Doris Whittle wrote to the Editor to say she thought the amount of tuck I ate was disgusting, and she said I'd change my habits this Christmas. Well, my habits have changed my habits, I can tell you! From Breaking-up Day till now I haven't been allowed more than eight meals a day—and I've never had more than six helpings of any one course!



Fatty Wynn on a diet!

The only disgusting thing I can see about that is that a chap with a healthy appetite

like I've got should be so restricted! Perhaps that's what Miss Whittle meant, though!

So long, all! Hope you all have a button-busting Christmas!

Well, chums, we seem to be disposing of some of your special requests all right—though whether you're satisfied with the way we're doing it is another matter! Now let me introduce young Wally D'Arcy—king of the fags! A reader giving the initials A. G. R., of Glasgow, complains that Wally ought to be more respectful to his elder brother, and I meant Wally to say what he thinks about it. This way, Wally!

Wally D'Arcy.

More respectful, my eye! What's the good of treating the old fogey with respect when he doesn't appreciate it?

After Tom Morry's meeting, just to see how it would work, I gave him an extra-bid dose of respect. I went up to him and bowed double. After that, just to make sure, I saluted and dropped a curtsy.

"Most noble Gus!" I said. "I wonder if your lordship, out of the kindness of your lordship's heart, could lend me five bob till the weather breaks!"

If it was respect Gussy needed, I should have thought he'd have fallen for that, good and proper. But he didn't register a scrap of joy. Instead of



that, he gave me a freezing glare through his window-pane and yapped: "I swear, Wally, that you are not twin to be disrespectful to your old eh bwatnah!"

Several times since I've tried to be respectful by raising my cap to him and calling him "sir," and going down on my knees and salaaming to him. But he only says "Praw don't be wide," or "You cheeky young vascationer!" or something. So what's a chap to do?

I know what I'm going to do. Keep my respect for people who jolly well value it! A.G.R., of Glasgow, can put that in his pipe and smoke it!

Cheerio, all—and don't make hogs of yourselves this Christmas!

That was Wally D'Arcy right enough—and anyone who feels like making him polite to his elders is welcome to try! And now what's this crawling up to me? I thought it was an earthquake—but I can see now that it's Fatty!

Percy Melish.

Ho, ho, ho! I can't help sniggering when I think how I've carried out the request I got from one of you milksoaps! This particular nunny wrote to the Editor of the Gex to say he wished I'd give up smoking cigarettes and betting on goo-goo and being a backslider. And I've done it!

I've given up smoking cigarettes—and taken to smoking my pater's cigars instead! I've stopped betting on goo-goo—and started betting on football teams! And, considering I went out (alongnagging this morning and kept on my tummy all the time, nobody can possibly say I'm a backslider! Ho, ho, ho!

Here's wishing all steady sportsmen a high old Christmas! Ho, ho, ho! Thank goodness he's gone, chums! Now, friends see, here's—uh, my hat! I didn't

expect to see you, sir! Boys and girls! Allow me to present Mr. Ratcliff, House-master of the St. Jim's New House!

Mr. Horace Ratcliff.

Alum! My purpose in addressing you young people is to correct an erroneous impression which you seem to have about me. One young man named Harry Cox, of Maidstone, even went so far as to write to the Editor of the Gex suggesting that it was high time I improved my temper! I simply cannot allow such a disgraceful libel as this to pass unchallenged!

The truth of the matter is that I am a most even-tempered and benevolent man. (Whatever is the matter with your throat, Merry? Are you choking?)

After hearing of this preposterous letter from the young man at Maidstone, I made a point of bidding farewell to my pupils in the New House, on breaking up, in a particularly cordial manner. It occurred to me that a little celebration supper would be an excellent way of doing it.

Kerr was the first boy I met. I stopped him and grasped his hand.

"A merry Christmas to you, my boy!" I said warmly. "Before breaking-up, would you care to come along and sample some Christmas pudding and mince-pies in my study?"

By an unhappy chance, Kerr became affected by a fit of speechlessness at that moment and was unable to reply appropriately. But I knew, of course, that he would be only too pleased to accept an invitation from his respected Housemaster.

A little later, I encountered Lawrence. "The compliments of the season, Lawrence!" I called out gaily. "Please come along to my study this evening and have a little supper with me. And bring along your friends."

Lawrence was unable to accept immediately, owing to his unfortunately falling into a dead faint at that moment; but I felt quite sure all the same that he would gladly come.

I invited quite a number of boys in this way, and, although, curiously enough, they all had attacks of illness before I left them, I am sure we should have had a most enjoyable gathering—but for the most extraordinary circumstance that stopped it. This circumstance was the arrival of a doctor who absolutely insisted that I should retire to bed immediately and have a complete rest.

I was at a loss to know why he had called at all, but I deemed it advisable to carry out his orders.

It was only afterwards that I learned he had been summoned as a result of an absurd rumour that I had lost my reason!

I sincerely trust that this finally disposes of the ridiculous legend that I am bad-tempered! A merry Christmas to you all! I always thought there was a soft spot somewhere in a Rat's tough old heart—and under the magic influence of the Christmas spirit, he has revealed it!

Here's hoping, readers all, that the same cheery magic will unite your Christmas the merriest and brightest on record!



Good will to all, from "Ratty"!

"Jolly glad you've come!" Blake exclaimed, with almost a gasp of relief. "Jolly glad you've brought Wally, too!" "Yes, rather," said Digby. "We shall have to walk to the house, though. Pilkington wouldn't send anything to meet you."

Wally nodded. "You leave Pilkington to me!" he exclaimed. "I'll jolly soon settle his hash. I have my fellows been doing anything to him?"

Blake shook his head. "No; only I fancy we got on his nerves."

"Butlers haven't any right to nerves in business hours!" pronounced D'Arcy minor oracularly. "I'll give him something to stop all that! Has Ethel come down yet?"

"No. Pilkington wired to her, or to her aunt—I don't know which—to suggest her not coming yet awhile."

"The awful nerve!" ejaculated Wally. "He says Lord Conway has constituted him head cook and bottle-washer while your father is away," said Blake ruefully.

"Well, I dare say that's so; the pater and Conway have endless confidence in him," said Wally. "He hasn't been with us very long, but they think a lot of him. But I don't like him; you see. Pongo doesn't like him, and when Pongo doesn't like a man, you can rely on it that there's something wrong with that man."

"Same with Towser," agreed Herries. "I always know if a chap's a rotter, because if he's a rotter, Towser wants to bite him."

"Well, if we've got to walk, let's walk," said Kangaroo.

"Wait a minute!" said Wally. "I'm going to send another wire to Cousin Ethel about Pilky's. Like his check to wire her! I'll let her know it was a mistake, and that we're expecting her." "Jolly good idea!" said Figgins heartily.

And they stopped in the post office for the telegram to be sent. Then they walked to Eastwood House through the keen, frosty air. The trees in the park were glistening with frost, and the lake was frozen over. In other circumstances, the juniors would have gazed round them with enjoyment, and thought of the pleasant hours of skating on the frozen lake. But they were not thinking of holiday-making now. The dark mystery of their chum's fate had to be unravelled, and until they knew that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was safe and sound, they were not likely to think of enjoyment.

The footman who opened the door to them had a slightly peculiar look upon his wooden face. He knew of the rift in the lute between the butler and his master's guests.

As a matter of fact, that was as much talked of in the servants' hall as the strange disappearance of Lord Eastwood and his son. The general opinion in the servants' hall was that Pilkington would have his way. Mr. Pilkington was a very authoritative personage in the little world below stairs, and was regarded with awe by the rest of the household.

"Hallo, Henry, old son!" said Wally, giving the stately footman a dig in the ribs by way of greeting. "Where's Pilky?"

Henry's dignity deserted him a little, and he started back with a gasp. But he soon recovered himself.

Pilkington is in the house-keeper's room at present, sir, torkin' to Mrs. Wipps, he said.

"Tell him to come here!" said Wally. The Gem Library.—No. 1,504.

"Yessir!"

And Henry departed.

"You fellows watch me!" said Wally.

"I'll settle him!"

And the juniors waited with great interest to see Wally settle the imposing Pilkington.

Henry came back with a subdued grin upon his face, which he tried in vain to make as wooden as usual. "Well," rapped out Wally, "where's Pilky?"

It seemed to amuse the scamp of the Third Form at St. Jim's to make playful variations in the butler's stately name.

"Mr. Pilkington begs that you will excuse him, Master Wally, as he is busy," said Henry.

Wally reddened.

In spite of Mr. Pilkington's civil message, it was evident that he refused to come, which meant that he declined to recognise the authority of the youngest member of the D'Arcy family.

"You buzz back," said Wally impressively, "and tell Pilky that he's to come here, or I'll come and fetch him!"

"Yes, Master Wally!"

Henry swam off once more.

Tom Merry & Co. waited with great interest. The contest between Master Wally and Mr. Pilkington was growing exciting.

It was three or four minutes before Henry came back, and now the grin on his face was less subdued. The grin, in fact, had almost entirely replaced the wooden expression which Henry had been carefully trained to wear.

"Well?" snapped Wally.

"Mr. Pilkington is sorry he is too busy to come, sir," said Henry.

Wally breathed hard through his nose. "Where is he?" he demanded.

"Mr. Pilkington is with Mrs. Wipps, sir."

"Come with me, you fellows!" said Wally. "I'm going to rout the old rascal out!"

"Hear, hear!" said Kangaroo.

Wally led the way to the housekeeper's room.

Mr. Pilkington was taking tea with the stately, silver-haired old lady, who rose and greeted Wally with a bright and affectionate smile.

Mr. Pilkington carefully placed his teacup in his saucer, and rose to his feet and bowed to Master Wally. He had never been more urbane, or more imposing, or more respectful in his manner.

"Now then, Pilks, what's the little game?" demanded Wally.

"I beg your pardon, sir!" said Mr. Pilkington respectfully. "May I ask to what you refer, sir?"

"Do you happen to have bought this house while I've been at school?" Wally asked sarcastically.

Pilkington shook his head.

"No, Master Walter. I could not afford to do so, and the house of your honoured father is not for sale," he replied.

He spoke with profound gravity, as if unaware of the sarcastic nature of Wally's question.

Wally felt baffled. The respectful urbanity of the obnoxious Pilkington was like a garment of mail. It was difficult to penetrate.

"I hear that Gussy has disappeared," pursued Wally.

"Master Arthur left the house last night or this morning, and has not returned," said Pilkington.

"And we're going to search, too," said Wally. "Gussy being gone, I'm top dog in this show, do you understand?"

"I trust I shall always treat my

honoured master's son with becoming respect, Master Walter."

"Oh, not so much gas!" said Wally. "Look here! I want rooms got ready for these fellows—at once!"

"Your orders shall be obeyed, Master Wally."

"Also Miss Cleveland's room and her aunt's. I've wired to them to come."

"Very well, sir."

"And if you forget your place and check my friends again, you'll get into trouble!" said Wally warningly.

"May I respectfully mention, sir, that Lord Conway has placed me in full charge of Eastwood House during the absence of Lord Eastwood?"

"Old Conway hasn't placed you in charge of me! And I'd jolly well punch his nose if he did!" said Wally. "Don't be an ass, Pilky!"

The butler winced.

"My name is Pilkington, sir."

"Blow your name!" said Wally.

"Have those rooms got ready at once, and order a feed for us! We're hungry!"

"Yes, rather!" murmured Fatty Wynn voluntarily.

"Is my room ready, Pilks?"

"No, Master Walter."

"Then I'll take Gussy's. Come on, you fellows! You can take your coats off in poor old Gussy's room."

And Wally led the way upstairs.

"Gussy was in the Painted Room last night," Blake explained. "His old room is out of order—under repairs, or something. Dig and I have rooms on each side. Look here, Wally, I think we'd better keep together. We don't want to disappear after Gussy. Suppose you have some extra beds shoved into these three rooms and we can keep together!"

"Jolly good idea!" said Wally.

"But Gussy didn't disappear in the house, did he?" asked Kerr.

"Blessed if I know!" said Blake.

"We found his handkerchief in a field nearly a mile away, so I suppose he must have gone out."

"He must have been kidnapped," said Figgins.

"There's no other possible way he can have disappeared like that. And that means that Lord Eastwood has been kidnapped, too!"

"Looks like it," agreed Wally. "Some rotter trying to get money out of the pater, perhaps. I'll tell Pilks about the rooms."

He did so, and the butler received his lordly commands with unbroken urbanity and respect. It was quite certain that Mr. Pilkington did not want the juniors there; but he had apparently given up the contest. He could not turn them out of the house, nor could he refuse to obey his master's son, so he had evidently decided to make the best of it.

The early winter darkness had already set in.

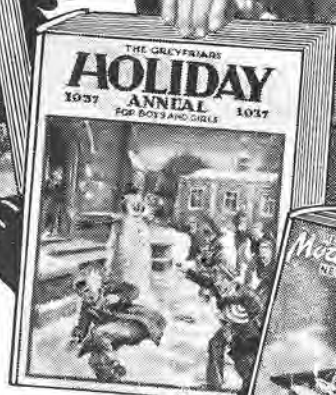
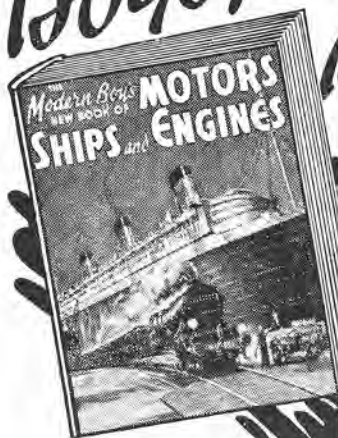
The juniors were hungry after their long journey, and they sat down with keen appetites to a well-spread board.

Mrs. Wipps, the housekeeper, saw to it that they were well provided. That kindly old dame evidently did not share Mr. Pilkington's prejudice against boys, and it was plain that she was very fond of Master Wally.

Fatty Wynn's plump face grew quite cheerful as he surveyed the varied and plentiful viands. He was as anxious about D'Arcy as the other fellows; but, as he remarked, they could not help poor old Gussy by going hungry. It was necessary to keep up their strength if they were going to hunt for him; and, indeed, the most judicious thing they

(Continued on page 18.)

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could possibly do was to lay a solid foundation, Fatty Wynn considered.

They proceeded to lay the solid foundation; and, meanwhile, they discussed their plans.

Their plans were necessarily a little vague. Arthur Augustus had to be found and he had to be hunted for; but where and how was the search to begin? That the swell of St. Jim's had been seized and taken away by force seemed certain. But by whose hand? And where could he be concealed.

By that time he might be miles from Eastwood House; while it was equally likely that he was hidden somewhere quite near at hand. Only Herries was quite sure of a method for beginning well. He proposed to take Towser to the spot where D'Arcy's handkerchief had been found, and to set him on the track.

"You see, if we show Towser the handkerchief there, and make him pick up the trail, he will lead us directly to the place where Gussy is now," Herries explained, evidently regarding it as the simplest matter in the world.

"Quite simple!" said Blake, with a snort.

"Yes, quite simple," said Herries emphatically; "and I really think you fellows might be a bit more keen about it, considering that Gussy must be in the hands of some awful rascals, who are keeping him a prisoner—"

"We're keen enough about finding Gussy, but not about putting your blessed bulldog through his tricks!" growled Blake. "However, I'll take you fellows to the place, and it won't do any harm if Towser comes along."

"Might be useful," said Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"Blessed if I see it! Do you think he can track down anything but a red herring or a dog-biscuit?"

"I tell you—" began Herries warily.

"No," said Tom. "But if there's trouble, Towser's teeth will be useful. If we should succeed in finding Gussy, there may be a fight. Whoever it is that has collared him may cut up rusty, you know, and we may have a scrap on our hands. Then Towser will come in useful."

"Well, that's true enough," admitted Blake. "And, considering that, we may as well take some sticks along with us, in case there's a scrap. If we do find Gussy, we're going to rescue him—I know that!"

And in the deep dusk the juniors started out, Blake and Digby leading the way. Blake carried a torch, and Herries led his famous bulldog, and Herries observed quite confidently, as they started, that it was a matter of an hour or so now.

CHAPTER 10.

On the Track!

DARK and gloomy looked the river and the fields adjoining as the juniors came up the path.

The leafless willows rustled in the winter wind.

Tom Merry & Co. halted by the willows, and Blake showed where the handkerchief had been found. That Arthur Augustus had been there, the clue of the handkerchief seemed to prove to the minds of the juniors. Korr had not expressed an opinion; he was still thinking it out.

"Give me the barky," said Herries. Blake handed it over.

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Then the juniors watched Herries' proceedings.

Towser had sat down and seemed inclined to go to sleep; but Herries jerked at his leash and woke him up again. Then he showed him the handkerchief, dabbling it on Towser's nose.

Towser made a snap at it, apparently under the impression that it was something to eat. Then, with an expression of disgust at finding it uneatable, he allowed it to drop in the grass, and closed his eyes again.

"Well," said Monty Lowther, "what's the next act? Are we going to watch Towser understudying the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood?"

"You wait a bit," said Herries crossly. "Towser hasn't got the scent yet."

"There isn't any," said Digby. "Gussy never uses scent!"

"Ass! I didn't say there was any scent on the handkerchief," growled Herries. "Towser will pick up the scent of Gussy soon, and follow the trail. If Gussy has been here, Towser will follow his trail."

"Ahem!"

Herries exerted himself to interest Towser in the handkerchief. He dragged at the leash, and forced the bulldog to keep awake at all events. Towser seemed to understand at last that he was expected to move, and ambled off.

Herries brightened up at once.

"Now he's on the track!" he exclaimed.

"B-r-r-r-r!" murmured Blake.

"Stand back, you fellows! Don't get in Towser's way!" Herries exclaimed excitedly. "Keep behind, and follow me!"

As there was evidently nothing more to be done upon the spot, the juniors had no objection to following Herries.

Towser, having once started, kept on steadily.

Herries gave him plenty of rope, so to speak, keeping back from him with the leash loose. Towser turned into the path along the river, and loped off towards Eastwood House. The juniors followed.

Herries turned an excited glance upon them.

"He's going back!" he exclaimed breathlessly.

"Looks like it," said Manners. "So are we."

"Oh, rats! You watch Towser."

Towser loped on to the park palings, and then turned round to the gates. Herries' excitement grew as he entered the park.

"We're right on the trail!" he exclaimed. "This shows that Gussy came back to the house after he dropped his handkerchief there."

Towser kept on up the drive.

Tom Merry & Co. followed. No one but Herries had the slightest belief that Towser was on the track, but Herries' faith in the powers of his bulldog was touching. Along the dark drive powdered with snow, the crowd of juniors went, Towser leading the way.

In front of the house Towser paused. He blinked at the great facade of Eastwood House, and hesitated for some moments, Herries watching him breathlessly.

"It's a bit parky here!" Fatty Wynn hinted.

"Shush!"

"What?"

"Shurrup! If you talk you'll disturb Towser. He's thinking it out."

"Make him buck up, then, for goodness' sake!" said Blake. "I'm getting cold in this blasted wind!"

"Shush!"

Towser started off at last. Apparently he had made up his mind not to go into the house. He started off along the terrace, and led the way round the house to the stables. The St. Jim's juniors followed him into the stable-yard.

Towser trotted into the stable and paused again.

"Watch him!" said Herries, in a hushed voice. "Gussy must have come into the stable for something. Towser's right on the track, you can see that."

The juniors grinned. It was pretty clear that Towser was simply looking for a comfortable place to sleep.

The bulldog made his way into a corner and lay down on a bundle of straw.

His eyes closed.

"Second act of 'Sleeping Beauty,'" murmured Lowther.

"I fancy he thinks better with his eyes closed," said Herries. "There are people like that, too, you know. Towser is thinking it out."

But in a few minutes it became quite evident that Towser was fast asleep, and Herries jerked crossly at the leash and woke him up again.

"Get on, Towser, old man!" said Herries encouragingly. "Go on! Snell him out!"

Towser rose and trotted out of the stable. He led the way into the garage, where Ruggles was cleaning a car in the electric light.

Ruggles touched his cap to the juniors, and regarded the bulldog with some curiosity. Towser rolled up in a corner and closed his eyes again.

"I'm getting fed up!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Anybody but Herries could see that Towser is simply looking for a place to go to sleep."

"Yes, rather!"

But Herries, though he was beginning to have his doubts, perhaps, would not admit anything of the sort, even to himself. He jerked Towser out of his repose, and the bulldog, with a reproachful blink at his master, trotted off again. This time he went into the house.

In the hall they met Pilkington, who eyed the bulldog with keen disfavour. The butler did not like bulldogs, especially inside the house.

"May I request you young gentlemen not to bring dogs into the house?" Pilkington said smoothly.

Wally sniffed.

"No, you mayn't!" he said.

"We're following D'Arcy's track," explained Herries. "Towser is smelling him out. We have found out that D'Arcy came back here."

Pilkington stared at him. Then he smiled.

"Indeed!" he said respectfully. "I am very grateful to hear it, sir. I sincerely trust that you will find Master Arthur, sir."

"Depend on it, I'll find him right enough," said Herries. "Hallo, Towser! What's the matter with you, old boy?"

Towser had given a deep growl.

His eyes were fixed upon the butler, and he made a sudden movement towards him and jerked the leash out of Herries' hand.

Pilkington turned quite pale.

"I—I hope that dog does not bite, sir!" he ejaculated.

"He only bites people he doesn't like."

said Herries. "Towser—Towser! Hold on!"

But the bulldog was rushing right at Pilkington.

Probably he would not have bitten him very severely, but he would certainly have nipped Pilkington's ample calves if he had got at them.

The butler made a wild spring for the stairs, with an activity surprising in so solid and stately a person.

"Keep him off!" he yelled. "How dare you set your dog on me! Call him off!"

Grrrrrr! came from Towser.

He was after the butler like a shot. Pilkington, with amazing activity, clambered on the broad balustrade of the staircase, and clung there astir, the bulldog glaring at him and snapping up at his legs that were out of reach. Pilkington's calm repose had vanished now. His face was white with fury and terror as he clung on the balustrade.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Wally.

"Towser doesn't like you, Pilks."

"Call him off, sir!" shrieked the butler.

"Please call him off, sir!"

Grrrrrr!

"Call the beast off, Herries, old man!" gasped Blake. "Don't let him bite Pilks."

Herries dashed after Towser and recaptured the leash, and dragged the bulldog away again.

Towser went reluctantly. Evidently he desired very much to bury his teeth in the plump legs of the butler.

"Take that dog out of the house!"

Pilkington gasped. "I insist upon it! Master Wally, pray have that dog taken out of the house!"

"Oh, I'll take him out!" said Herries. "Sorry he went for you, but Towser must have his fancies sometimes. He wouldn't have hurt you very much—only a nip."

"Take him out!" roared Pilkington.

Herries led Towser away. The trail had come to an end on the staircase of Eastwood House. According to Herries' theory that Towser was following Gussy's trail, the swell of St. Jim's should have been found sitting on the stairs, as Lowther humorously observed. But he wasn't, and Herries led his bulldog away greatly disappointed.

Not till Towser was safely out of the house did Pilkington venture to descend from the balustrade. His face was still white as chalk as he disappeared downstairs, and his voice might have been heard, later, soundly rating Henry, the footman, who had committed the sin of grinning at the sight of the stately butler perched on the banisters.

CHAPTER 11.

What Henry Saw!

TOM MERRY & CO. spent the rest of the evening in their futile search.

The hopelessness of the quest was only too evident to them from the start. There was not the slightest clue to follow.

They thought the matter over without ceasing, discussed it, and talked it over under every possible aspect, but they got no nearer to the solution of the mystery.

Where was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy? Where was Lord Eastwood? Had they been taken to a great distance by their unknown captors, far from the radius of the search? These were questions the juniors tried to find an answer to, without success.

Amid the endless discussion, Kerr said very little. The Scottish junior always thought more than talked, and he was



"Call him off!" shrieked the butler, and he made a wild spring for the balustrade as Towser rushed at him. Pilkington clambered on the balustrade and clung there, with the bulldog snapping at his legs. "Keep him off!" he yelled. "How dare you set your dog on me!"

now thinking the matter over, and was content to listen to the wild theories and impracticable schemes of the other fellows, without delivering an opinion of his own.

Mr. Dodder, the man from Scotland Yard, was at Eastwood House again during the evening. He talked to the juniors a little, asking questions about Arthur Augustus, and questioning especially Blake and Digby as to D'Arcy's movements of the night before. He did not confide his impression of the matter to them, but they could see for themselves that the detective was as puzzled as they were.

There was simply nothing to account for this disappearance of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. His father might have disappeared of his own accord, for some unknown business reason in connection with the Anglo-South American Railway Syndicate, as some ill-disposed gossips suggested. But Arthur Augustus could not be supposed to have disappeared of his own accord.

Evidently the swell of St. Jim's had been kidnapped by force.

Why? Was it possible that in searching for his father he had fallen upon the right track, and the kidnappers had been compelled to make him a prisoner, too, in order to keep their secret? If so, it proved that Lord Eastwood was held a prisoner within easy distance of his own home.

Tom Merry guessed that Mr. Dodder was thinking something of the sort, for the Scotland Yard man remained at Eastwood House, and spent his time in the grounds or in the vicinity.

It was hard to imagine any other

reason for which Arthur Augustus could have been kidnapped.

Mr. Dodder frowned a little sometimes when he encountered the juniors engaged also upon the futile search. It was pretty clear that he did not like the schoolboys invading his province, as he doubtless regarded it, and fully sympathized with the butler's desire to get rid of them. It probably appeared to the Scotland Yard gentleman as check on the part of Tom Merry & Co. to take up the search upon which he was officially engaged. They intended to search for their missing chum until he was found, however their action might be regarded from the view point of professional dignity.

Tom Merry & Co. stayed up later that night than their usual bed-time at St. Jim's. But about ten o'clock, tired out with their long and useless searching, they went up to bed.

Wally's bed was in the Painted Room, occupied the previous night by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Eleven beds were wanted for the whole party, and Wally had ordered them to be placed in the three communicating rooms.

The disappearance of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had made the Co. determined to keep together. Somewhere—perhaps near at hand, for they could not know—were the enemies into whose hands Lord Eastwood and his son had fallen.

True, it seemed that the kidnapping had taken place at a distance from the house. But who could tell whether the rascals might not penetrate into the house itself, to deal with the other fellows as they had dealt with Arthur Augustus?

To wake up in the morning and find a member of the party had vanished, as D'Arcy had vanished, would not be pleasant. For that reason the juniors intended to keep always together—a very wise precaution.

The three rooms were very large, and there was more than ample accommodation for the beds placed in them. But as they came into the Painted Room, the juniors observed that there was only one bed there. There were five each in the two adjoining rooms.

Wally frowned as he noted it. "Pilkny must be off his dot!" he exclaimed. "Or Mrs. Wipps must be—as she must have looked after putting the beds here. I don't want to sleep by myself in this room. I want some of you chaps in here, too."

"Three or four in each room, certainly," said Tom Merry. "We don't know what might happen to-night."

"That's it! I'll go and see Mrs. Wipps."

Wally went downstairs, and found Mrs. Wipps in the housekeeper's room. Mrs. Wipps explained that the beds had been so placed by the special instructions of Mr. Pilkington. Whereupon Wally grunted, and remarked that it was like Pilkny's cheek to interfere, and directed a rearrangement.

While the beds were being changed, Mr. Pilkington made his appearance in the Painted Room, where the juniors were gathered before a sparkling log-fire on the broad hearth, chatting.

"Pray excuse me, Master Wally!" murmured Pilkington, as he glided in. "I am sorry the arrangement I made did not please you."

Wally grunted.

"What did you want to interfere with Mrs. Wipps for?" he demanded.

"I thought you would prefer an apartment for yourself, Master Walter," said Pilkington suavely. "I am very sorry."

"Oh, it's all right!" said Wally. "It doesn't matter now."

"But I am very sorry indeed!" murmured Pilkington contritely. "I was trying to please you, Master Walter."

"You'll get over it in time," said Wally unsympathetically. "When you go down, send Henry up here. I want to jaw to him."

"Yes, Master Walter."

Henry, the footman, made his appearance soon afterwards. He stood in a respectful attitude before Wally, his face beautifully wooden in expression.

"You can squat down, Henry," said Wally, pointing to a chair.

"Thank you, sir!" said Henry, making no movement, however, to sit down.

"It was you saw the ghost the other night, Henry?"

Henry shivered involuntarily.

"I did not say it was a ghost, sir," he stammered. "But—but it was very strange. I do not believe in ghosts, sir, but they say that Sir Bulkeley D'Arcy does walk at Christmas-time, sir."

"Jolly cold time to choose for walking," said Wally. "Tell us just what you did see, Henry. You told me you wanted to hear about it, Kerr."

"Just so," said Kerr.

"Kerr did!" said Figgins, in surprise. He would never have suspected his practical, hard-headed chum of taking any interest in ghost stories.

"Well, let's hear it."

"Pile in, Henry!" said Wally encouragingly.

Henry obediently piled in.

"It was the night after his lordship's disappearance, sir," he said. "I was very uneasy. I thought his lordship was kidnapped, and I feared that it might mean that some robbery was intended, as there are many valuable articles in the house. I came down in the night to make sure that all doors and windows were fastened."

"What time?" asked Kerr.

"It must have been about two o'clock in the morning, sir."

"Good! Go on!"

"I finished in the picture gallery, sir. You remember that the door of the picture gallery was found unfastened in the morning after his lordship's disappearance. Then I came into the library. Of course, it was very dark, and I was feeling my way to the electric light switch to turn it on, when—"

Henry's voice faltered, and he cast an uneasy glance about him. "It—it was quite horrible, sir."

"But what happened?" asked Kerr.

"There was a dark figure, sir, somewhere in the room. We had been talking about the story of Sir Bulkeley's ghost in the servants' hall, sir, and perhaps I was feeling a little nervous. But I would swear, sir, that a dark figure brushed by me in the library. I could really hear it breathing, sir; and I was so startled that I stood quite still for some moments."

"If it was breathing, it wasn't a ghost," said the practical Kerr.

"Ghosts don't have lungs, and don't need to breathe, if there are such things as ghosts."

"Yes, sir; so I thought, after the first moment's shock, sir. And I thought it was a burglar, perhaps, and I turned on the electric light at once. But the room was empty."

"Empty!"

"Yes, sir," said Henry. "There was no one in the room, excepting myself, sir. I was so startled, I hardly knew what to do. But I examined all the windows—they were fastened. The door was shut, and it could not have been opened without my hearing it—indeed, without my touching it, as I was standing close to it at the time."

"Perhaps the figure dodged into the picture gallery?"

"I searched the gallery, sir, from end to end. It was empty, and the doors and windows were fastened."

"Might have dodged out by another door, and shut it quietly?" Kerr persisted.

Henry shook his head.

"I did not leave the matter at that, sir. I determined that the house should be searched. I hurried away to Mr. Pilkington's room to call him."

"And what did Pilkington do?"

"I could not awaken him, sir. His door was locked; and he is a very sound sleeper, and he did not hear me knock. So I called the other footman, and we searched through the house, looking in every place where anybody might have been hidden. But there was no one; and all the doors and windows were fastened. No one could have got out without opening them, and he could not have fastened them on the inside after him if he had gone out. Besides, it was a rainy night, and yet there was not a trace of mud or wet on the floor anywhere. I am quite certain, sir, that no one had come in from outside."

"Might it have been another servant who had come down just as you had done?"

"I asked everybody in the house, sir. It was not that."

"You did not awaken Pilkington?"

"No, sir; he knew nothing about it

till the morning, and then he laughed and—and—" Henry paused.

"What else did he do?" asked Wally.

"He called me a coward, sir, for being frightened over a ghost story, and said I must have fancied it, and ordered me never to come down in the night again, if I wished to keep my place. Mr. Pilkington was quite angry, sir."

"And you've never been down in the night since?" asked Kerr.

"Oh, no, sir! I should not like to repeat that awful experience. And, besides, Mr. Pilkington has ordered me not to do so. He thinks that Lord Eastwood would be displeased to have ghost stories told about his house."

"And that's all, Henry?"

"That is all, sir."

And Henry respectfully took his leave.

Kerr's brows were wrinkled in thought, and the other fellows looked at him curiously. They all had a very great respect for Kerr's judgment; but they wondered a little at his interest in a ghost story told by a frightened footman.

"Well, what do you think of it, Kerr?" asked Figgins at last.

Kerr smiled.

"I haven't finished thinking yet," he said. "But—"

"But what?"

"I've got something to think about, that's all. And I jolly well won't sleep alone while we're here for any price."

"My hat! You're not beginning to believe in ghosts in your old age! And you a blessed Scotsman, and as canny as they make 'em!" exclaimed Kangaroo, in surprise.

Kerr shook his head.

"I don't believe in ghosts, but I believe in that dark figure that Henry saw in the library," he replied quietly.

"You think there was somebody there?"

"Yes."

"Then where did he get to when Henry put the light on?"

"That's what we're going to find out," said Kerr quietly.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"We're here to look for Gussy, not for the ghost," he said. "After Gussy's found, we might amuse ourselves with a ghost hunt; but not till then."

"We might find them both together," said Kerr.

"What!"

"By Jove!"

"You don't mean to say—" began Figgins.

"Yes, I do," said Kerr. "I mean to say that there seems to me a connection between Henry's ghost and Lord Eastwood's disappearance."

"In plain words, that the dark figure was the kidnapper, or one of them!" said Tom Merry.

"Yes."

"But it was the night after Lord Eastwood's disappearance that Henry saw the ghost, not the same night," said Fatty Wynn.

"I know that."

"Well, the kidnapper wouldn't come back twenty-four hours later, just for the sake of trotting round the library in the dark, would he?" said Blake warmly.

"Jolly queer proceeding, if he did," said Herries.

"The whole business is queer," said Kerr. "I'm going to have a big think before I go to sleep, and I'm going to turn in now—but not alone. And Wally, specially, must not sleep alone, or be left alone."

"Mel!" ejaculated Wally.
 "Yes, you?"
 "Why me, specially?"
 "Because you're in more danger than any of us," said Kerr coolly.
 "Cheese it, Kerr, old man!" said Fatty Wynn. "How can Wally be in more danger than us—and how are we in danger, either, if you come to that?"
 "I think that Wally's in danger of joining his father and his major, if the kidnapper gets a chance at him," said Kerr, unmoved. "And I think that if Wally slept alone to-night, he would stand a jolly good chance of seeing the dark figure that Henry saw in the library—and that he wouldn't get away from it so easily."

Wally looked rather uneasy.
 "I say, you're piling it on, you know!" he remarked. "Blessed if I think I shall go to sleep at all to-night, after that."

"There will be three of us in the room with you," said Tom Merry, nodding towards the three extra beds that had been placed in the Painted Room—
 "Blake, and myself, and—"

"And myself!" said Kerr.
 "Just as you like!" said Wally.
 And the juniors, considerably impressed by what Kerr had said, turned in, with uneasy thoughts in their minds of the long hours of the night.

CHAPTER 12.

An Alarm in the Night!

KERR sat for some time in the easy-chair by the fire, as the flames grew duller and the embers died down.

As he sat there, leaning back, his keen and restless eyes wandered over the room.

He scanned the panelling of the old walls, almost black with time, and the painted figures and the old blue of the ceiling.

From the centre of the ceiling, Bacchus grinned under the vine-leaves in his hair, and seemed to wink at him.

Tom Merry, Blake, and Wally turned in, Wally taking the bed that should have been occupied by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy the previous night, but which had not been slept in. Kerr remained in the chair some time, while the fire died down. Tom Merry watched him from his pillow curiously.

"How long are you going to sit there, Kerr?" he said. "You said you were going to turn in."

"So I am," said Kerr, "when the fire's a bit lower."

"Can't you sleep in the light? I'm tired enough to sleep anywhere," yawned Blake.

Kerr nodded, and crossed to the electric light switch and turned it out. The room was filled with shadows immediately, moving on the glimmering old walls in a ghostly way as the dying firelight rose and fell.

Lower and lower the fire died out. "You fellows asleep?" asked Kerr. "I'm not," said Tom Merry. "Those blessed shadows looked like goblins. Why not have the light on all night? What do you say, Blake?"

Blake did not answer; he was asleep.

"Wally, are you asleep?" asked Kerr. "Not yet," said D'Arcy minor un-
 "I say, it's not a bad idea to have the light on all night."

"The electric light can be turned off downstairs," said Kerr.

"But it never is," said Wally. "The

light's always left all night, in case it's wanted. Filky won't start turning it off to-night."

"I'd rather have it off, if you fellows don't mind," said Kerr.

"Oh, just as you like!" said Tom Merry once.

"Same to me," said Wally.

"I've locked the door, and the doors of the next room are locked," Kerr remarked, as he began to undress.

"Safe as houses!" yawned Tom Merry. "We don't want the light."

"Tumble in!"

The fire was nearly out now.

Kerr turned into bed by the last gleam of light, but he did not sleep. His watchful eyes watched the grate till the last red ember had died out among the logs.

Now there was black darkness in the Painted Room.

And then Kerr moved. He slipped quietly out of bed, and made his way to Wally's bed, and whispered:

"Wally, old fellow—quiet! Whisper!"

"Wally started up."

"What's the matter?" he whispered, considerably startled.

"I've got an idea—never mind what it is now—but will you change beds with me?" said Kerr, in a low whisper, barely audible. "Not a word—just do it!"

"Oh, all serene!"

Wally turned out of bed and slipped into Kerr's bed. Kerr took Wally's place, and drew the bedclothes lightly over him. Within easy reach of his hand he placed a heavy walking-stick he had brought up to bed with him. He lay resting lightly on his elbow but did not sleep.

The deep and steady breathing of Tom Merry, Blake, and Wally soon showed that they were in the land of dreams.

But the Scottish junior did not once close his eyes.

He was tired, like the other fellows, and his eyelids were heavy, but he kept awake by sheer force of will.

The communicating doors between the three rooms had been left wide open, and from an adjoining chamber Kerr could hear Fatty Wynn give an occasional snore.

The night grew older.

Save for the breathing of the juniors, the Painted Room was plunged into a death-like stillness. Long ago the last door had closed below, and the last light had been extinguished. Kerr could not see his watch in the dark, but he guessed that it was about two in the morning when a slight sound in the stillness startled every nerve in his body and caused him to strain his ears to listen.

It was an indefinite sound—merely a break in the stillness—but though Kerr did not know what it was, it was proof of one thing—that all in Eastwood House were not plunged in slumber, as they should have been at that hour.

Who was moving in the darkness—and where?

Was the unknown dark figure that had breathed close to Henry in the library near now to the Painted Room?

In spite of his nerve and courage, Kerr felt a strange thrill run through his limbs.

The ghost of Eastwood House did not seem so absurd at that hour of darkness and stillness as it seemed in the time of light and wakefulness.

He listened intently, the blood throbbing in his heart.

Another sound!

It was like the creak of a moving door; a sound, faint and yet quite distinguishable in the deadly stillness of the Painted Room.

Kerr silently sat up in bed, and grasped with a firm and steady hand the stick he had placed in readiness.

Ghost or no ghost, the figure, if it came near him, would feel the weight of the stick.

Kerr's eyes glinted in the darkness, and his teeth were hard as steel.

A stealthy sound—as of cautious creeping on the floor in stocking feet!

It was approaching Kerr's bed—the bed that would have been occupied by Wally D'Arcy if he had not changed with the Scottish junior after the light was out.

And then Kerr became aware of a strange, soft, sickly smell in the room, hovering as it were over his head.

All his senses were on the alert. He knew what it was!

He had been in a hospital ward, and he had smelt that sickly odour there, and in the laboratory at St. Jim's.

It was the smell of chloroform.

The smell, which evidently proceeded from some wall soaked in the drug, hovered over the head of the bed, just above the pillow, where the face of the sleeper would have been if a sleeper had been there.

That the chloroform was held in a human hand was certain; and from the fact that it approached where the face of the sleeper would have been Kerr was able to judge the position of the holder.

He drew back the heavy stick silently, and, calculating the distance that must intervene, he slashed out suddenly in the darkness.

The slashing stick came into contact with something—and the wild, mad yell that followed showed that the something was a human face.

The yell of agony rang through the Painted Room, and it awoke the juniors, who started up in bed with exclamations of alarm.

"What's that?"

"What is it?"

"Who the—?"

"Get a light!"

Kerr had already leaped from the bed on the other side. He was springing towards the switch of the electric light.

His hand found it, and he pressed it, and the room was flooded with light.

Kerr glanced round him quickly.

Tom Merry, Wally, and Blake were sitting up in bed, and the two open doorways were crowded with the other juniors, alarmed by the sudden yell.

But there was no one else to be seen in the room!

CHAPTER 13.

A Dream of Dreams!

COM MERRY jumped out of bed.

"What is it, Kerr? Did you call out?"

"No."

"Who did?"

"Whoever it was that came here to chloroform Wally and take him away," said Kerr grimly. "He found me instead."

"What?" gasped Wally.

"Do you mean to say that somebody has been here?" asked Kangaroo.

"Yes; the ghost of Eastwood House!" said Kerr, with a shrug of the shoulders. "But he was a pretty solid ghost—you heard the yell he gave when I caught him across the chivvy with my stick."

(Continued on page 23.)

It Was More Than A Pantomime At Wharton Lodge When The Chums Of Greyfriars Rehearsed "Peter Pan"!

HARRY WHARTON'S HOLIDAY PARTY!

WHAT HAPPENED LAST WEEK.

Harry Wharton, of the Remove Form at Greyfriars, takes a party of juniors down to his home, Wharton Lodge, for the holidays. Before they leave Greyfriars the juniors rehearse "Peter Pan," in readiness to give a show during the vacation.

En route in the train the holiday party get to loggerheads with a fellow-passenger—a crusty old gentleman who has seen service in India. The juniors pull his leg, and Bob Cherry and Harry Wharton pretend to play dice for money—the old gentleman being unaware that the dice-cup and dice are merely a match-box and marbles!

The Indian veteran threatens to report them for gambling when the train reaches Fernbridge, the station for Wharton Lodge. Harry Wharton & Co. little know that the old gentleman is to be their fellow-guest during the holidays!

(Now read on.)

A Surprise for the Major!

FERNBRIDGE
It was the station for Wharton Lodge, and there was a bustle in the carriage as the juniors heard the porter call the name. "We get out here!" said Harry. Bob Cherry threw open the door and the juniors alighted on the long, plank platform of the country station.

Harry assisted Marjorie to alight, being just a moment before Bob Cherry, who also wanted to render his services. Harry looked up and down the platform.

"I expect the colonel will be here in the car," he remarked. "Blessed if I know how we shall all get into it, though. Hallo, Jukes!"

A man came up, touching his cap. "Welcome home, Master Harry!" "Glad to see you, Jukes! Is my uncle at the station?"

"Yes, sir; he's in the car. I've got another car for the young gentlemen and the luggage."

The white-whiskered gentleman was alighting from the carriage now. He signed to a porter to approach.

"Ho, there, my man!" "Yes, sir!"

"Is there a conveyance at this station from Wharton Lodge?"

Harry started. "Yes, sir; there's the colonel's car." said the porter.

"Good!" said the old fellow to himself. "Thank you!"

He was walking away, when Harry stepped quickly towards him.

"I beg your pardon, sir—"

The old gentleman twisted his white moustache and glared at him.

"Do you want to speak to me, boy?" "Just a word, sir."

"Ah, you wish to beg my pardon, I suppose? Perhaps manners have not deteriorated so much as I supposed since my young days."

"I cannot see that I have anything to be pardoned for, sir," said Harry.

"I was about to ask you if you were going to Wharton Lodge, as I could not help hearing what you said to the

By Frank Richards.

(Author of the grand long yarns of Greyfriars appearing every Saturday in our companion paper the "Magnet.")

porter. I am Colonel Wharton's nephew."

The old gentleman started.

"My old friend Wharton's nephew?"

"I am Harry Wharton."

"Hah! Then I shall be able to tell my old comrade what his nephew is like at home, and what he needs to correct him!" exclaimed the old gentleman.

"I may tell you—"

"You may tell everything to your uncle, sir!" said the other. "I shall certainly not fail to report to him the disgraceful scene of the gambling in the carriage. It's my duty, sir, and George Chutney never yet failed in his duty to his country, or his friend, sir! You can look out for trouble."

And George Chutney walked out of the station.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I'd have been a bit more careful

When Billy Bunter does the flying act, broken windows, bumps and bruises are frequent, painful and free!

if I had known he was a friend of the gun'ors," he remarked. "But I can't see that we were to blame."

"He seems to be a rather unreasonable old gentleman," Marjorie said.

The juniors trooped out of the station. Two cars were waiting, and beside one was the tall, soldierly figure of Colonel Wharton, talking to the ebauffeur.

"Wharton!"

The colonel turned quickly round.

"Major Chutney! I am glad to see you!"

The old soldiers grasped hands. Colonel Wharton looked attentively at the beetroot-like hue of the visitor's face.

"Nothing wrong, I hope, Major Chutney?"

"Yes, sir, confoundedly wrong, by Jove!" said the major.

"Indeed, what is it? Ah, here is my nephew! You came down in the same train—"

"Hah! In the same carriage, sir, by Jove!"

"Indeed, then—"

"And I should not be doing my duty, sir, if I did not report to you the disgraceful conduct of this lad, who is not worthy to be your nephew!"

The colonel's brow darkened a little.

"I should be very sorry to learn that my nephew was guilty of any conduct that could be called disgraceful!" he

said, rather coldly. "I imagine there must be some mistake."

"No mistake, sir! Under my very eyes, sir, he was gambling with dice with this other lad, equally depraved, I have no doubt."

Colonel Wharton's brow grew stern. "Is this possible, Harry?"

"Confound it, sir, I suppose you don't doubt my word!" roared the major.

"Not at all; but I suppose I must hear my nephew before I condemn him!"

"This lad has the dice-cup and the dice in his pocket!" exclaimed the major.

"Produce them, sir! Do you hear?"

There was a twinkle in Bob Cherry's eye. The juniors were all grinning, and even Marjorie was sniggering, but that only added to the major's excitement.

"Produce them, sir!"

Bob Cherry hesitated.

"If you have a dice-cup, Cherry, please produce it at once!" said the colonel.

"I'm afraid the major would be angry, sir."

"Never mind. Produce it!"

Bob Cherry drew the matchbox and marbles from his pocket and held them out innocently to the colonel.

"These are what we were playing with, sir. I think the major must have judged by the sound that they were dice, but it was quite a mistake."

Major Chutney stared at the marbles in amazement.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry, unable to resist the expression of the major's bewildered face. "You jumped to conclusions a little too hastily, sir."

"But—but—"

There was a twinkle in Colonel Wharton's eye now.

"Did you actually see any dice, major?" he asked.

"No, but I heard; and I thought—"

"Ha, ha, ha! I mean, it was evidently a mistake. I am afraid you have been the victim of a joke, major."

"I—I—I—"

"The major seemed to think we were a set of rotters, so we gave him something more to be shocked at, uncle," said Harry Wharton. "I didn't know he was a guest of yours, of course."

"Come, major, you must overlook this little disagreement!"

"I have been made a fool of!"

"Case of born so!" murmured Hazeldene.

"I think the major owes us an apology, sir," said Harry Wharton.

"He jumped to the conclusion that we were a set of blackguards without any evidence."

The major looked as red as a beetroot.

"Well, I'm sorry!" he said at last. "You are a set of mischievous young rascals, but I'm glad to find that I was mistaken."

"Thank you, sir. You won't find us such a bad lot when you get to know us better," said Harry Wharton.

"Miss Hazeldene will come in my car with her brother, the major, Harry, and myself," said Colonel Wharton, the rest in the other car. And now let us be off."

You'll Find Loads Of Laughs In This Sparkling Story Of The Holiday Adventures Of Harry Wharton & Co.



Right back across the room swung Billy Bunter on the end of the rope. Just as he reached the door it opened and Major Chutney entered. The major came in at an unlucky moment—for Bunter's foot crashed on his chest and sent him flying!

And the whole party were soon rolling swiftly towards Wharton Lodge.

A Lesson in Flying!

MAJOR CHUTNEY improved upon acquaintance. He could be genial as well as fiery, and when he found that he had done the Greyfriars juniors an injustice, he leaped to the other extreme, and quite forgave all the chipping he had received in the train.

The first evening at the lodge was very pleasant for the whole party, and they went to bed feeling very satisfied with themselves and things generally.

The Greyfriars juniors had assigned to them a large bed-room, which reminded them of the dormitory at school.

Billy Bunter looked round the room as they entered.

"Jolly comfy quarters, Wharton!" he said. "I think I shall enjoy my holiday here. I very seldom really enjoy a holiday, as there are very often difficulties in the feeding line. Your uncle certainly seems to know that boys have appetites."

Harry laughed.

"I'm glad you are satisfied."

"Well, as a matter of fact, I am satisfied for once," said Bunter, "and I've managed to bring up some sandwiches we had for supper, in case we get hungry during the night—I mean, in case I get hungry."

"Ha, ha! Nothing like forethought! Though how you could ever get hungry again, Bunter," said Bob Cherry, "after the supper you put away, puzzles me!"

"You didn't do so badly yourself, Cherry."

"True," said Bob Cherry, laughing. "I'm not a bad trencherman. Now, you chaps, I suppose we're not going to bed just yet?"

"Hardly," said Wharton. "We've got to get on to the flying business, or we shan't be up to it when the time for the performance of 'Peter Pan' comes round."

"Vat is tat flying bizness?" asked Fritz Hoffman.

Harry Wharton explained.

"You know Peter Pan flies through the air—"

"Ach! I don't know, pefore."

"Well, you know now, after," said Bob Cherry. "Peter Pan can fly, and he teaches the kids in the play to fly."

"Ach! Tat was not easy, after!"

"Of course, it's done by stringing them on wires," said Harry Wharton. "The wires are invisible, and there you are."

"Where?"

"I mean, that's how it is."

"Ach! I see!"

"Ciell! It's useless to attempt to get zat Sherman ass to comprehend anything," said Adolphe Meunier. "He is as stupid as neivale vas, I zink."

The German looked wrathful.

"Vat you say mit yourself, you French peeg?"

"I say zat you more stupid zan ever."

"French peeg!"

"Sherman rottair!"

"Shutez yours up!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "There's the two silly asses starting ragging again. Bump Hoffman on the floor, Wharton, and I'll do the same for Frenchy."

"Ach! I tink—"

"Ciell! I zink—"

"Are you going to stop ragging, or will you be tied up to two bedsteads with your own braces?" demanded Harry Wharton.

"Ach! I tinks I stops ragging, ain't it?"

"I zink I do anyzing to oblige my friend Wharton."

"Shut up, then! Now, about the flying act. I've got the ropes here to practise with, and a big iron hook to fix in the ceiling."

Nugent looked up at the ceiling dubiously.

"Will a hook in the ceiling stand the weight?"

"Oh, yes! The ceiling is oak under the whitewash, like most of the house," said Harry. "It will stand anything."

"Good!"

"There's a stepladder here to get up to it. Some of you hold the ladder while I put in the hook," said Harry. "Right-ho!"

"Of course, we shall have to have invisible wires when we do the real performance in the dining-room downstairs," went on Harry. "I don't quite see yet how we shall fix it up, either. But we can see to that later. At present the business is to practise the flying. We never had a chance to do that at Greyfriars, and it's a most important part of the business."

"We had better begin with Bunter," said Hazeldene. "He's the heaviest, and if the hook bears his weight, it will bear anybody's."

"No, you won't, Vasoline!"

"Oh, it will bear twice the weight of THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 1,504."

the heaviest fellow here!" said Harry Wharton as he ascended the steps. "There's no danger at all."

"I say, Wharton, you can start with me, if you like."

"I'm afraid you're too clumsy, Bunter."

"Now, look here, Wharton—"

"Steady with the steps," said Harry, as he stood on the top and began to drive the screw of the hook into the oak.

"Right you are!"

"I say, Wharton, you had better start the flying act with me. You need a fellow of more than average intelligence for the work. I'll just have a snack at these sandwiches while I'm waiting."

"Oh, we'll start with you, if you like, Bunter!"

"Very good! I should be sorry if any of you fellows started and made a muck of the thing through clumsiness. I believe the major sleeps under this room, too, so we mustn't have any tumbling about and making a row."

The fixing of the hook was not an easy task, but it was finished at last. The rope was slung over it, and Harry Wharton descended.

"That's all ready."

"So am I," said Billy Bunter. "I suppose I had better take my glasses off. They might fall off while I'm flying and break."

"Hand them over," said Bob Cherry.

"Are you ready, Bunter?"

"Yes, Wharton, I'm quite ready," said Bunter, turning towards Harry. But without his glasses the short-sighted Owl was quite in a fog, and he ran straight into the steps, sending them flying with a terrific crash.

"You ass!" roared Bob Cherry.

"What is that?" asked Billy Bunter, peering round. "Has some clumsy ass knocked the steps over?"

"Yes," said Harry, laughing.

"You have!"

"I thought I knocked against something. It was rather thoughtless to put them in my way, wasn't it?" said Bunter. "Never mind; no harm done."

"If the major's gone to bed, that'll wake him up—"

"Never mind the major now. I'm quite ready for the flying act now, Wharton. Will you fasten the rope round me?"

"Certainly. Wrap this blanket round you, under the arms, so that the rope won't hurt you. We shall have to pad you somehow when the real flying act comes off."

"That is very thoughtful of you, Wharton. It would not do for me to be hurt. Don't fasten the rope too tightly."

"Ass! Do you want it to let you drop?"

"Certainly not. But—"

"It's all ready," said Harry. "Take the end of the rope, all of you, and sling Bunter into the air. We have to let him go from one side of the room to the other with a swing, and he flies out of the window—"

"Stop—stop! Hold on—"

"What's the matter now?"

"I'm not going to fly out of the window. I refuse to do anything of the sort. The window's fifty feet from the ground, and I should break my neck. If you want somebody to fly out of the window, you can have Bob Cherry."

"No fear!" said Bob Cherry. "You claimed the honour of taking the first flight, and you can't crawl out of it."

now. We can't have all this trouble for nothing."

"I won't fly out of the window—I won't—"

"You young ass!" said Harry Wharton impatiently. "Of course, you're not to fly out of the window. You're to do that in the play, but not now."

"Oh, I see, Wharton! That alters the case, of course. I am quite ready. Raise me from the floor very slowly, so as not to make me giddy."

"Stand him on this chair first, on this side of the room," said Harry; "then there won't be any danger of him banging on the floor as he flies across the room. If he did, it would make an awful row!"

"Really, Wharton—"

"It might damage the linoleum, too," agreed Bob Cherry. "Here you are, Bunter. On the ball—I mean, on the chair! Now, pull on the rope and I'll let him go!"

"Really, Cherry—"

"I will give the signal," said Hurree Janset Ram Singh, "and the let-gofulness shall be instantaneous! Are you ready?"

"Really, Inky—"

"Quite ready!"

"Haul on the rope!"

And the juniors hauled. The hook with the rope over it was in the centre of the ceiling. Bunter stood on a chair at the side of the room. When the rope was hauled and he left the chair, he would fly across the room if nothing went wrong.

"Then go!" said Hurree Singh, holding up his dusky hand.

Billy Bunter went.

But the nabob had thoughtlessly stood in the middle of the room to give his directions, and the flying junior came swinging straight towards him. Before Hurree Singh could get out of the way Bunter bumped right into him.

"Ow!" yelled the heir to the throne of Bhanipur.

He went staggering, to fall in a heap on the floor, and Billy Bunter spun round like a top suspended at the end of the rope. The juniors let it out, and he bumped on the floor.

"Did I knock against anything?" gasped Bunter, blinking round.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "He wants to know if he knocked against anything! Did he knock against anything, Hurree Jampot?"

"Oh, I'm stunned! I am knocked fearfully into the coked hat! I feel terrifically shaken-upful!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Did I knock against you, Hurree Singh?"

"Yes—ow—yes!"

"I'm sorry! But what did you get in the way for? It was a most careless thing to do!"

"Ow!" groaned the nabob.

"It was careless to get anywhere near Bunter!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Let's have another try!"

"I say, you fellows, I feel rather giddy!"

"Don't you want to try again?"

"Certainly I do; but I think I had better have another sandwich to keep up my strength," said Billy Bunter.

"You young cormorant! Get on the chair again."

"But I say—"

"Stick him on the chair!"

Bunter was lifted upon the chair at the side of the room. The juniors hauled on the rope again. Hurree Janset Ram Singh prudently retired out of reach of the amateur flier.

"Are you ready, Bunter?"

"Ye-es."

"Then go!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

Billy Bunter swung across the room again. This time there was nothing in the way, and he swung across as far as the window, making that fact quite evident by putting his foot through the glass! There was a crash and a tinkling of glass outside the house.

Billy Bunter gave a gasp as he swung back.

He went across the room again, straight towards the door. His foot bumped on the door with a crash.

"I say, you fellows—"

Back he swung to the window, and there was another crash as his foot went through a second pane. The juniors were yelling with laughter, and Bunter was yelling to be let down.

But they did not intend to interrupt such a successful rehearsal to please Bunter. He had asked for it, and he could not complain if he had a little more of it than he wanted. Back he went to the door again with a swing, and at the same moment the door opened, and Major Chutney entered.

The major had gone to bed shortly after the boys, but he would have been stone-deaf to be able to sleep under the room in which the Greyniars juniors were carrying on the rehearsal of the flying act in "Peter Pan."

He had come up to remonstrate, but he came in at an unlucky moment. If the door had not opened then, Billy Bunter's foot would have crashed on the upper panels. As it was, it crashed on the major.

"Oh! Ha!"

Major Chutney gasped out the words. Billy Bunter's foot crashed right on his chest, and he went flying.

"Oh!" roared Bunter, as he swung back to the centre of the room.

Two or three juniors had run forward at the sight of the major, and Bunter, as he swung back, swung right into the midst of them, and knocked them right and left. There was a chorus of yells, and the other fellows, naturally, let go the rope in the confusion, and Billy Bunter bumped on the floor.

He might have been hurt by the concussion, but, fortunately—from his point of view—he bumped upon Hoffman, and flattened him down on the linoleum.

"Ach!" gasped Hoffman.

"Oh," panted Bunter, "you horrid asses!"

"Hah!" roared the major, struggling to his feet and glaring into the room.

"Hah! Another of your little tricks—hah!—by James!"

Harry Wharton ran to the door, trying hard not to laugh.

"So sorry, sir!"

"Hah! In my young days we—"

"It was quite an accident, sir!"

"Ach, I am crushed—"

"Ciel! Ze Sherman peeg is squashed like ze pancake!"

"Ach Himmel!"

"Hah! I have been knocked over and—"

"What is the matter?"

It was the colonel's deep voice, and Harry's uncle appeared on the scene.

Bob Cherry's Little Secret!

COLONEL WHARTON looked into the room in amazement. With the juniors in various stages of undress, the beds pushed back, the rope suspended from the hook in the ceiling, several boys sprawling on the floor and gasping, and Billy Bunter sitting on Fritz Hoffman's chest, the sight was certainly curious.

"By Jove! What is the matter?"

"Matter, sir!" roared Major Chutney.

"I have been knocked over by a boy flying through the air, sir; that's what's the matter, sir, by James!"

"Dear me!"

"It was quite an accident, sir!"

"By Jove!"

"The explainfulness is quite simple," said the Nabob of Bhanipur. "If the honourable major sahib will have the patience for a moment, as your estimable poet Shakespeare expresses it, he shall be enlightened as to the true inwardness of the unfortunate situation. It is due to the clumsiness of the esteemed fathead Bunter!"

"Oh, I say, Inky!"

"He offered voluntarily to perform the rehearsal of the flying person in the playful pantomime of the 'Petrol Pan,' and it has ended in a muck-up, owing to the door being opened at the wrongful moment."

"Hah! By James!"

The colonel smiled.

"Let me see. You were rehearsing the flying act in 'Petrol Pan'?"

"Exactly, sir!"

"With Bunter on the rope?"

"Precisely!"

"And the major opened the door as he swung this way?"

"You have hit the correct nail exactly upon his honourable head!"

"You see, major," said the colonel, turning to the irate major, "it was quite an accident."

"I hope Major Chutney will receive our assurances on that point," said Harry Wharton. "We hadn't the least idea he was going to open the door."

"I came to ask you to make a little less noise," said the major.

"Could you hear us down below, sir?" asked Bob Cherry innocently.

"By James, I should say so!" Colonel Wharton laughed.

"I could hear you from the dining-room," he said. "I really think you had better leave the rest of the rehearsal till the morning."

"Certainly, sir!"

"You see, you could practise the flying act from the branch of a tree, with the soft turf to fall upon in case of accidents."

"Good where?" said Nugent.

"Only," said Colonel Wharton thoughtfully, "I really don't see how the flying act is to come off when you give the play on the stage in the dining-room. It looks to me as if you will have difficulties you have not reckoned upon. However, your stage manager must settle that. Good-night, boys!"

"Good-night, sir!"

"Good-night!" said the major, rubbing his chest. "And no more flying in the air indoors."

The door closed, and the juniors grinned at one another.

"It was funny," Nugent remarked. "The major isn't such an old boulder when you get to know him. His hurricanes don't last long. What are you grumbling about, Hoffman?"

"Tat Bunter flop on mein chest and knock to vind out of me after!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is no matter for te cackle. I vas hurt."

"You couldn't expect to get a weight like Bunter's on your chest without being hurt. Don't be unreasonable, Hoffman!"

"Ach! I tink—"

"I am sorry, Hoffman, if you are hurt; but really, it is very fortunate that you were underneath when I fell, as I might have been hurt myself."

"Ach! I tink—"

"Chiel! I zink it very fortunate!" grinned Meunier. "It not hurt so fat Sherman peeg to fall on him."



Bob Cherry and Nugent grasped the struggling aliens, and Hoffman and Meunier, still locked in fierce embrace, were rolled down the slope and sent with a splash into the water. "That will cool your tempers!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"If you call me peeg, you French pounder, I—"

"Sherman peeg!"

"Ach! I vipes up to floors mit you before!"

The juniors dragged them apart.

"If you row now we'll hang you out of the window for the night on that rope!" said Bob Cherry darkly. "I mean it, so look out!"

The foreign juniors never quite knew how to take Bob Cherry. They thought upon the whole that they had better regard his words, and they glowered at each other and went to bed. The others followed their example, and the room was soon deep in slumber.

In the bright morning the juniors were soon awake. Harry Wharton was the first up, however, and the others had not yet stirred when he slipped out of bed and dressed himself.

It was Harry's first visit to his home for some time. As he had never been away for so long before he was eager to revisit the old, familiar places which had been his early haunts before he went to Greyfriars.

He left the house quietly and crossed the velvety, green lawn towards the river.

As he came in sight of the river he uttered a sharp exclamation. Under the trees by the riverside he caught a glimpse of colour, and then next moment he was looking at Marjorie Hazeldene.

The girl was evidently an early riser, too. She smiled at sight of Harry.

"Jolly here, isn't it?" said Harry.

"It's grand to be home again for a bit. How do you like this place?"

"It is beautiful, and I was tempted

to come out very early to see it," said Marjorie brightly. "I did not expect to find anybody astir so early, though."

"Would you like a row on the river before breakfast?"

Marjorie's eyes danced. It was plain enough that she would like it.

"I can get my skiff out of the boathouse," said Harry. "That's what I was thinking of when I came out. Would you like it?"

"Ever so much."

"Then we'll have it out."

Harry and Marjorie walked down to the boathouse, chatting cheerfully. Harry soon had the boathouse open, and he carried his skiff down to the water. As he launched it Bob Cherry came in sight on the bank.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" he called out.

Harry looked up.

"Hallo, Bob! I didn't know you were out of bed."

"Well, here I am," said Bob, colouring a little. "Are you going on the river?"

"Yes, we're just off. Coming?"

Bob Cherry hesitated.

"Oh, do come!" said Marjorie.

"Shall I, Harry?" said Bob in a low voice.

Harry Wharton looked at him in astonishment.

"Of course, Bob! What are you so jolly mysterious about?"

Bob Cherry laughed uneasily.

"Oh, all right! I'd like to come."

He stepped into the boat. They were soon pulling up the broad river. The two juniors took the oars, in turn, and Marjorie steered. It was a pleasant row

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in the early morning, and the three thoroughly enjoyed it.

When they came back to the planks outside the boathouse Billy Bunter was there, sitting on a bench and eating the remains of the sandwiches he had captured the previous night. They landed, and the skiff was put up, and Harry Wharton looked at his watch.

"Good time for breakfast," he said cheerfully.

Marjorie had gone into the house while the juniors were putting up the boat. Billy Bunter finished his last sandwich and rose.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Bob Cherry.

"Really, Cherry, I was going to say that it would be a foolish thing to be late for breakfast."

"Get along, you young cormorant, and don't bother me!"

"I mean to get along; but I think you're very rude, Cherry."

"Oh, rats!"

Billy Bunter toddled off to the house, looking amazed. Bob Cherry was usually as patient as anybody with him. Harry was surprised, too, and he looked curiously at his friend.

"Nothing wrong, is there, Bob?" he asked.

Bob Cherry had his hands in his pockets and was staring away across the river. He did not meet Harry's eyes.

"No," he said, after a pause, "nothing—except that I'm a fool!"

"What the dickens do you mean?"

"Nothing."

Harry laid his hand lightly on Bob's shoulder.

"I say, old fellow, if there's anything up, why can't you tell a fellow? If there's anything I can do—"

Bob Cherry laughed shortly.

"I'm an ass, Harry. But—but what a ripping girl she is, isn't she?"

Harry Wharton looked astonished.

"Who?"

"Marjorie."

"I—I— What do you mean? I know she's a ripping girl—one of the best, Bob; but that's nothing to grouse about, is it?"

"No, I suppose not."

Harry stared at him blankly. Something of the truth came into his mind, and he was strongly inclined to laugh. But the serious look on Bob's face banished that inclination.

"Bob, you're right—you are an ass!" he said. "Why, you're younger than I am, and I'm only fifteen! Bob, you are an ass, old chap!"

"I know I am. Of course, it's all rot," said Bob hastily. "Only—only she doesn't seem to have eyes for a fellow at all—when you're around, at all events."

"My dear chap—"

"Oh, don't say any more! I know I'm an ass. But not a word, for goodness' sake! I should hate to be chipped about it," said Bob Cherry in a low voice.

"You may be sure I shan't say a word," said Harry quietly. "But I'll give you some advice. Fellows of your age must be silly asses to think of falling in love—and I suppose that's what's the matter. Brace yourself up and keep it right out of your mind. Remember, if Marjorie got a hint of any nonsense of that sort, she would never be chummy with you. Bear that in mind. Now let's go in to breakfast."

"I know I'm an ass," said Bob Cherry.

And with that candid statement, which really in the present instance was not very far from the truth, he walked on with Harry.

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Cooling the Aliens!

"ARE you ready, Bunter?"
"Ready for what, Nugent?"
"Is there a feed on?"
"My hat! And it's only half an hour since breakfast. No, Bunter, my lad, it's not a feed; it's a flying rehearsal."

Billy Bunter shook his head decidedly.

"No, Nugent; I'm not ready."

"Well, how long will you be?"

"A jolly long time, Nugent; in fact, never! I've had enough of flying through the air at the end of a rope. I'm not going to do any more rehearsals."

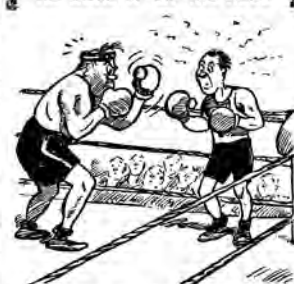
"But if you're going to take your part in the play you'll have to be up to it, Bunter."

"H'm! Well, I'll see you other fellows do it first."

And Billy Bunter was firm upon that point.

The chums of Greyfriars were in the old, shady garden, and the low-hanging branches of a large apple-tree afforded facilities for flying practice that could never be found indoors. Hazeldene was in the branches of the tree, fastening

HE WORE IT ON HIS HEAD



"Don't forget—no punching below the belt!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. Higham, S. Josiah Mason's Orphanage, Erdington, Birmingham.

the rope. Marjorie was among the juniors and Harry was explaining to her the proposed rehearsal.

But volunteers for the first practice were not forthcoming. Billy Bunter's misadventures on the previous night had rather discouraged the juniors.

"Ach! As a Sherman I will offer to take to post of danger," said Fritz Hoffman. "A Sherman is praver than any other."

"Ciell! Vatever a Sherman can do a Frenchman can do better," said Adolphe Meunier. "I zink I take ze place."

"I tink you do nothing of te sort."

"I zink I do as I please, vizout asking Sherman peeg!"

"I punches te nose of te French pounder!"

"I vipes up ground viz Sherman peeg!"

The two aliens were rushing at one another and Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry dragged them apart. Wharton jammed Hoffman against the apple-tree, and Bob Cherry harled Meunier into a mass of bushes.

"Now, you silly asses," exclaimed

Harry Wharton, "you've got to make it pay for the whole of this vacation! Do you hear?"

"The paxfulness is imperative," said Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh. "It is ruderful of the esteemed rotters to quarrel in the presence of a lady. Where is the Parisian politeness of the honourable Meunier?"

"Ciell! I am hurt."

"The hurtfulness will be terriffe if you alarm the esteemed Marjorie by further quarrellousness," said the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Ma foi, I am sorry! Pardonnez-moi," said Meunier. "I am sorrowful, mademoiselle, zat I did forget for ze moment zat ze charming Miss Marjorie was present."

"Ach! I pegs to pardon of te beautiful fraulein," said Hoffman contritely.

Marjorie smiled.

"Then why do you not leave off quarrelling?" she said. "Why don't you make peace for the rest of the vacation?"

The two aliens looked at one another doubtfully.

"I tink—"

"I zink—"

"Shaka hands and be friends," said Marjorie encouragingly.

"Ze vord of ze fair mademoiselle is lay to ze Frenchman."

"Te vish of te beautiful fraulein is a command to te Sherman."

"I will make ze friend viz Hoffman."

"I will take te band of te French peeg—I mean, te prave Frenchman." And the two foreign juniors shook hands.

"Mon ami, ve vas friends for evair!"

"Tat is so, mine friend Meunier."

"Ve nevaer quarrel more."

"Neffer—neffer!"

The two foreigners beamed round upon the juniors.

"Ve are friends now," said Adolphe Meunier. "Ve quarrel no more."

"Neffer!" beamed Hoffman.

"Till the next time, I suppose," said Bob Cherry. "Now let's get on with the washing."

"The impatience with which I await for the washfulness to proceed is terrific."

"I will take te post of danger."

"Nevaer!" exclaimed Adolphe Meunier. "I cannot permit my friend Hoffman to take ze post of ze danger."

"Asses! There isn't any danger."

"My dear Meunier—"

"Mon ami Hoffman—"

"I vas really insist—"

"Ze insistence is on my side!"

"The politeness is more troublesome than their rowing. Yank them both under the tree and let them start together."

"Good wheeze!"

"I am mood satisfied."

"Zak is ze good idea!"

And the rope was attached to the two foreigners and tightened. The juniors took hold of the loose end and drew the aliens off the ground. Naturally they began to turn round and round.

"Ach! I tink tat I grow giddy, ain't it?"

"Ciell! I feel vat you call sick, mes amis!"

"Give them a start."

"Ach! Stop!"

"Parbleu! Stop!"

But the juniors were not inclined to stop. The flying act might not be a success as a rehearsal, but it was decidedly funny.

Colonel Wharton and the major and

Miss Wharton were standing on the lawn, watching the scene and laughing. And the juniors were yelling as the two aliens made frantic endeavours to extricate themselves from the rope.

"Ach! Stop, ain't it!"
"Ciel! Will you let us down?"
"Give them a swing!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "They're not flying yet. They can't keep up this humming-top business all the time!"

"Ha, ha! Shove them along."
Bob Cherry and Micky Desmond caught hold of the swinging foreigners and gave them a shove, and they flew through the air.

"Arrah! And they're started inferly."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"I say, you fellows," exclaimed Billy Bunter, coming towards the group under the apple-tree. "I want to— Ow-wow!"

The Owl had walked right in the way of the swinging aliens. He was fairly lifted off his feet and sent whirling, and he plumped down on the grass and sat there, not much hurt, but utterly amazed.

"My hat! What was that? Something hit me!" he gasped.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Ach! Let us go!"
"Ciel! I will be let down."

The juniors let the rope loose and the two aliens dropped to the ground. They sat up and stared at one another.

"I say, you fellows, can you see my glasses? They've fallen off and I'm afraid some silly ass will tread on them, and then—"

"Ach! You pounce me in te ribs mit your elbow while I was vying on te rope, out French pounder!"

"You vas dig me in ze neck viz your head!" roared Mounier. "I sink zat you a rotten Sherman peg!"

"French peasant—"
"Sherman rottaie—"

The next moment the two foreigners were rolling over and over on the grass, fighting like cats. The juniors were laughing too much to interfere.

"I say, you fellows, have you seen any spectacles? If they get broken I shall expect you to pay for them, you know. I really—"

"There they are, Bunter, close to your hand."

"Thank you, Cherry! What is all the noise about? Is somebody fighting?"

"Ha, ha! Yes."

Hoffman and Mounier were certainly fighting. They were rolling along the greensward, which had a slope in this place down towards the river. A mischievous idea flashed into Bob Cherry's brain, and he caught Harry by the arm.

"Give them a roll over," he said. "It's only a few more yards to the water, and a ducking would cool their tempers."

Harry Wharton laughed.
"Good wheeze!"

The juniors hailed the idea with delight. Nugent and Bob Cherry rushed on the struggling juniors, and Hoffman and Mounier, still locked in fierce embrace, were rolled down the slope and through the rushes, and went with a splash into the water.

"That will cool you down for a bit!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

The river was shallow there, and the two aliens rose in a second or two, dripping, and very much cooler. The water only came up to their waists.

"French pounder!" hissed Hoffman, giving his foe a glare.

"Sherman peg!" retorted Mounier.

Then they scrambled ashore. The colonel was on the bank by that time, laughing as heartily as any of the juniors.

"You had better cut off to the house and change your clothes, or you will catch cold!" he exclaimed.

"Certainement, monsieur!"
"Gewiss, mein herr."

And the two aliens cut off to the house. The colonel laughed heartily, but as the foreigners disappeared into the house he became grave.

"I'm afraid that flying act will have to be omitted, Harry," he remarked. "It will be more troublesome in the performance than in the rehearsals. I imagine, and it has caused trouble already."

Harry Wharton nodded.
"I was just thinking so, uncle. We shall have to modify our plans a little."

"PETER PAN."

Selections Performed by the Wharton Operatic and Dramatic Co.

That was the intended programme of the dramatic company, and the less ambitious plans were a great success.

On the evening of the performance old friends of Harry's and many friends of his uncle packed the long dining-room at Wharton Lodge to see the "selections" from "Peter Pan."

Each of the juniors had a good part in the circumstances, and each was greeted with applause. The evening was a great success.

Perhaps the heartiest applause was awarded Harry and Marjorie, but the

whole of the company had reason to be satisfied with the appreciation shown by the audience.

After the performance—which was only marred by one row between Hoffman and Mounier—the whole company were called before the curtain and heartily applauded. They were very well satisfied with themselves.

"Jolly sensible lot of people live in this part of the country," Bob Cherry remarked. "They know a good thing when they see it."

"Exactly!" said the Nabob of Bhanipur. "The goodness of the performance was only equalled by the excellent appreciativeness of the honourable and ludicrous audience."

"It has been a great success," said Marjorie to Harry, at supper. "I think the Wharton Operatic and Dramatic Society should be perpetuated. It is a good idea."

"We shan't let it die," said Harry, laughing. "At least, so long as we can depend upon our heroine."

And Marjorie laughed, too.

The holiday at Wharton Lodge was an enjoyable one. The vacation came to an end all too soon for the juniors. But when the time came to take the train for Greyfriars, they all declared that they had spent at Wharton Lodge one of the happiest holidays of their lives, and they carried many happy recollections back to Greyfriars.

(Harry Wharton & Co. return to school—to find it silent and deserted! What's happened? Read all about it in "ROUGHING IT AT GREYFRIARS!"—next week's sparkling story.)

THE HOUSE OF A HUNDRED EYES



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