# £50 CASH PRIZES.

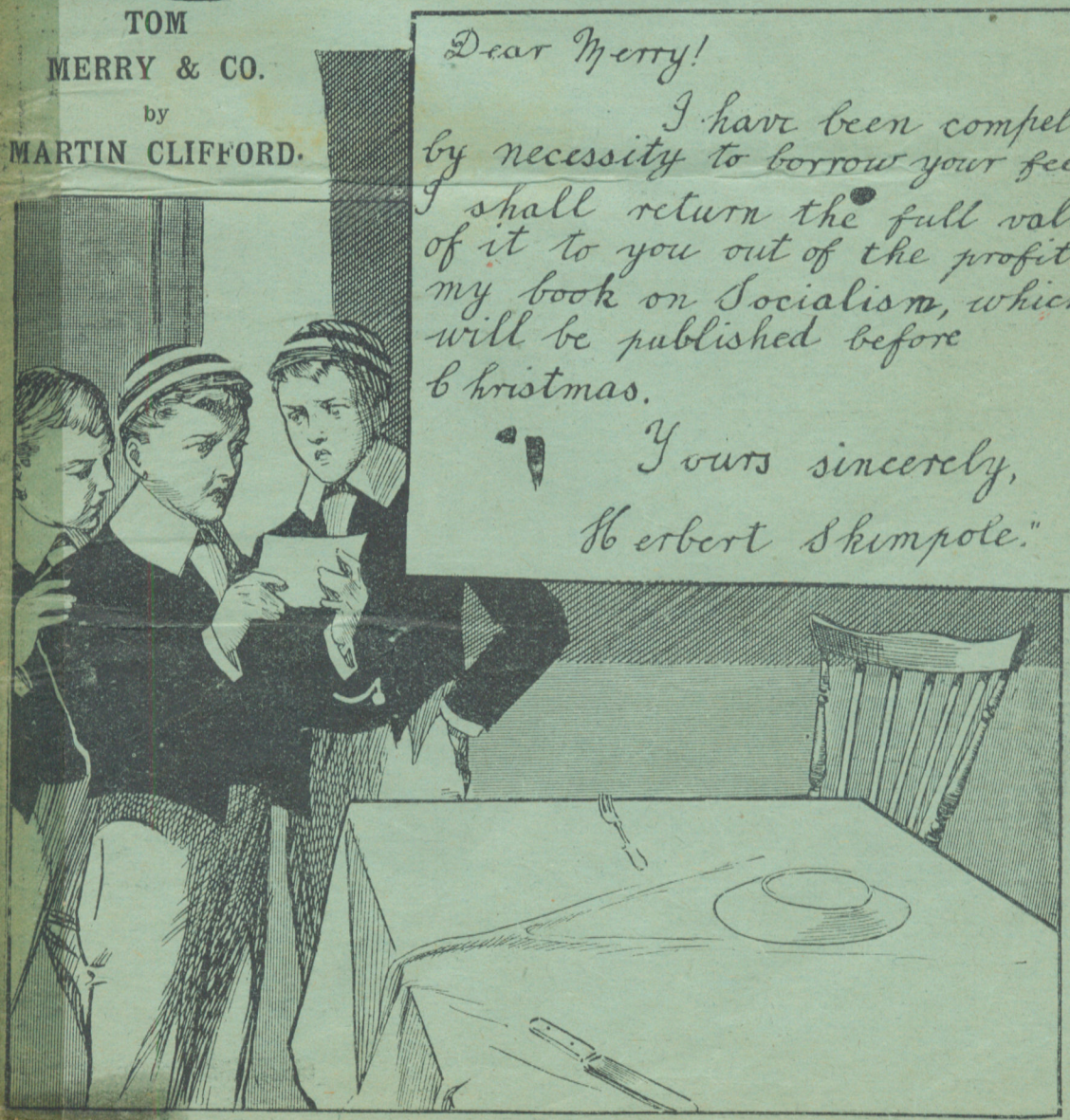
# THE GEM LIBRARY 1d.

NEW SERIES

TOM MERRY & CO.

by

MARTIN CLIFFORD.




NO. 36. VOL. 2.

The GEM Library.

EVERY THURSDAY. 1d.

Complete Stories for Everyone, and Every Story a Gem!

# D'ARCY MINOR

## A School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

### CHAPTER 1.
### A Joyful Surprise for D'Arcy.

"WAT'S the time, D'Arcy?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked round with a slightly bored expression. The chums of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's—Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy—were standing on the steps of the School House, evidently waiting for something or somebody. It was a keen October afternoon, and the juniors—three of them, at least—were tattooing with their heels on the stone to keep their feet warm. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy leaned in a graceful attitude against the stone balustrade. His manners never failed to have that repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

"Weally, Blake, that is the third time you have asked me that question," he said, in a tone of remonstrance.

"Is it?" said Blake. "Well, what's the time? That's the fourth."

"I weally do not know. If you go down the steps and cwoss the quadwangle, you can see the clock in the towah. The clock in the towah was wight by my watch this mornin'."

"Yes; I'm likely to do that when you've got a watch in your pocket. Why can't you tell me the time, ass?"

"I object to bein' called an ass!"

"Why can't you tell me the time?" roared Blake.

"Well, I could, you know; but it cweases my waistcoat to keep on pullin' out my watch. Howevah, I suppose I must tell you the time once more, deah boy."

And the swell of St. Jim's pulled out his handsome gold watch and cast a languid eye upon it.

"It's a quartah to six," he said. "The postman is late, and he may be here any minute now."

"Good business!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Yes; good," said Digby dubiously, "if D'Arcy's letter comes; but——"

"It's bound to come, deah boy. My wespected matah told me in her lettah last week that there would be a gweat and pleasant surpwise for me in her lettah this week, and, of course, that statement can only have one meanin'."

Jack Blake nodded thoughtfully.

"I suppose so," he assented. "It must mean a tip, and a decent one."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Still, you never know," said Digby, who seemed to be afflicted with doubts. "I have an uncle who promised me a treat one Christmas, and sent me a copy of Cruden's Concordance."

"My hat! If I had an uncle like that, I'd—I'd invite him into Study No. 6, lock the door, and get Herries to play the cornet to him."

"Oh, cheese it!" said Herries, turning pink. He was rather sensitive about his cornet.

"My matah isn't like that," said Arthur Augustus serenely. "She's a good sort. It means a tip. My governah has wathah failed in that line lately. I w'ote to him for a five-pound note the othah day, and he w'ote back and enclosed me a pamphlet on 'How to Live on a Pound a Week,' he did weally. I wegarded it as wathah wotten, you know, because I was expectin' the fivah. The gov. havin' failed to play the game, I am wight down on the wocks, and haven't even the pwice of a new pair of gloves about me. Unless my matah turns up twumps, I am bwoke till Saturday."

"And so are we all," grunted Jack Blake. "We blued about every penny we had on that visit to the Zoo. I came back with twopence."

"I had a French penny," said Herries.

"And I had a tanner," said Digby. "If Gussy doesn't get a remittance, I really don't know what Study No. 6 is going to do. We can't borrow of Tom Merry, because he's as stony as we are, and Manners and Lowther are in the same boat."

"And Figgins & Co. are stumped, too," said Blake thoughtfully, with a glance across the quadrangle in the direction of the New House. "It's marvellous how money goes when you're spending it."

"I say, what's the time, Gussy?" said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies, I cannot consent to keep on cweasin' my waistcoat!"

"Here's the postman!" exclaimed Blake joyfully.

The portly figure of Blagg, the Rylcombe postman, could be seen crossing the quad from the direction of the gates of St. Jim's. The four juniors looked eager. Even Arthur Augustus allowed some signs of interest to appear in his face. He jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and fixed it on the postman.

"Yaas, here he is," he remarked. "Now, the feahful suspense will soon be ovah, deah boys."

"Well, I hope it will be a remittance, that's all," said Digby, who seemed determined to keep up the character of Doubting Thomas.

"Oh, that's all wight, Dig. I tell you my matah is bound to turn up twumps. She said distinctly that there was a joyful surpwise for me comin' in her next lettah. It can't be less than a sov., and it may be a fivah."

"Well, a sov. would tide us over till Saturday," said Blake.

"It's weally much more pwob. that it is a fivah, deah boys."

The postman plodded up to the School House. The juniors descended the steps to meet him, and Blagg stopped.

"Anything for us?" asked Blake. "That is to say, anything for D'Arcy? Never mind the others! D'Arcy's letter is the important one this time."

"Yes; there is one for Master D'Arcy."

"Wegistahed, I suppose?" asked Arthur Augustus.

Blagg shook his head.

"No; I haven't any registered letters this morning, Master D'Arcy."

The School House swell's face fell for a moment. Digby nodded, as much as to say that he had said so. Blagg groped in his bag for D'Arcy's letter.

"Oh, it's all wight," said Arthur Augustus, looking round. "Ladies always forget to wegistah letters, you know. I knew one once who sent a wing by post without wegistahin' it, you know. It's their way."

"Well, I don't see what she would want to register a wing for," said Herries. "What kind of a wing was it—cold chicken?"

"It was a diamond wing."

"The ass means a ring," grinned Blake.

"I object to bein' alluded to as an ass, Blake!"

"Go hon! I was brought up carefully to speak the truth, Gussy, and I'm not going to depart from it now to please you. Is that D'Arcy's letter, Blaggy?"

"That's it, sir."

"There you are, Gussy. Open it quick!" Blake slit the envelope with a penknife. "There, now, buck up! You can take all my letters into the house, Blagg! Be extra careful with those containing gold and banknotes!"

The postman grinned, and went on. Arthur Augustus drew forth his mater's letter, and unfolded it. There was no enclosure, and D'Arcy's face grew longer.

"Well," said Blake pleasantly, "hand over the banknote!"

"There doesn't seem to be any banknote, deah boy."

"Then hand over the gold!"

"There doesn't seem to be any gold, I'm afwaid."

"Then chuck out the postal orders!"

"I am afwaid there are no postal ordahs."

"What did I tell you?" asked Digby, addressing no one in particular.

"That's right," said Blake, turning on his chum, "begin to cackle like a girl!"

"Blake, I cannot hear you pass such wemarks upon the gentle sex. I have a gweat wespect for them, and I wefuse ——"

"Read your letter! Perhaps there's some tin coming by the next post?"

"I wefuse to hear you pass dispawagin' wemarks upon girls!"

"Read your letter!" howled Blake.

"It is twue that Dig was a pwovokin' ass, but——"

"Eh, what's that?" said Digby.

"I was wemarkin' that it is twue you were a pwovokin' ass, Dig; but that does not justify any dispawagin' wemarks upon the gentle sex."

"Are you going to read that letter?" shrieked Blake.

"Not until you have withdwawn your dispawagin' wemarks about girls," said Arthur Augustus firmly.

The swell of the School House was awfully near at that moment to being hurled bodily into the puddle left by the latest rain at the foot of the School House steps. But Blake restrained himself.

"I withdraw them," he said, breathing hard through his nose. "I withdraw everything I said and didn't say, all that was implied and all that wasn't implied. Now read the letter!"

"I am satisfied, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "If you young persons will keep quiet for a little while, I will pewuse this lettah."

And he perused it, the chums of Study No. 6 watching him the while. An expression of amazement overspread D'Arcy's face. He ejaculated "Bai Jove!" twice, and whistled once.

"Well, what's the surprise?" demanded Blake. "Is your governor coming to visit you?"

"No, deah boy, that's not it."

"Is there a fiver coming by the next post?"

"No. I am sowwy to say that my matah has ovahlooked the wathah important fact that I am stony bwoke. Women are so thoughtless, you know."

"Well, what's the news, then? I suppose there's some news?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus looked worried. And Blake's manner, as soon as he saw the troubled look on his chum's face, changed at once.

"I say, nothing wrong at home, is there, old chap?" he asked.

"Oh, no. I am afwaid there's goin' to be somethin' w'ong here, though."

"What's the matter?"

"My young bwothah is comin' to St. Jim's."

"Your young brother?"

"Yaas, wathah; my young bwothah Wally."

"And that's the joyful surprise?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That's right," said Blake, "begin to cackle like a girl!" "Blake!" interrupted D'Arcy, "I cannot hear you pass such wemarks upon the gentle sex. I have a gweat wespect for them, and I wefuse——"

## CHAPTER 2.

### Raising the Wind!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY folded the letter and put it in his pocket. The swell of St. Jim's wore a worried look. Blake, Herries, and Digby were looking serious, too.

"Women have curious ideas of a joyful surprise," Blake remarked, in a thoughtful way.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I suppose you couldn't wire to your mater to send a fiver instead?"

"Well, no, I am afwaid that would be wathah imposs.," said D'Arcy. "Of course, you know, I'm glad to have young Wally here."

"Yes; you look glad," assented Blake.

"It's—it's wathah a shock to me," explained D'Arcy. "You see, my young bwothah Wally has never weally tweated me with the wespect due to his eldah bwothah."

"Is he much younger than you?" asked Blake curiously. "Will he be in the Fourth?"

D'Arcy shook his head.

"No, he'll be in a lowah Form—the Third, I suppose. Now, as a mattah of fact, it's a feahful twouble to a fellow to have a youngah bwothah in a lowah Form.

"Ha, ha! He'll make you do all his exercises for him."

"Yaas; I've no doubt he will twy."

"And he'll get chipped to death by the Third Form fags if he starts wearing a topper, and of course he will! It runs in the family."

"Weally, Blake——"

"It will cost your gov. something in toppers," said Blake seriously.

"The matah asks me to look aftah him," said D'Arcy. "Of course, I want to please the matah, though she has vewy singulah ideahs about joyful surpwises. I shall do my best for young Wally. But suppose he fails to tweat me with pwopah wespect before the fellows, you know? The posish. will be deuced awkward.

"Very awkward," said Blake. "Still, there's compensations. He will probably come with a lot of tin, and you can borrow some. So the most important question really is, when will D'Arcy minor arrive?"

"It would be infwa dig. to bowwow of a Third-Formah."

"By Jove, I forgot that! He can come when he likes, then!"

"He is comin' to-night," said D'Arcy. "As a mattah of fact, he is comin' by the half-past six twain at Wylcombe. The matah wants me to go down to the station and meet him."

"Well, that would only be a brotherly thing to do!"

"I have no objection in the world; but the weather looks wainy, and I shall pwobably spoil my clothes! Of course, I am willin' to make sacwifices for a blood-welation. The matah suggests that my fwiends would like to come down to the station with me, so as to give Wally a warm welcome and make him feel at home at once."

"So we will!" said Blake. "Lady Eastwood has stood us more than one feed, and it's only fair that we should stand by this young rotter—I mean this young gentleman—newly arriving at a public school. I dare say the poor little sprat will be awfully shy and bashful, and won't be able to say 'boo' to a goose!"

D'Arcy grinned.

"I am afwaid you have a wathah mistaken idea of young Wally, Blake!"

"Oh, these new kids are all the same! We'll go and meet him. It's rather a come-down for Fourth-Formers to go to the railway-station to meet a Third Form fag, but of course Lady Eastwood doesn't understand these fine

distinctions. It's a pity we are all stony. We ought to have stood the kid a feed on his first night!"

"I haven't told you all, deah boys!"

"Oh, rats! You haven't any young sisters coming as well, I suppose?"

"Oh, no; it's not quite so feahful as that! But the matah wants us to have young Wally in Study No. 6!"

Blake laughed.

"I'm afraid that can't be did!" he remarked. "Third Form kids can't pig in with grave and reverend seigniors of the Fourth Form. It wouldn't be allowed, even if we wanted it; and, as a matter of fact, I think I should draw the line there!"

"I rather think so!" said Digby, with emphasis.

"Right-ho!" said Herries. "You wouldn't have my bulldog in the study, and I'm blessed if we're going to have any Third Form fags there either!"

"I shall have to w'ite to the matah, and explain that it's imposs.," said D'Arcy, with a worried look. "But you know, it's so hard to make people understand these things! It would be vewy painful to me to think that anybody might suspect I didn't want young Wally to come to St. Jim's!"

"Well, without being very suspicious, they might suspect that if they saw your chivvy now!" Blake remarked.

"Not at all, deah boy! I am vewy glad to have the opportunity of doin' somethin' for young Wally; but if he fails to tweat me with pwopah wespect, the posish. will be so beastly awkward, you know! Still, I suppose we must make the best of it. Matah seems to think that St. Jim's will wegard it as wathah an event for us to have young Wally here. A chap's mother thinks so diffewently fwom othah people!"

"By Jove, you're right! But young Wally will soon get kicked and cuffed into his place, you know!" said Jack Blake, comfortingly.

"As a mattah of fact, Blake, Wally is a D'Arcy, and he would uttahly wefuse to be kicked and cuffed into his place!"

"Well, if the train's coming in at half-past six, we'd better get a move on, as we've got to walk," said Blake. "Remarkable oversight of your mother's not to enclose a five-pound note in that letter. I can't say I think your governor's playing the game, either! While we're in Rylcombe, we ought to wire to somebody for some tin!"

"Your governor, Blake?" Digby suggested.

Jack Blake shook his head.

"It's no good. He's made a rotten rule on that subject, ever since I wired to him last time for some cash. He wrote that he'll never send any tin in answer to a telegram, but will deduct the amount of money I waste on telegrams from my next allowance."

"Bai Jove, that's wathah wuff!"

"Well, what about your governor, Dig? A giddy baronet ought to be able to dub up at times!"

"Well, we could try him," said Digby doubtfully. "It only costs a tanner to send a wire."

"Haven't you any kind uncles or aunts?"

"Ye-e-es, but they're not good for more than half-a-crown or so, and that's not worth a wire. You can't startle an old lady with a telegram for two or three bob!"

"What about your people, Herries?"

"No good. I've had three distinct warnings not to overdraw my allowance any more."

"They're talking about national degeneracy!" said Blake, with a sniff. "As if young people were degenerating! It seems to me that degeneration has set in among parents and guardians, and is proceeding at an alarming rate!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy, with a nod. "You know, I've heard that when my patah was at Eton, he used to spend a feahful lot of money! He's saving tin every term by keepin' me at St. Jim's instead of Eton, and I weally think I ought to have the diffewence in pocket-money!"

"Why don't you point it out to him?"

"I have, wathah!"

"And what did he say?"

"He said I was a young jackanapes; and I weally couldn't help wegardin' that weply as appwoachin' to wudeness! But I've got an ideah——"

"Your ideas are all right, Gussy, but some tin would be more useful just now!"

"It's an ideah to get some tin!"

"Oh, now you're talking! What is it?"

"I'll wire to my matah for some cash to meet the expenses of seein' young Wally comfortably placed in the school. Of course, it will come feahfully expensive, and I don't see how I am to meet it out of my own wesources—especially as I haven't any wesources at the pwesent time!"

Jack Blake clapped the swell of the School House on the shoulder with a force that made him stagger.

"Ripping! And we'll all look after young Wally, and regard him as the apple of our eye!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rubbed his shoulder.

"Vewy well, Blake; but I weally wish you would not dislocate my beastly backbone, you know! Have you a tannah?"

"Nix!"

"Have you a tannah, Dig?"

"Not the ghost of one!"

"Have you a tannah, Hewwies?"

"I've got a French penny!"

"I'm afwaid the charmin' young lady in the post-office wouldn't consent to send a telegwam in exchange for a Fwench penny, deah boys!"

"Perhaps she might, if you gave her your most killing smile, Gussy!"

"Oh, weally, Blake——"

"Still, it might have fatal results, and we don't want to try any risky experiments! I dare say Tom Merry has a tanner or two. Let's go and see, and then we shall have to buzz off to Rylcombe without wasting time!"

"Wight-ho! Let's go and see Tom Mewwy!"

The chums of the Fourth made their way to the Shell passage in the School House, and Blake kicked at Tom Merry's door. The door flew open with a jerk, and there was an angry yell from Manners. Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy entered, and Blake stared at Manners rather aggressively.

The chums of the Shell were at home. Tom Merry was examining a football that had certainly seen service, and looked as if it would not stand seeing much more. Monty Lowther was stretched in the easy-chair, with his feet on the fender, laying down the law on the subject of football in his easy, drawling voice. Manners was seated at the table. He had what appeared to be a wooden box with a handle in the side before him, and he was carefully turning the handle. The startling opening of the door had made him give it a sharp jerk—hence his ejaculation of annoyance.

"Is that a musical-box you're playing with, Manners?" asked Blake.

"Rats! Don't you know a daylight developer when you see it?" growled Manners.

"Oh, is that a daylight developer? I should have expected them to be used in the daylight!"

"Ass! You can use them in any light! They're to obviate the need of a dark-room, and you can carry them with you on tours, and so on!"

"And can you develope with them?" asked Blake innocently.

"Ass! Of course I can!"

"Well, there's no accounting for tastes! I use a Sandow developer myself!"

"You utter ass!" hooted Manners. "This isn't a physical developer, it's a photographic developer! It's for developing films!"

"Oh, I see! I thought you wouldn't get much physical development by turning that little handle!" said Blake blandly.

Manners looked daggers at him. Words failed the amateur photographer of the Shell. He did not believe that Blake was really so ignorant on the subject, either. The twinkle in the Fourth-Former's eye seemed to hint that he was "rotting." Manners went on turning his little handle, and Blake, seeing that he was not to be drawn, turned to Tom Merry.

"Tom Merry, old son, have you a tanner?"

"Lots!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "I've had a postal-order from Huckleberry Heath by the post that just came in. It's not cashed yet!"

"Then we'll cash it for you; we're going to the village!"

"Good! It's for a pound, and you can take the tanner and bring me the change."

"If it's all the same to you, we'll take the change and bring you the tanner," said Jack. "We're in want of cash for a most important purpose. A younger scion of the house of D'Arcy is going to honour the Third Form at St. Jim's by entering it to-day!"

There was a general movement of interest in the study.

"By Jove!" said Monty Lowther. "Are there any more at home like you, Gussy?"

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Good!" said Manners. "I'll take him as my fag, if you like, Gussy!"

"Wally would uttahly wefuse to fag for you, Mannahs!"

"Oh, his name's Wally, is it?" said Tom Merry.

"Yaa, wathah! Walter Adolphus D'Arcy."

"Ha, ha! And is he like his elder brother?"

"I wegwet to say that Wally does not wesemble me vewy much at pwesent, but I have hopes of him, Tom Mewwy. He may impwove as he gwows oldah."

"Then he's more likely to get on in the Third Form," said Tom Merry, laughing. "As a matter of fact, two Gussies would be rather overpowering! I've often thought that one was too much!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Where's that postal-order?" said Blake.

"Here you are. You can have half of it till Saturday, if you like."

"Thanks; I will! We're going down to meet young D'Arcy, and we want to get a lift of some sort back. We were thinking of standing a feed, to[illegible]porter celebrate his coming. I should like to kill the fat-headed calf, you know, only Lowther's people might object to the funeral expenses!"

"Eh? What's that?" said Monty Lowther.

"If you fellows like," said Blake; "I'll tell you what—your study is bigger than ours, and we'll have the feed here, and you can join in!"

"Well, that's not a bad wheeze!" said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "But won't it be making too much of a Third Form kid? It would be bad for him to get swelled head—and it rather runs in the family, you know!"

"Weally, Tom Mwewy——"

"Well, we could give him a licking to-morrow, if necessary, to take him down a peg," said Blake. "But I expect he's some shy, mum-chance little beggar, and it would make him feel at home to make rather a fuss of him at first!"

"Good! I'll get in the things at the tuckshop while you're gone, and you might bring in some extras from Mother Murphy's in the village."

"Right you are!"

And Jack Blake put the postal-order in his waistcoat-pocket, and the Fourth-Formers quitted the study. Monty Lowther broke into a chuckle when the door closed.

"My hat," he said, "I'm curious to see young D'Arcy minor! If he's anything like Gussy, the Third Form will rag him to extinction! Some shy little rotter, I expect—all high collar and silk hat! My word!"

## CHAPTER 3.

### A Short Way With Humorists.

"HA, ha! It's a lark!"

It was Gore of the Shell who spoke, and Jack Blake heard the words as he came out of Tom Merry's study. Gore and Mellish and Sharp were chuckling over some little joke in a group, and Jack Blake looked at them curiously. That it was something ill-natured he was certain, or it would not have amused Gore and Mellish so much.

"What's on?" asked Blake, as he came along the passage. The juniors looked round, and Gore gave him a grin.

"Such a lark!" he chuckled.

"What's a lark?"

"It's Mary, the housemaid, you know. Haven't you noticed her?"

"Blessed if I have!" said Blake.

"I have," said D'Arcy. "I wemembah she has been lookin' wathah queer lately. When I wequested her yesterday to see that my boots were made just a little bwightah by that lazy young wascal of a boy, she was cwyin'. I assured her that it was weally a mattah of no such gweat importance as all that, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Gore. "Do you think she was crying about your rotten boots, you ass?"

"My boots are not wotten, and I wefuse to be called an ass."

"It's a regular romance," said Gore. "You've heard of that young chap, Lynn? There was a lot of jaw about him a few weeks ago."

"I remember," said Blake. "He was an under-keeper on Sir Neville Boyle's estate, and he showed us a jolly lot of places for fishing in the Rhyll, last summer. He was a decent sort, and that yarn about his being mixed up with poachers was all rot, in my opinion."

"I suppose you didn't know that he was engaged to Mary, the housemaid?" grinned Gore.

"No; I don't take such an interest in other people's affairs as you do, Gore."

"Well, it was a fact, anyway," said Gore, "and since he's got the sack from Sir Neville, Mary has been going about looking like the ghost in a drama. Stand here, and you'll see her coming along in a minute."

"Well, you rotten pig," said Blake, with great frankness, "do you see anything funny in that?"

"Well, yes, rather; it's a good joke, I think. You see——"

"And you're waiting here to see her, because she looks down in the mouth?" asked Blake, with a gleam in his eyes.

"You mind your own business, Blake."

"I make this my business on the spot," said Blake. "This is where we clear the passage. Follow your uncle, my pippins!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard Goah as a beast, and I think it's the pwopah thing to do to administah a feahful thwashin' to him."

"Look here——"

"Hands off——"

Blake, Herries, and Digby charged as if they were charging down a football field. Gore and Mellish and Sharp went reeling away, and a series of powerful kicks helped them towards the stairs, down which they bundled at top speed.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood looking on through his eyeglass. He would have lent a hand if it had been necessary; but as it was not needed there was no sense in rumpling his clothes for nothing. The three unlucky humorists rolled down the stairs, and Blake & Co. plunged after them, still kicking.

There was a light step in the passage, and D'Arcy turned round to see Mary, the housemaid. She was a neat and pretty girl. D'Arcy, when he came in contact with her, had always treated her with great politeness. He made her a graceful bow now, and the girl, seeing that he wished to speak, stopped.

"I am awfully sorry to heah that you are in twouble, Mawy!" said D'Arcy. "Is it twue that young Lynn has had the ordah of the push—I mean, that he has been discharged by Sir Neville Boyle?"

Mary's eyes filled with tears. There was no doubt that she was taking the matter very much to heart. To Mary, young William Lynn was all the world, and the matter, indifferent to all others, was a tragedy for her.

"Yes, Master D'Arcy. And it's not true that he had anything to do with the poachers. He was as honest as any young man in the country-side. It's not true."

"Don't cwy, my dear," said D'Arcy. "I'm quite sure it's not twue. I wemembah Lynn wescued my toppah for me when it dwopped into the wivah one day, and I was vewy gwateful, and so I am sure that he couldn't have had any dealin's with any wascally poachahs. I believe Sir Neville is a wathah unweasonable old gentleman, but pewwaps the mattah can be explained. Don't cwy! I'll look into it for you."

Mary's tears were flowing, and D'Arcy's generous assurance did not stop them. Perhaps Mary did not think that D'Arcy's looking into it would improve the matter very much.

"I believe the case was not pwoved, was it?" said D'Arcy

"No, but Sir Neville's head-keeper was against William from the first," said Mary, crying softly, "and he told wicked stories about him."

"Bai Jove, that must be looked into!" said D'Arcy. "Now, don't cwy, Mawy, my dear, and I'll look into the mattah, and set it wight."

And the swell of St. Jim's walked on after his chums. The maid smiled a little through her tears. She did not think that D'Arcy could help her, but at all events sympathy was something, and D'Arcy's sympathy was very genuine. The swell of St. Jim's found his three comrades dusting themselves in the hall. Gore, Sharp, and Mellish had disappeared.

"Are you weady?" asked D'Arcy. "Bettah get our coats!"

"Rats! Better walk sharp."

"Suppose it comes on to wain?"

"No time for dressing up for the occasion," said Blake, "and it won't rain much. Come on!"

"My toppah is upstairs."

"It can stay there. Here's your cap."

"On such an occasion as this, when my youngah bwothah is comin' to the coll., I weally think we might dwess decently for once," said D'Arcy, with dignity.

Blake replied by seizing him by the shoulder, and running

him out into the dusky quad. The swell of the School House struggled in vain in his leader's muscular grip.

"Welease me, Blake, you wottah! You are cwumplin' my jacket."

"I say, we shall want a pass," said Digby suddenly. "They've made locking-up earlier now, you know, now that the nights are drawing in. We shall be out after Taggles has locked up."

"I forgot that!" grunted Blake. "Wait for me. I'll ask Kildare for a pass. He's bound to give it me when I tell him it's to meet a new kid."

Jack Blake re-entered the School House. Herries and Digby waited on the steps in the growing October dusk, and D'Arcy took advantage of the opportunity to slip into the house for a silk hat. Blake hurried to Kildare's study, but it was vacant. The captain of St. Jim's was out. He came out again, and encountered Darrel of the Sixth in the passage. Darrel was outside-right in the first eleven, and the finest winger at St. Jim's. He was a somewhat grave and quiet fellow, and Kildare's closest chum.

"Hallo, Darrel!" said Blake cheerfully. "You'll do!"

"Eh—what's that?" said Darrel, looking at him.

"I wanted to see Kildare, but you'll do. I want a pass for self and three to go to the railway-station."

"Can't be done!" said Darrel, shaking his head. "You wouldn't be back before locking up, and you've had too many passes lately."

"This is a special occasion."

"Yes. It always is."

"But this is really special," explained Blake. "D'Arcy's younger brother is coming to St. Jim's, and his mother has written to Gus to meet the train at half-past six."

"Oh, that alters the case," said Darrel good-naturedly. "Come into my room, and I'll write out the pass. Mind you come straight back!"

"Well, the lane winds a lot, you know, and if we leave the road——"

"Cheese it!"

Two minutes later Jack Blake rejoined his chums with the pass in his pocket. Arthur Augustus came out at the same moment arrayed in a nobby autumn coat, and a silk hat.

"Got it?" asked Digby.

"Yaas, wathah! I weally considah——"

"Ass! I was speaking to Blake. Have you the pass, Blake?"

"Yes, I got it from Darrel. Come on!"

And the chums of the Fourth lost no time in getting down to the gates, and were soon striding through the gathering dusk towards Rylcombe.

## CHAPTER 4.

### D'Arcy Decides to Look into the Matter.

CRACK! Crack!

Jack Blake started, and glanced at the dark woods that bordered the lane. The sounds of the gunshots came eerily through the thickening dusk of the October evening.

"Bai Jove, that sudden wow thwew me into quite a fluttah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I pwesume that is some poachah at work."

"Shouldn't wonder," said Digby. "There has been a lot of poaching in this part of the county lately, and they're making a lot of fuss about the matter, too. Hallo, who's that?"

A tall figure in coat and gaiters suddenly appeared from the shadows of the trees, and looked out into the road. The man was a burly fellow, with a short, black beard, and he carried a gun in the hollow of his arm. The juniors halted instinctively at the sight of him, and Blake signed to his comrades to be silent. Where the chums had stopped a tree threw its dark shadow over the lane, and it was plain that the man looking out of the wood did not see them.

"Bai Jove," murmured D'Arcy, "is it a poachah, deah boys?"

"No," muttered Blake, "I know that chap's chivvy. It's Barberry, Sir Neville Boyle's head-keeper."

The keeper looked up and down the lane, as if in expectation of seeing someone. It was a lonely way after dark, and Blake wondered whom the head-keeper expected. But as it was no poacher, there was no reason for the juniors to keep out of sight, and they walked on. The keeper gave a start as they came out of the shadow of the big tree, and came into view in the dusk of the lane.

"You have been a long time!" he exclaimed sharply.

"Have we?" said Blake cheerfully. "You see, we didn't know you were waiting for us, Mr. Barberry—— Hallo, he's gone!"

The keeper started at Blake's voice. He had evidently mistaken the boys, in the thick dusk, for the persons he had been expecting, whoever they were. As Blake spoke, Barberry turned round, and strode abruptly back into the wood. The junior grinned.

"He doesn't seem pleased to see us, and I'm sure I spoke to him most politely," he remarked.

"Yaas, wathah, there was weally nothin' left to be desired in that wespect, Blake."

"Thank you! If Chesterfield Grandison passes my manners, they must be all right."

"Oh, weally, Blake——"

"I don't like that chap's chivvy," Blake remarked thoughtfully, as they walked on. "I like a chap who can say a civil good-evening, instead of looking at you like a demon in a pantomime."

"Yaas, wathah! And speakin' on this subject, I am thinkin' of takin' up my amateur detective work again, deah boys."

"Good! You are going to investigate and discover why Barberry is a surly pig? Have you any clue?"

"Pway, don't wot, deah boy! I had a little conversation with Mawy, the housemaid, while you were wollin' those wottahs downstairs, and weally I was vewy touched."

"You've been touched a long time, old chap!"

"Weally, Blake, I should be obliged if you would not intewwupt me with wude and iwwelevant wemarks. I was deeply touched by her gwief. She seems to be suffewin' fwom melancholy, pewwaps a bweakin' heart, and a bweakin' heart is a sewious thing, you know."

"Oh, of course. You always have a breaking heart when you fall in love, so you ought to know," assented Blake.

"Pway be sewious. I have only been in love thwee times, as you know pewfectly well."

"And is Mary to be the fourth?" demanded Digby.

"I shall take it as a favah, Digby, if you will speak with more wespect of myself and that extwemely wespectable and mewitowious young person," said D'Arcy with dignity. "This is not a subject for jokin'. Sewiously, Mawy is wowwyin' about that young keepah chap Lynn, who has been sacked by Sir Neville Boyle for actin' in collusion with the wotten poachahs. Now, I don't believe he was weally guilty, and he seems to have been sacked on suspish."

"It's a rather serious matter for them," said Digby. "They were going to be married at Christmas."

"Yaas, it's vewwy hard on both of them——"

"What is, being married at Christmas?"

"No, certainly not. It is vewy hard on both of them to have their mawwiage mucked up like this, and, as a mattah of fact, deah boys, I have pwomised Mawy to look into the mattah."

"You have whatted Mary what?"

"I have pwomised Mawy to look into the mattah."

"And what difference will that make?"

"I hope it will make a gweat diffewence. The poor gal was cwyin' like anythin', you know, and I hate to see a gal cwy. Somethin' ought to be done, so I have pwomised to look into the mattah. She says William—young Lynn, you know—is innocent, and I weally think him a most wespectable young fellow myself, because he wescued my silk hat for me one day when it fell into the wivah."

"I don't see how you could have a clearer proof than that of a chap's absolute respectability," assented Blake solemnly.

"I believe you are wottin', you wottah; but it does weally show that a chap's heart is in the wight place when he wealises the importance of a silk hat not bein' lost or damaged. He was vewy civil, too, and showed me a nice place to fish, and explained quite politely that I mustn't fish on Sir Neville Boyle's bank of the wiver. If he had put it wudely, I should have insisted upon fishin' there, of course."

"And got run in for poaching?"

"Well, it would have been a question of dig. with me, and I could not vewy well have given way. But he weally put it vewy nicely, and I wegard him as a most wespectable and mewitowious young man, and quite deservin' that I should look into the mattah."

"You young ass, what good do you think you are going to do?"

"I object to bein' called an ass. As for the good I am goin' to do, I expect to clear young Lynn; and if he's cleared of suspish, Sir Neville will take him on again, and then those wespectable and mewitowious young people can get mawwied at Chwistmas all the same. I shall give them my blessin'," said D'Arcy, with quite a paternal air. "I like to see young people happy."

"I don't see what you're going to do."

"Neithah do I, at pwesent, but I have pwomised to look into the mattah, and I shall keep my word. Of course, I have a clue to the weal facts."

"What is the clue?"

"Mawy says that the head-keepah told wicked stowies

The keeper gave a start as Tom Merry & Co. came out from the shadow of the big tree.

about Lynn to Sir Neville. Now, if Lynn was condemned on Barbewwy's evidence, and he is innocent, it stands to weason that Barbewwy was tellin' lies."

"Did you work that out in your head?"

"Yaas, wathah! Now, to continue the line of weasonin' in the style of Sherlock Blake or Sexton Holmes—I mean Sexton Holmes or Sherlock Blake—I mean——"

"Never mind what you mean; get on with the washing, and we'll guess the meaning as near as we can."

"Weally, Blake—— But, as I was sayin', to continue the weasonin' in pwofessional style, what was Barbewwy's motive for tellin' whoppahs about young Lynn?"

"Perhaps young Lynn is a nobleman in disguise, and Barberry is his wicked uncle."

"Oh, pway don't wot, deah boy! You wowwy me. It cwossed my mind that pewwaps Barbewwy might be young Lynn's wival."

"His what?"

"His wival for the hand of Mawy, the housemaid. But upon weflection I don't think that is the case, as he is twice as old as Mawy, and a widowah; and besides, I believe he is not acquainted with her."

"Well, that last circumstance would stand somewhat in the way of a desperate attachment," agreed Blake.

"Therefore, what was Barbewwy's motive?"

"Don't ask me conundrums. You know what we've got in store for you if you start in the funny man business again."

"I wasn't askin' you a conundwum. I said, what was Barbewwy's motive? I wegard it as wathah plain that he put the thing on young Lynn to keep himself clear. You see, it seems pwetty plain that somebody was in collusion with the poachahs, and it may have been necessawy to find a scapegoat."

"My hat," said Blake, "there may be something in that! I never like a chap who can't say a civil good-evenin'."

"Yaas, and young Lynn is weally a vewy civil young person, and he wescued my toppah."

"Good! We'll look into this."

"I shall be vewy pleased to weceive any assistance you can wendah," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity, "but you will please to wemembah that it is I who am lookin' into the mattah."

Half-past six rang from the village church as D'Arcy spoke. Blake gave a start.

"Hallo, the train's in!" he exclaimed.

"Bai Jove, that's wathah wotten! Buck up, dear boy! It's awfully bad form to keep a chap waitin' when you're goin' to meet him at the station. Wun like anythin'!"

And the juniors sprinted, and a couple of minutes later arrived breathless at the station.

A cheerful-looking youth, with his hands in his trousers

pockets, and his cap on the back of his head, was standing in the station entrance. D'Arcy uttered an exclamation.

"That's young Wally! He's awwived."

Blake gave a long, long whistle.

"That D'Arcy minor! My only hat!"

## CHAPTER 5.

### Master Wally.

D'ARCY MINOR looked coolly at the juniors from St. Jim's. He did not bear much resemblance to D'Arcy major. There was a resemblance of features, but in "manners and customs" the youthful Wally was amazingly unlike his brother.

There were some untidy fags in the Third Form at St. Jim's, but the inkiest of the Third Form fags did not seem to Blake's mind quite so untidy as D'Arcy minor.

D'Arcy minor was dressed in Etons. His waistcoat was crumpled, and there was a smear of toffee on his trousers. His jacket was plentifully adorned with little hairs, apparently from the coat of some animal. His collar was awry, and soiled in a way that made Arthur Augustus shudder to look at it. His hair was untidy, and his cap was on the back of his head. His boots were muddy. They were of the lace-up variety, and the laces of one were undone, and trailing round the boot. Withal, there was a cheerful grin upon his none-too-clean face that was very taking.

"Hallo, kid!" he said, addressing D'Arcy. "So you've come."

Arthur Augustus screwed his eyeglass into his eye, and surveyed his young brother majestically. Blake, Herries, and Digby were beginning to grin, and Arthur Augustus felt that if his dignity as elder brother was not asserted at once, it was in danger of being lost for good and all.

"Wally!"

"Hallo! Same old Gussy!" said Wally cheerfully. "Same old window-pane!"

"Wally!"

"Blessed if I know what you want to keep on repeating my name like a giddy parrot for! Ain't you going to shake hands with your brother, after being parted for weeks and weeks?" demanded Wally, extending a grimy paw.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked at the hand, and did not take it.

"I am sowwy," he said, with dignity. "I will shake hands with you pwesently, when you have had a wash. I cannot have my gloves wuined."

"Looks a bit spotty, doesn't it?" agreed Wally complacently.

"Where are your gloves, young 'un?"

"Blessed if I know. The mater gave them to me when I started. I think Pongo gnawed one of them in the railway carriage, and the other must have been left on the seat."

"Pongo!" said D'Arcy faintly. "You don't mean to say that you've bwought that howwid, wotten mongwel to St. Jim's?"

"Yes, rather!" said Wally. "There was a row about it, but I argued it out with the mater. Here, Pongo, Pongo!"

He whistled, and a ragged-looking cur came slinking up. Wally patted his rough head affectionately.

"He's a jolly good ratter," he said. "If you've got rats in the studies at St. Jim's, he'll clear 'em out for you. Bites like anything, too. He bit the guard of the train, and there was a row. I had to nurse him most of the way down."

"Yaas, you look like it."

"That's the worst of Pongo," said Wally, glancing down at his dusty, hairy jacket. "His wool does come off, and no mistake."

"You ought to have the howwid bwute dwowned."

"Rats!" said Wally. "You've never liked him since the time he got his teeth into your trucks. It was your eyeglass he didn't like. I told you he would let you alone if you chucked your eyeglass. You didn't."

"I am hardly likely, I pwesume, to change my habits for the sake of pleasin' a wotten mongwel, Wally."

"Then you can't blame him if he goes for you. Don't be afraid now, though. I've got my eye on him. If he goes for you I'll have him off before he hurts you. But I say, if these chaps are friends of yours, you may as well introduce me. I know you're overcome with joy by my arrival, Gussy, but you mustn't forget your manners, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Herries and Digby in chorus.

Wally looked at them.

"Your friends seem to find something amusing in the case," he remarked. "Are they often taken like that? Or is this a ventriloquist imitation of cheap German alarm clocks?"

The Fourth-Formers ceased to laugh, and turned very red.

Blake wagged his forefinger warningly at the youthful scion of the house of D'Arcy.

"Look here, kid," he said, "you're going into the Third Form at St. Jim's. We belong to the Fourth. You'll have to learn to treat your seniors with respect."

"Oh, I'll give you all the respect you deserve," said Wally. "It won't be enough to worry about, I dare say. Have you got any kind of a go-cart to get to the coll. in, Gussy?"

"I wefuse to be addwessed as Gussy. My name is Arthur."

"Oh, don't be particular about a trifle. I'll call you Arty if you like."

"If you addwess me as Arty I shall give you a feahful thwashin'."

Wally cocked his eye thoughtfully at his indignant brother.

"I rather think you couldn't do it," he remarked. "But keep your wool on, old son. Down, Pongo! Down, you young rascal!"

"Keep that wotten bwute furthah away fwom my legs."

"It's your eyeglass that worries him. I've warned you of it before. Couldn't you take it off for a bit?"

"Certainly not!" D'Arcy turned to Blake & Co. "Blake, deah boy, allow me to pwesent my youngah bwothah Wally. You need not twouble to shake hands with him. Wally, this is Jack Blake, and this is Digby, and this is Hewwies. You will have the kindness to tweat them with pwopah wespect, as my fwiends, and as membahs of a highah Form."

"Oh, certainly!" said Wally. "I suppose you fellows always treat chaps in a higher Form with great respect."

Jack Blake coughed.

"That's nothing to do with the matter," he remarked. "If Third Form kids don't behave themselves, they get licked. You ought to bear that in mind. It may be useful to you. Now, Gussy, I've got to go to the post-office to cash Tom Merry's postal-order. Take this young ragamuffin away, and get the trap, and I'll meet you at the tuckshop."

"Golly," said Wally, smacking his lips, "I'm hungry!"

Jack Blake hurried away. There was a grin on his face. D'Arcy minor had surprised the chums of the Fourth. Blake wondered what Tom Merry would think of him. The cheerful youth evidently had no idea of keeping his place as a humble and insignificant Third-Former. There were probably ructions ahead for Master Wally.

Blake cashed Tom Merry's postal-order, and then walked over to the tuckshop. There he found Wally eating jam-tarts. A considerable portion of the jam seemed to be spreading itself over his face and hands. Arthur Augustus was watching him in dismay. Herries and Digby were grinning, and urging more tarts upon the cheerful youth.

D'Arcy minor's box was in the trap outside. D'Arcy minor looked up at Blake with a decidedly jammy grin.

"Come and sample these tarts," he said; "they're ripping."

"My good youth, it's against college etiquette for a Fourth-Former to devour tarts with an infant," said Blake severely.

"Well, I'm not an infant, my pippin."

"The Third Form are called the infants at St. Jim's."

"They'd better not call me an infant, or somebody will get his nose punched," remarked Wally, jamming another tart into his mouth.

Jack Blake chuckled.

"I can foresee a high old time for this young merchant in the Third Form," he observed. "Young Jameson and Curly Gibson will give him a few lessons, I think. Lemme see—I told Tom Merry I would take in a few things. May as well have some tarts, if young Wally hasn't cleared out the stock. Do you always eat jam with the outside of your face, Wally?"

"Lend me your handkerchief, Gus," said Wally.

"What for?" asked the swell of St. Jim's distrustfully.

"To rub the jam off my mouth. I've lost mine."

"I uttahly wefuse to have my handkerchief wuined."

"Oh, I don't care! If you want me to arrive at St. Jim's like this, all right. I suppose I shall have to go in and see the Head."

D'Arcy groaned, and passed his cambric handkerchief to his younger brother. Wally rubbed his mouth and face with it energetically, so energetically that it tore. Then he offered it back to his brother. D'Arcy drew back from the soiled rag.

"You can keep it now," he said faintly. "I make you a pwesent of it."

"Right-ho! I'm waiting for you chaps."

"Then wait, and don't jaw," said Blake.

"Oh, rats!"

Blake gave a jump.

"What did you say?"

"Rats!"

"Are you aware that you are talking to a Fourth-Former of St. Jim's?"

"Hadn't thought about it."

"D'Arcy, old chap, I'm sorry, but I'm afraid that it will be necessary for me to smash this rotten little specimen into little pieces."

"More rats!" said Master Wally. "None of your gammon, you know!"

Blake looked at him. He looked at him with an expression that might have brought a blush to the cheeks of a stone image. But it had no perceptible effect upon Master Wally. That youth put his hands in his trousers' pockets, and began to whistle.

"Let's get into the trap!" said Blake shortly.

They mounted into the trap. Blake's purchases were stowed away beside Wally's box, and Herries and D'Arcy stowed themselves away, too. Blake and Digby mounted in front, and Blake took the reins. Wally looked at him.

"Get in, young shaver," said Jack.

"Who's going to drive?"

"I am."

"I think you'd better let me take the ribbons, old man. I know more about horses——"

"Get in, or I'll leave you behind!" howled Blake.

"Oh, all serene! Keep your whiskers on!" And Master Wally clambered into the back of the trap. There was a yelp from Arthur Augustus.

"What's the matter with you, Gus?"

"Ow! You have twodden on my foot, you young ass."

"Sorry! Blessed if I can see why you want to spread your feet all over the floor. I say, you chaps, make room for Pongo!"

"If you think you're going to have that mongrel in this trap," said Herries, with emphasis, "you're making a big mistake, young shaver."

"I'm jolly well not going to leave my dog behind, I know that!"

"I should certainly wefuse to have him here."

"Oh, he can follow, I suppose," said Wally. "He'd be more comfy if you'd have him in, and let him sit on your knees, Gus."

"Weally, Wally——"

"Never mind, he can follow. Here, Pongo—Pongo!"

There was the sound of a desperate combat in the dusk outside the tuckshop. Barking and yapping and snapping and snarling made the night hideous. Wally chuckled.

"He's a terror, Pongo is," he remarked. "He never sees another dog without going for him. He's lost an ear in a fight with a bulldog, you know, and he's been half-killed lots of times. He's covered all over with marks. I wouldn't take his weight in gold for him. Pongo—Pongo! Doggie! Come here, Pongo!"

The young gentleman gave a piercing whistle that made D'Arcy jump, and Herries stop his ears. Pongo came trotting up behind the trap, looking well pleased with himself. Wally D'Arcy shook his finger reprovingly at his shaggy favourite.

"You young rip," he said, "I'll lick you if you don't learn manners! Follow on, now!"

And Pongo followed on as the trap rattled off through the October gloom towards the ancient college of St. Jim's.

## CHAPTER 6.

### Skimpole Wishes to be Kind.

TOM MERRY looked round the study with an approving eye. The cloth was laid, and the crockery set. Cups and saucers, borrowed from all quarters, adorned the table, and if no cup matched a saucer, and no saucer matched any other saucer, what did a detail like that matter? Plates, too, were there in plenty, in an assorted heap, and the soap-dish containing the jam glistened in the gaslight. There were good things galore on the study table. The feeds in Study No. 10 in the Shell were well known, and Fifth and Sixth Formers had been known to speak of them with respect. There was little doubt that Master Wally would be both pleased and impressed.

"That's all right," said Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather," said Lowther. "A lot of trouble to take over a Third-Form kid, though."

"It's a special occasion. D'Arcy isn't a bad sort, when he's not funny. I expect his brother will be a chap like himself, but younger and shyer. Some little kid who can't say boo to a goose, and sits quite quiet, you know,

Monty Lowther laughed.

"He'll have a high old time among the Third Form fags, if that's the kind of kid he is," he remarked. "They'll roast him."

"We might keep a fatherly eye on him at first," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "Three fatherly eyes, in fact—I mean, three pairs of fatherly eyes."

"I don't know. If they thought he was backed up by fellows in a higher Form, they'd make his life a burden on principle."

"Something in that," remarked Manners. "Still, we could give young Jameson a licking to start with. He's the most obstreperous of those young rascals."

"Better give him a feed," said Tom Merry, laughing. "He would pass a licking on to D'Arcy minor. Now, everything seems to be ready, and I think we may as well go down to the gates, and look for them."

"Jolly cold weather for waiting at the gates."

"Well, we can chip Taggles, to pass the time."

"H'm, all right. Hallo, here's Skimpole. Lucky we're going out."

A large head, adorned with tufts of hair and an enormous pair of spectacles, looked round the door of the study. Skimpole, the brainy man of the Shell, nodded to the Terrible Three. He had a large notebook in his hand, and a pencil stuck behind one large ear.

"I want to speak to you fellows——"

"Sorry!" said Tom blandly. "We're just going out."

"It's rather important. I will walk down to the gates with you, and explain."

"Couldn't think of troubling you," said Tom Merry, putting on his cap."

"No trouble at all, Merry."

"Now, look here, Skimmy, you must take care of your health. You must not go out of doors on a raw October evening. Good-bye!"

And Tom Merry turned down the gas, and the Terrible Three left the study. Skimpole blinked at them, and followed them down the passage. He tapped Tom Merry on the arm.

"It's a rather important matter, Merry. As a sincere Socialist, I am bound to assist all I meet who are in affliction, to comfort the unhappy, and——"

"And to bore everybody else."

"Really, Merry! It is a rather important matter. I am thinking of taking up my amateur detective work for a short time, in order to set a certain matter right. You may have noticed that Mary, the housemaid, has been looking very rotten lately. I have discovered that she is engaged to a young man named Lynn."

"Did you discover that all by yourself, Skimmy?"

"Yes, I unearthed the secret."

"The secret was known to everybody in the county who cared to know it, so I suppose it wasn't any very great mental exertion on your part to discover it."

"She is engaged to a young man of the name of Lynn," said Skimpole. "This young man has been discharged by his employer for acting in collusion with poachers. He was under-keeper to Sir Neville Boyle."

"I know all about it, Skimmy, and it's rough on Mary; but you won't improve the matter by bothering your head about it."

"You are quite mistaken there, Tom Merry. I am going to look into the matter, and reveal the truth——"

"Ass!" said Tom Merry politely.

"I regard that as almost rude, Merry. Mary still believes that young Lynn was innocent, and consequently her affection for him survives, though it seems that his being discharged from his employment has interfered with their arrangements in some respects. Now, I was thinking that if I could prove——"

"You are going to prove his innocence?"

"Oh, no. I am afraid that would be impossible, as he is undoubtedly guilty. I was thinking that if I investigated the matter, and proved his guilt, Mary, as a sensible young person, would naturally cease to think about him——"

"You unutterable ass!" said Tom Merry.

"Really, Merry! You see, I feel very much for Mary's distress, and I desire very strongly to relieve her. Surely I cannot do that more effectually than by proving that her young man is unworthy of her affection."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, go ahead, Skimmy. If you come across young Lynn in the course of your investigations, and explain your views to him, he will probably dot you on the nose. That will do you good."

"I was thinking that you fellows might be willing to assist me. I shall have to explore the woods after dark, and track down the poachers. It is a very adventurous sort of thing, you know, and I should think you would like to back me up."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I cannot see anything comical in the matter. It is a very serious one."

"It will be a serious one for you, if you are caught breaking bounds of a night to track down poachers!" grinned Lowther. "And so it will if you happen to run into any of the giddy poachers. You may get knocked on the head."

"As a sincere Socialist, I am prepared to run risks for the

sake of doing good. It will relieve poor Mary's mind ever so much to know that her sweetheart is guilty. But if you do not wish to assist me personally, it will suffice if you will lend me all the spare cash you happen to have. My idea is to take a quantity of grub into the wood, and hide it in the hollow oak, so that I can get meals there, and pursue my investigations without interruption. What do you think of the idea?"

"Rotten!"

"Really, Tom Merry——"

"Skimmy, take a little run, old chap! Go and write the four hundred and forty-fourth chapter of your book, and give us a rest."

And the Terrible Three quitted the amateur Socialist, and hurried down to the gates.

Skimpole blinked after them, shaking his head solemnly. Then he slowly and thoughtfully took his way back to Tom Merry's study. The Terrible Three arrived at the gates, which had been closed by Taggles. A trap loomed up from the dusk of the road, and Jack Blake jumped down and dragged at the bell. Taggles came grumbling out of his lodge. He grumbled as he opened the gates, and grumbled still more as the trap came in, and nearly ran into him.

"Oh, cheese it, old chap," said Blake. "We've brought a nice new boy, one you will be bound to like. Surely it is worth while trotting out of your old lodge for that."

"Which all boys is himps," said Taggles, "and ought to be drownded at birth; and which you are the worst himp of all, Master Blake."

"Taggy, old man, I call that ungrateful, when I've got a bob for you burning a hole in my waistcoat pocket," said Blake reproachfully.

"Which it's very kind of you to remember me, Master Blake."

"Yes, rather, but you're such a pleasant, agreeable chap to remember, Taggy, that it makes memory quite a pleasure. Here you are, and mind this trap. Brown's man is coming for it."

"Right you are, Master Blake."

The juniors alighted, and walked into the quadrangle, and Taggles took away the trap, and closed the gates. Tom Merry looked round for D'Arcy minor. That young gentleman was whistling to his dog with a piercing note that made Tom Merry stop his ears.

"Where's D'Arcy minor?"

"There he is."

"My only Aunt Jane!"

## CHAPTER 7.

### Scoffed.

WALLY looked round at Tom Merry. His dog had answered his whistle at last, and Wally had taken a grip on his collar, and lifted him into his arms. Pongo struggled a little, and deposited a fresh coating of frowsy hairs on Wally's jacket.

"Tom Mewwy, this is my youngah bwothah, Wally," said D'Arcy feebly. "I—I am afwaid you will think him a feahful young wagamuffin. I have twied to bwing him up in the way he should go, but it is a feahfully difficult task."

"So I should imagine," said Tom Merry, looking at D'Arcy minor.

"Keep still, Pongo! Good doggie! Keep still!"

"Nice dog, that!" said Lowther.

"Yes, he's ripping!" said Wally. "You should see him rabbiting; nothing will stop him. Are you allowed to hunt rabbits in these parts?"

"Yes, if you can pay the fines, or do the hard labour afterwards."

Wally grinned.

"Then I expect Pongo will get me into fearful rows. Nothing can stop him when he's on the scent of a rabbit. It comes cheap, in a way, because he keeps himself, you see, and he costs me next to nothing for dog-biscuits!"

"What breed is he?" asked Manners.

"Fox-terrier-pointer-retriever-bulldog-newfoundland-blughound," said Wally calmly. "Rather a mixed breed, you know."

Manners was silent. He had asked that question from politeness, but perhaps Wally had scented a hint of patronage in the manner of the Shell boy.

"Pway come in, Wally!" said D'Arcy brusquely. "Leave that beast in the quad!"

"No fear! It's time for Pongo to have a feed. If he can't have a rabbit, he will have to have a biscuit. Anybody got a dog-biscuit in his pocket?"

"Sorry," said Tom Merry ironically; "I usually have plenty of them about me, but I gave my last one to the poor!"

"Does anybody here keep a dog?" asked Wally.

"Yes, I do," said Herries. "If you like, I'll show you where to keep that brute, and give you a biscuit for him."

"Thanks; you're a decent chap!"

"Vewy good," said D'Arcy; "show him where to put the beast, Hewwies, and then bwing him in. Then I will take him to a bath-woom."

Herries conducted Wally to the building behind the New House, where the boys of St. Jim's kept their pets. There Herries' bulldog Towser—the best-hated animal in the school—reposed in his kennel. He looked out, with a growl, at approaching footsteps, and his eyes burned at the sight of another dog. Wally still had Pongo in his arms, and he looked distrustfully at the powerful bulldog.

"I say, he won't get loose, will he?" asked D'Arcy minor.

"No, he's on his chain. Don't be nervous."

"Who are you getting at?" asked Wally pleasantly. "I'm not afraid of any old bulldog, but I don't want a brute that size to go for Pongo. Pongo is certain to go for him, but he will be able to get out of it again if your brute's on a chain, so that's all right."

"You can keep him in this box till you get a kennel," said Herries. "Better tie him up, too, in case he gets wandering. They always make a row here if my bulldog gets loose, though he's a pleasant and harmless animal."

Wally chuckled.

"No good tying up Pongo. He's such an artful beggar! He would be bound to get loose. He'll be off somewhere, as sure as a gun!"

"If he gets into the woods after the rabbits, he'll get shot," said Herries warningly. "Barberry has shot twice at my bulldog, and he's a nice, quiet animal!"

"Yes, he looks it," agreed Wally, glancing at the savage-looking bulldog. "And who may Barberry happen to be?"

"Sir Neville Boyle's head-keeper."

"There will be a row if he shoots at my dog," said Wally. "Pongo is bound to go rabbiting; it's his nature. Blessed if I can see why people can't let a dog be happy! My mater made an awful fuss because I had him in my room one night, and he tore up the pillows and bolster. Mater isn't fond of animals. She wouldn't let me bring my ferret to school. You'd like him; such a comical little beggar!"

"Here's the biscuit," said Herries.

"Right-ho! Thanks, very much! There's a lot of animals here!"

"Lots of the fellows keep pets."

"Good! I like that! Pongo always kills white mice and rats. I dare say there will be some rows about that, too!" said Wally, with a chuckle.

Herries vouchsafed no reply. He felt that this new ornament of the Third Form was a little too much for him. He led him back to the quadrangle, and, as they passed the angle of the New House, three juniors in running flannels came into sight. They were Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn of the New House, taking their evening sprint round the quad to keep in form. Figgins & Co. halted as they saw Herries and his companion.

"Hallo!" said Figgins affably. "I hear that D'Arcy's young brother is coming to St. Jim's. Is it a fact, Herries?"

"Yes, rather, here he is!"

Figgins & Co. looked closely at Wally. They looked at him, and they looked at one another. Then three distinct chuckles were heard in the quiet of the October evening.

"My only hat!" said Figgins.

"My giddy Aunt Matilda!" murmured Kerr.

"Great pip!" remarked Fatty Wynn.

And Figgins & Co. sprinted on, still chuckling. D'Arcy minor stared after them.

"Who may those merchants happen to be?" he asked.

"Figgins & Co., of the New House."

"Oh, you have separate houses here?" asked Wally, as they walked on through the dusk towards the School House. "I think I remember Gussy telling me something about it. You have House rows, I believe?"

"That's it," said Herries. "The School House is cock-house at St. Jim's, you know, and we have to keep Figgins & Co. in their place!"

"Do you always lick them?"

"Oh, yes, always—except—except when they lick us! Here we are!"

They entered the School House. Tom Merry & Co. were waiting for them in the hall. Arthur Augustus looked depressed. Wally gave him a friendly dig in the ribs that made him start violently.

"Cheer up, old cock!" said Wally.

"Weally, Wally, if you addwess me in that diswespectful mannah——"

"Oh, don't get on the high horse, Gussy! I've had enough of that in the holidays!" said Wally, in a tone of remonstrance. "The pater was talking to me in the same

"Wally!" cried Arthur Augustus. "Wally! Where are you?" "Here I am, Gus!" said Master Wally, all his coolness returning as he found himself in the presence of the chums of St. Jim's. "Fancy meeting you!"

strain too, just before I left! I suppose I had better go in and see the boss."

"The—the—the what?"

"The Head, then."

"If he heard you allude to him as the boss," said Tom Merry, "there would be a licking for the cheekiest kid at St. Jim's!"

"Oh, but he didn't hear, so it's all right! Where is his den?"

"You must come and have a wash and bwush-up first, Wally," said D'Arcy; "and you had bettah weport yourself to the housemastah in the first place. I pwesume that awwangements have been made for you to be in the School House?"

"I hope so. I shall want to keep Pongo in my study."

"Pets are not allowed in the House, and Third Form kids don't have studies," said Tom Merry.

Wally stared.

"Ain't I going to have a study to myself, then?"

"No. You'll do your prep. in the Third Form room, with the rest of the infants, and you'll have a locker there to keep your things in, if you can find an empty one. The other infants often take two or three when there are vacant places, and you may have to fight somebody for one!"

Wally pushed back his soiled cuffs with a grin of anticipation.

"Oh, I sha'n't mind that," he said; "I know Gussy will hold my coat!"

"Weally, Wally, I should wefuse to do anythin' of the sort," said D'Arcy. "Come with me, pway, and make yourself a little tidy. Tom Mewwy has been kind enough to have a feed pwepared in his study for you, to celebwate your awwival. This is an unpwecedented honah for a Third Form kid!"

"I hope it's an unprecedented feed, too," said Wally; "I'm jolly hungry!"

"Pway come along!"

Arthur Augustus marched his terrible younger brother off. Tom Merry & Co. exchanged glances and chuckled.

"My hat," said Tom Merry, "this will be a sad trial for the one and only Gus! I hardly expected to see anything like this!"

"Nor I," grinned Blake. "He came as a surprise! Poor old Gus! And his mater told him that Wally was coming as a joyful surprise!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let's get up to the study," said Lowther. "We may as well have the feed quite ready by the time his lordship comes up. I can foresee a heap of lickings in store for that young gentleman, and he may as well start with a good feed."

"Right-ho! Hallo, Skimmy, going out?"

Skimpole had just come downstairs with a leather bag in his hand, and his cap obviously concealed under his jacket. He seemed inclined to avoid the chums of the Shell, but it was impossible, and he stopped.

"Yes, I am going for—for a little walk," he said. "It is a—a very pleasant October evening, and—and in short, I am going for a little walk."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Yes, it's a pleasant misty evening, with a pleasant little drizzle coming on," he agreed. "May as well speak out, Skimmy. You are going out to play the giddy goat!"

"Really, Tom Merry, I——"

"You are going out of bounds," said Tom Merry severely, "and that bag contains the grub you told us you were going to hide in the wood. Now, then, isn't that it?"

Skimpole turned very red, and looked uneasy.

"Well, perhaps you are right," he said. "I really think you might show a little more sympathy in this matter, Tom Merry. You can see that poor Mary is almost breaking her heart over that young fellow Lynn getting the sack, and it will be a great comfort to her to know that he deserves it. When I have proved him guilty——"

"When you have what?" roared Blake.

"When I have proved him guilty, she will naturally cease to think of such a worthless fellow, and will be happy again."

"You crass idiot!"

"Really, Blake, I cannot help regarding that expression as almost rude. But I shall do my best, in spite of opposition. A sincere Socialist is only made the more determined by opposition. Pray, do not delay me any more; I am in a great hurry!"

Tom Merry laid his hand on the amateur Socialist's shoulder.

"Look here, Skimmy, you can't play the giddy goat!" he said. "You'll get into a fearful row if you go out of bounds at night! You've done it before, and been let off lightly, but you can't impose on Mr. Railton's patience too often, you know!"

"I should not hesitate, as a sincere Socialist, to break bounds for the sake of doing good," said Skimpole; "but, at it happens, I have a pass out of bounds to-night!"

"A pass?" said Tom Merry suspiciously. "Where did you get it?"

"Knox gave it to me," said Skimpole. "I told him I particularly wanted to go down Rylcombe way, and he has given me a pass. I am going to do a little shopping for him in the village."

Jack Blake gave a sniff.

"Yes, I know what that means! You are going to get cigarettes for him!"

"Really, Blake, I suppose a prefect can do as he likes? As a sincere Socialist, I approve of everyone doing as he likes! If Knox chooses to ruin his wind by smoking cigarettes, why shouldn't he? It's his own wind, isn't it?"

"Rats!" said Tom Merry. "You're talking rot, Skimmy; but you always are, so we won't argue the point! If you hadn't a pass, I should march you in again by the scruff of your neck. As it is, I suppose I can't stop you from playing the giddy goat!"

"I am only able to conclude, Merry, that your absurd remarks are dictated by an envy of my wonderful ability as a detective!"

"Exactly!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Go ahead, ass! Come on, you chaps!"

Skimpole left the house rather hurriedly, as Tom Merry & Co. went upstairs.

"Of all the asses," he remarked, "I think Skimmy takes the cake! He's going to make Mary happy by proving her sweetheart guilty, and he had the cheek to ask us to supply him with provisions for his expedition in search of the poachers! I should be more inclined to provide him with a strait-jacket!"

"He seems to have got them from somewhere, though!" remarked Monty Lowther.

"Yes, I dare say he has raided Gore's cupboard; he generally does when he's in want!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

They entered Tom Merry's study. The gas was turned up, showing that someone had been there since the chums of the Shell left the room. Tom Merry looked round quickly, then he gave a whoop.

"My hat! Look!"

His shout was echoed by Manners and Lowther. The good things that had been piled on the table had disappeared—hardly a thing was left. But in the place of the feast destined for D'Arcy minor's honour, was a scrawled note, pinned to the tablecloth. They did not need to guess that it was in Herbert Skimpole's handwriting. Tom Merry picked it up and read it out:

"'Dear Merry.—I have been compelled by necessity to borrow your feed. I shall return the full value of it to you out of the profits of my book on Socialism, which will be published before Christmas. Yours sincerely,

"'HERBERT SKIMPOLE.'"

The chums looked at one another. Blake sat down, gasping. Digby burst into a roar. Herries stared at the denuded table. The Terrible Three were furious.

"I think this takes the cake," said Jack Blake. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Skimmy has passed the limit this time," said Monty Lowther wildly. "Give me the chopper. He can't be out of the gates yet."

Tom Merry brightened up.

"Good! He can't be gone yet. Come on, kids! We may catch him, and get the grub back, and give him a fearful hiding into the bargain."

The juniors did not need bidding twice. Tom Merry rushed from the study, and the others followed him fast. They rushed headlong down the stairs and out into the dusky quadrangle.

## CHAPTER 8.

### The Third Form of St. Jim's.

"HERE'S the bath-room, Wally."

"Right-ho!" said D'Arcy minor. "Show us a light, will you? While I'm having a wash you might find out where they've put my box, and get me out a clean collar, will you?"

"Ya-a-s, wathah!"

"And bring me a brush to get some of this dust off."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Don't forget to give the chap a tip for carrying my box up. I don't want to be mean."

"Yaas," said Arthur Augustus faintly. And he left his young brother to clean up, and went away in search of the cheerful infant's box. It was decidedly infra dig. for a Fourth Form fellow to run errands for an infant in the Third Form. But D'Arcy's desire to render his brother's appearance a little more respectable before he saw the housemaster overpowered every other feeling. He scouted in the Third Form dormitory, and found the box, which Taggles was just placing on the floor. He gave Taggles a sixpence for Wally, and the porter grunted and left the dormitory. D'Arcy stooped down to open the box, and remembered that he had forgotten to ask Wally for the key.

"Bai Jove!" murmured the swell of St. Jim's. "That young boundah will exhaust me at this wate. I shall have to go down again."

He descended to the bath-room. Wally was puffing and blowing under the flowing tap, and did not see or hear him. D'Arcy tapped him on the bare back to gain his attention, and Wally started and suddenly raised his head, sending a shower of cold water over Arthur Augustus. D'Arcy started back with a gasp.

"You uttah young ass! You've wetted me."

"Hallo," said Wally, "is it you? You startled me. Sorry."

"Yaas, I should think you are sowwy," said D'Arcy witheringly, as he mopped his splashed face with a towel. "I wegard you as a careless and flippant young beast. You did not give me the key of your twunk, and I have had to come down again for it."

"Oh, that's all right," said Wally cheerfully; "it's not locked."

"Bai Jove!"

"I've lost the key ages ago. It's just corded up. You can cut the cord."

D'Arcy did not reply; his feelings were too deep. He left the bath-room and ascended to the Third Form dormitory once more. He sawed through the cord with his penknife, and the lid of the trunk started up. It was evidently crammed to its fullest capacity, and a little over. Arthur Augustus's boxes were models of neatness. But Wally did not follow in his elder brother's footsteps in this respect. Doubtless his fond mamma had seen to the packing of the box. But Wally had been at it since then, to pack in his

own personal treasures. D'Arcy raised the lid, and gave a sniff of disgust at the wild disarray that met his eyes.

Shirts and collars were jammed together with sweaters and boots, and a pretty little autumn overcoat was crammed round a muddy football. Boots and caps, pegtops and marbles, dog biscuits and white collars, formed a heap of untidiness that made the flesh of the School House swell to creep.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove! The young wascal!'

It was rather difficult to find a collar without a stain of some kind on it. Arthur Augustus selected the cleanest, and sorted out a clothes-brush. He carried them down to the bath-room, and found the new junior putting on his shirt.

"Thanks!" said Wally. "You're a brick!"

"Your box is in a feahful state, you young wascal."

"Yes, isn't it?" chuckled Wally. "Curious thing that my box always gets like that, isn't it? You shall tidy it up for me to-morrow, Gus."

"Pway get finished, and let me take you to the housemastah," said D'Arcy stiffly.

Wally did not take long to finish. Three rubs with the brush, and he announced that his clothes were all right. One hack with a comb, and his hair was finished. D'Arcy looked at him hopelessly, and led him out. He certainly looked cleaner and tidier, and a little more of a credit to the swell of the School House.

Arthur Augustus tapped at Mr. Railton's study door. The housemaster bade him enter, and the brothers went in. Wally held his cap in his hand, but did not look at all scared. He glanced round the room, and ducked his head to Mr. Railton. The master of the School House looked at them curiously

"If you please, sir, this is my young bwothah," said D'Arcy. "He has awwived at the school, sir, and I have bwought him to you."

"Ah, I am glad to see you, D'Arcy minor!" said the housemaster. "Dr. Holmes has spoken to me about you, and I have been expecting you. I understand that you have been previously at a preparatory school, and the Head informs me that you will go into the Third Form."

"Yes, sir," said Wally meekly.

"You will have a locker in the Third Form-room for your books and other things, and you will do your preparation there," said Mr. Railton. "Your brother will, I have no doubt, show you about the school and explain matters to you. You had better go and report yourself to your Form-master—Mr. Selby, in the next room."

And Mr. Railton shook hands with the new School House boy, and D'Arcy led him from the study. Wally was looking thoughtful.

"I rather like Railton," he remarked. "Seems a decent sort of merchant."

"Mr. Wailton is wathah a decent sort," said D'Arcy, with some emphasis on the "Mr."

"I wonder what my own boss will be like?"

"Mr. Selby is wathah a sharp man, and he will keep you up to the mark. I wish you would not use that extwemely vulgah word, Wally."

"Oh, rats! Let's wake the old boy up."

And Wally thumped on the door of the study next to Mr. Railton's. D'Arcy jumped, and a thin voice bade the boys enter. Mr. Selby was a gentleman with weak nerves, sometimes very lenient and sometimes very severe with his boys. He was fortunately in a lenient mood now, or that thump on the door might have cost D'Arcy minor dear.

"Ah, D'Arcy!" he said, looking over a book on his table. "D'Arcy minor—yes, quite correct. What is your full name, D'Arcy minor?"

"Walter Adolphus Montague Fitzroy Plantagenet Tudor D'Arcy, sir," said Wally, with a face as grave as that of a graven image. Mr. Selby gave a start, and looked curiously at the new junior. Then he wrote the name down in his book.

"Dear me!" he remarked. "I think Walter D'Arcy will do for—for all ordinary purposes. You will be known as D'Arcy minor, as you have an elder brother here. I shall examine you further in the morning, and assign you your place in the Form. You will have—er—No. 10 locker in the Third Form-room. You will—er—ask Jameson for the key, Jameson having been allowed to use the locker while it was empty. You will find the rules for your conduct written up in the Form-room, and I have no doubt that your brother will explain anything to you. You may go."

"Thank you, sir," said Wally demurely.

And they went. The moment the door had closed Arthur Augustus took a grip on his brother's ear that made that young gentleman wriggle.

"Here, hold on, Gus!" grunted D'Arcy minor. "Hold on! Let go!"

"You young wascal, why did you tell Mr. Selby that widiculous list of names? He will find out some time that you have only two Chwistian names."

Wally chuckled.

"Can't you understand a joke, you solemn old owl?" he said. "I think I shall have to liven you up a little, Gus. There's a little too much of the Pooh-Bah about you."

"Don't be an impertinent young wascal. I suppose I had bettah show you to the Form-woom while I'm on the mattah, as I shall have no time to attend to you to-mowwow."

"Right-ho! Lead on, Macduff!"

Arthur Augustus led the way to the Third Form-room. A considerable amount of noise was proceeding from that apartment. The juniors of the Third Form did their prep. in that room, having no studies of their own. Prep. over, they were allowed to use the room till bedtime, and they preferred it to the common-room, where they had to sit quietly or be cuffed by their elders in the Fourth Form and the Shell.

Prep. was over in the Third Form-room now. The infants, as they were called at St. Jim's, were enjoying their relaxation. The Form-rooms were common property between the two Houses, and there were New House as well as School House boys there. Twenty-five or thirty youngsters, from the age of nine to that of thirteen or fourteen, were in the room, most of them with inky fingers, and a great many with inky faces. Two or three of them were older still—lazy "slackers," who had failed again and again to get their remove, and remained among the infants of the Third, although they towered above many of the smaller boys in the Fourth Form. Among these was Jameson, who, by reason of his size, was the cock of the Form.

The Third-Formers were playing leap-frog down the centre of the room, and Jameson had just alighted close to the door when Arthur Augustus opened it. Jameson turned round and looked at the swell of the School House aggressively.

"Hallo, here's a lark!" he exclaimed. "If it isn't Gussy!"

D'Arcy gave him a withering look. Jameson was bigger than D'Arcy, as a matter of fact, and nearly as old, but he was an "infant," while Arthur Augustus was in the Fourth. Therefore, he should have been respectful. But he wasn't.

"Jameson," said D'Arcy frigidly, "you will have the gweat kindness to give the key of No. 10 locker to my young bwothah, who is comin' into the Third."

"What a lark!" roared Jameson. "Another Gussy, and in the Third! Won't we warm him—eh?"

"Well, rather!" said Curly Gibson, a little fellow with an innocent face, flaxen hair, blue eyes, and the most mischievous disposition in the School House. "Won't we just!"

Arthur Augussus looked a little dismayed. Wally was a trouble to him and a worry, that could not be denied, but in his heart the swell of St. Jim's had a real regard for his younger brother. He wanted to make things easy for him at the beginning at St. Jim's. It looked as if they were to be far from easy.

"If you tweat my bwothah with wudeness, Jameson," he said, "I shall give you a feahful thwashin'."

"Rats!" said Jameson promptly. "Get out! Travel! Slide! We don't allow Fourth-Formers in this room. Bunk!"

"I uttahly wefuse to bunk."

"Then we'll jolly well bunk you," shouted Jameson. "Come on, kids!"

An inky-fingered crowd surrounded the swell of St. Jim's at once. In their own quarters the Third Form were cheekier than they ventured to be in the quad or the common-room. Jameson laid violent hands upon Arthur Augustus, and Arthur Augustus promptly knocked him down. Curly Gibson collared D'Arcy minor. D'Arcy minor did not show any signs of being scared. He let out his left with scientific accuracy, and Gibson sat down. He sat down without knowing exactly how he got there, but feeling as if his chin had been kicked off by a particularly powerful mule. He felt for it, and was almost surprised to find it still there. Gibson looked at D'Arcy minor doubtfully, and retired. He had no desire to sample further what Wally could do with his left.

But the odds were great. The brothers were rushed to the door by force of numbers, and hurled into the passage. The doorway was crowded with a pack of jeering fags. Arthur Augustus, with his blood at fever heat with indignation, was charging back, when Wally caught him by the sleeve and stopped him.

"Cheese it, kid!" he said. "No go."

"Welease me, Wally!"

"Rats! Let's get along and have that feed."

"Jameson has not given you the key of the lockah."

"I'll make him give it to me presently," grinned Wally. "I think I could knock that merchant out, big as he is.

But the fact is, if I'm backed up by a fellow in a higher Form, they'll all be down on me," went on Wally, as he dragged his brother along the passage. "I don't want to make a start like that."

"Yaas, there is certainly somethin' in that," admitted Arthur Augustus.

"As a matter of fact," went on Wally, "it's rather up against a fellow to have a brother in a higher Form. Of course, I don't blame you," added Wally magnanimously.

Arthur Augustus breathed hard through his nose. It was up against a fellow in the Fourth to have a brother in the "infants," and to risk being continually dragged into the rows and squabbles of a set of inky fags. It had never occurred to the swell of St. Jim's that there was an opposite side of the question, too. At the same time, he felt a little relieved in his mind. Wally was evidently able to take care of himself. He was not likely to need any assistance in keeping his end up among the Third-Formers.

"Vewy well, let's get to Tom Mewwy's study," said Arthur Augustus.

They went down the long corridors, and came out into the School House passage. Tom Merry came in from the quadrangle at the same moment, looking very flushed and annoyed.

"Anythin' the mattah, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Yes; the feed's been scoffed."

## CHAPTER 9.

### Tea in Tom Merry's Study.

WALLY gave a grunt. The news was particularly unwelcome to him, because he was very hungry, and he had been looking forward to the feed. He would have been fighting Jameson now had not the thought of the feed in Tom Merry's study drawn him away from the Third Form-room. Naturally, he felt annoyed.

"Bai Jove," said Arthur Augustus, "it is a New House waid!"

"No; it's that villain Skimpole. He's borrowed the feed, and walked it off. The silly ass is going out to track down the poachers, and he wanted to take provisions along with him. We've hunted round the quadrangle for him, and can't find him. He's vanished!"

"He's gone out, right enough," said Monty Lowther, coming in. "I've asked Taggles, and he says he let him out, and Brown's man gave him a lift to the village in his trap."

"Then it's all up with the grub."

"I say, that's rotten!" said Wally. "I'm pretty sharp set. What are you going to do?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"We won't let you starve, youngster. Where's Blake? I suppose he brought in the things from Rylcombe. Did you bring in much, Blake?"

"Middling," said Jack Blake, coming in. "You see, I thought you had most of the feed here. But I dare say there will be enough to go round. Let's see, anyway! I left the stuff up in your study."

They ascended to the study. Blake's parcel was still there, lying on the table. It was unwrapped, and the quantity of good things it contained satisfied the juniors.

"We've got some grub left," Manners remarked. "There's heaps of bread, and lots of butter and jam in the cupboard, and part of a ham."

"I don't know about that ham," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "I was going to have some of it last night, and it was rather—rather—well, rather ratherish!"

"Oh, it's all right!" said Manners, opening the cupboard and taking out the ham. "Things keep any time in this cold weather. I don't want any ham myself. I don't care for it much; but this is perfectly good, and you needn't be afraid of it."

"I don't know that I care for ham much," remarked Lowther. "But put it on the table, by all means. Do you care for ham, young D'Arcy?"

"Sometimes," said Wally; "not that kind, though. I suppose this is a high-tea; but I don't believe in having it too high. That ham is simply soaring!"

Tom Merry smiled in a sickly sort of way.

"Better shove it out of the window, Manners!" he remarked.

"It's been a jolly good ham!" said Manners regretfully. "It seems a pity to waste it. Suppose we keep it for Herries's bulldog."

"Let me catch you poisoning my bulldog!" said Herries. "I tell you this ham has been a jolly good ham!"

"Sling it out of the window, old chap!" said Wally. "It talks!"

"I'll sling you out of the window, you cheeky kid, if you call me old chap!"

"Is that how you usually speak to a guest?" asked Wally innocently.

Manners turned red. He did not reply to the question, but opened the window, and slung out the ham with a swing of his arm. There was a terrific yell from the darkness below.

"Ow! Ow! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "That's Gore's voice. You've stumped him!"

"Blessed if I knew anybody was there," said Manners. "I suppose he's gone out into the quad to do some of his filthy smoking on the quiet. Serve him right!"

"Well, we've seen the last of the ham, that's one comfort!" said D'Arcy minor.

But D'Arcy minor was mistaken. There was a sudden crash of breaking glass, and the ham came whizzing back into the room. Gore had returned it—through the window-pane. The ham dropped on the knees of Arthur Augustus, who had just sat down.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "What's that? Ow!"

He jumped up, and the ham rolled on the floor. There was a yell of laughter from the quadrangle. Gore considered that he had got his own back. Manners picked up the ham once more, and started towards the door with a vengeful look.

"Where are you going?" called out Tom Merry.

"To find Gore!"

"Cheese it! You banged him on the napper, you know!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"He's busted our window, and it hasn't been broken for more than a week!"

"Never mind; you must have nearly busted his napper. Chuck the ham into his study, and come in and feed."

Manners grinned, and went along the Shell passage to the next study. He hurled the ham into it, and closed the door. He came back, with a faint, lingering scent of the ham about him. Wally sniffed a little.

"Never mind the window," he said. "We want a little fresh air after that ham! If you've got any potatoes, I'll show you how to bake them in their skins a treat."

"We haven't any," said Monty Lowther; "and we know how to bake them in their skins a treat, without instruction in that important branch of knowledge from a Third-Form kid!"

"Oh, keep your wool on, old son!"

"Yaas, wathah; keep your wool on, Lowthah! My young bwothah only wants to be obligin'."

"Oh, don't you begin!" said D'Arcy's young brother ungratefully. "Never saw such a solemn old owl as Gus. He ought to be in the House of Lords! I say, is that feed ever going to be ready? I'm jolly hungry."

"Sit down, dear boy!" said Lowther affectionately, pushing a chair towards D'Arcy minor. "Make yourself comfortable, and don't stand on ceremony! Dear me!"

One leg of the chair gave way as D'Arcy minor sat on it, and he rolled on the floor. Lowther gazed at him with great concern.

"Dear me! I hope you're not hurt," he said. "How stupid of me to forget that that was the visitors' chair—I mean, that that was the one with the weak leg. Not hurt, I hope?"

"Oh, no!" said Wally, rubbing his leg. "Not at all; not a bit!"

He sat down on another chair. The chums gathered round the table. The absolute coolness and self-possession of the Third-Form junior had, as Blake put it, flabbergasted the boys of the Fourth and the Shell. Exactly how to deal with him they did not know—Arthur Augustus least of all. But he was a guest for the time being, and so they possessed their souls with patience. Manners made the tea, and Tom Merry poured it out.

"Pass my cup, kid!" said Lowther, who was sitting next to Wally.

"Certainly!" said Wally politely.

He was busy with knife and fork on a pork-pie. He laid them down, and passed Lowther's cup of tea along. As it approached Lowther, the cup slid from the saucer, and inverted itself on Lowther's knees. Monty gave a fearful shriek and jumped up, knocking the table with his knees and making the crockeryware dance.

"Oh! Ow! I'm scalded!"

"Dear me!" said D'Arcy minor. "I'm so sorry! I hope you're not hurt!"

"You young——"

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry warningly. "Visitors!"

"Ow! My trousers are soaked, and I'm scalded!"

"Well, I'm sorry," said Wally—"as sorry as you were for giving me the visitors' chair by mistake! I can't say more!"

Lowther looked daggers at the new junior. The others burst into a roar. Monty mopped the tea off his trousers with his handkerchief, and sat down again. He took care to get a little farther from D'Arcy minor. That youth pursued his meal with a cheerful smile upon his face.

D'Arcy minor was hungry, and he did ample justice to the feed in Tom Merry's study. The juniors looked after him well. Lowther was unusually quiet, and Manners did not seem to have much to say. But Tom Merry took the cheek and coolness of the new "infant" with perfect good-humour. D'Arcy minor amused him.

D'Arcy minor was quite unconscious of either exasperating or amusing anybody. He had a good tea, and was comfortable. When the feed was over, he rose at last with a very satisfied expression, and a smear of jam upon his chubby face.

"Well, that was a jolly good feed, and I'm much obliged," he said. "It was decent of you to look after me like this. I'll do as much for you when I get settled here. I always run through my tin, but I can easily borrow some of Gus——"

"Weally, Wally——"

"And I'll do you down first chop!" said D'Arcy minor.

"You may not be aware, young man," said Blake solemnly, "that it would be infra dig. for Fourth-Formers to feed with a Third-Form infant. We would not come!"

"Oh, I expect you'd come when you saw the grub!" said Wally calmly. "You wouldn't stand so much on your dignity as a Fourth-Former if you were hungry. If you fellows would like to see some fun, you can look into the Third Form-room presently."

"You had bettah not go back there now, Wally!"

"My dear kid, I must get the matter settled to-night, and start clear to-morrow!" said Wally. "I've got to make Jameson give me the key of my locker, and I know jolly well that he won't give it up without a hiding!"

"You—you young ass!" gasped Tom Merry. "Jameson will make mincemeat of you!"

"Gammon!" said the younger son of Lord Eastwood cheerfully. "You can come and look on, if you like! Mind, you're not to back me up. It's bad form to be backed up by fellows higher up in the school. I wouldn't stand that. You can look on if you like."

"We may as well go and see him slaughtered!" said Blake. "It will be rather amusing, and we can bury him quietly behind the woodshed when the fags have done with him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry. "We'll just go along, and we won't interfere unless D'Arcy minor asks us to. It's settled."

"I sha'n't ask you to, my pippins!" said D'Arcy minor. "Come on, kids!"

And Wally led the way. The juniors followed—Tom Merry laughing, Lowther frowning, and the rest of the juniors wearing mingled expressions, as if they did not quite know what they thought about the latest addition to the Third Form at St. Jim's.

## CHAPTER 10.
### Knocked Out!

D'ARCY MINOR opened the door of the Third Form-room. There was still a great deal of noise in that apartment. Some of the youngsters were reading or playing draughts or dominoes. But some were boxing, and Jameson and Gibson were having a bout with foils. But the various occupations ceased at once as the face of D'Arcy minor, with its bland smile and its smear of jam, was seen in the doorway. Jameson dropped his foil.

"Hallo! Here's that kid again!" he exclaimed. "Have you come back to be slaughtered?"

"I've come for the key of my locker, please!" said Wally.

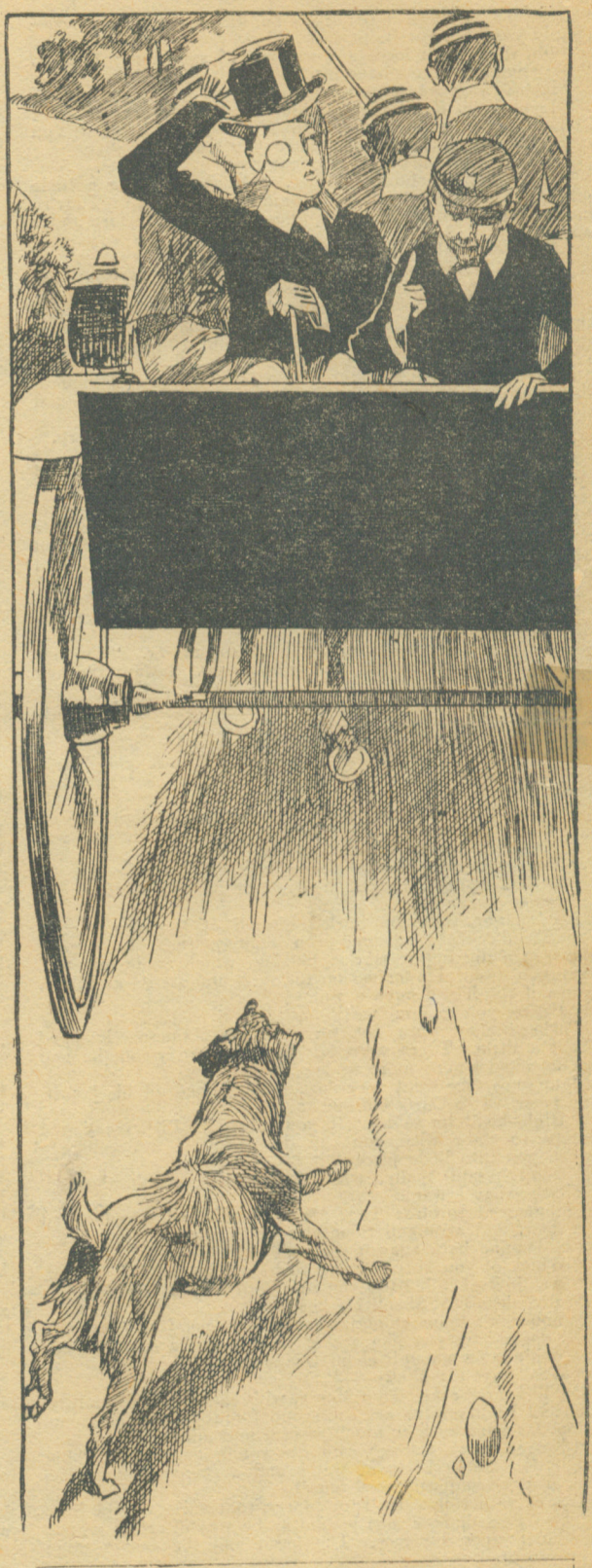
"The what?" said Jameson, in a terrifying voice.

"The key of my locker. I am to have No. 10, and Mr. Selby says that you have the key, as you've been using the locker while it was empty."

"And I'm going to continue to use it, my son," said Jameson, grinning. "You can shove your books and things under a desk, or in the coal-box! Keep 'em in the box-room! That's good enough for a new fag! Here, what are these outsiders doing here? We don't allow the Fourth Form and the Shell in this room!"

Tom Merry & Co. had walked in. Arthur Augustus had been ejected earlier in the evening, as we know. But it was different when it came to ejecting seven of the best junior athletes in the School House. As a matter of fact, Tom Merry & Co. could have taken on the whole of the Third Form, and knocked them into a cocked-hat.

"You'd better kick us out, then," said Blake sweetly.



Wally D'Arcy shook his finger reprovingly at his shaggy favourite. "You young rip," he said, "I'll lick you if you don't learn manners! Follow on now!"

"Come on! We're waiting to be kicked out, Jameson—simply yearning for it, in fact!"

"Oh, don't let's have a Form row!" said Curly Gibson. "Let young jam-face have his key!"

"Rats!" said Jameson angrily.

"Look here, if all these fellows have come here to back him up, it's no good having a row," muttered Curly. "You can bung him in the eye to-morrow to make up."

Jameson shook his head obstinately.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Wally. "You're making a little mistake. These chaps haven't come to back me up. They're here to see the fun. They've promised not to interfere under any circs."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Unless D'Arcy minor asks us to," said Tom Merry.

D'Arcy minor sniffed.

"I'm not likely to ask you to, Merry. I can look out for myself. You see, you kids? These chaps are only spectators. Jameson is going to give me my locker key, or I shall make him—off my own bat!"

Jameson laughed, and the other Third-Formers joined in the laugh. Wally was a head shorter than Jameson, and slighter built in every way.

"You'd better be careful, kid!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Oh, rats, Merry!"

Wally crossed over to Jameson. The cock of the Third looked at him with a grin.

"I want the key of my locker," said Wally.

"Can't be done," said Jameson. "I have three lockers at present. I need them all. One of the other fellows will let you have a corner of his, perhaps, if you stand him some tarts. Gibson might."

"Well, I might let you keep some things in my locker, young D'Arcy," said Gibson. "We'll talk it over in the tuckshop to-morrow morning."

"Thank you for nothing," said D'Arcy minor. "I'm not looking for a conversation in the tuckshop. I want the key of my locker."

"You'll have to go on wanting for a considerable time, I think," said Jameson, yawning.

"If you don't give it up I shall fight you for it."

"If you don't stop your cheek I shall lick you," said Jameson, beginning to get red in the face. "I've had about enough of it, you know. Drop it!"

Wally put up his right, and gave Jameson a slight tap on the nose. The cock of the Third staggered back. He was not hurt, but he was utterly amazed.

"You—you—you cheeky young villain!" he gasped.

"Is that enough," asked Wally, "or do you want one in the eye to warm you up?"

For answer, Jameson hurled himself at the new boy in the Third. Wally dodged the clumsy rush, and gave Jameson a dig in the ribs in passing, which made him reel against a desk. He leaned on the desk and stared at Wally. Some of the Third gave a yell.

"Bravo, young Jam-face!"

Perhaps they were not sorry to see Jameson knocked about a little. There were few in the Form whom he had not knocked about, more or less, himself.

Jameson's face went very dark. He slipped off his jacket, and passed it to Curly Gibson.

"Right-ho!" he said. "If you mean it, I'll give you a chance to show what you can do. Mind, I am going to smash you into little pieces."

"Good!" said Wally, without appearing much alarmed. "That's what I want."

He glanced towards Tom Merry & Co., who had closed the door, and arranged themselves in a row just inside the room, leaning back against the wall to look on.

"Which of you kids is going to be my second?" he asked.

"Bai Jove, I will back you up, Wally, deah boy!"

Wally, dear boy, shook his head.

"You don't know enough about the game, Gus," he said. "I'd depend on you like a shot in choosing a silk hat, but you don't know enough about this sort of thing."

"Weally, young Wally——"

"Will I do?" asked Tom Merry, with exaggerated humility. "I shall be happy to act as second for a young gentleman whom I regard with so much respect and admiration."

"Not so much toffee," said the young gentleman; "but you'll do. Get a basin of water and a sponge from somewhere—this chap will need 'em."

It was rather new to Tom Merry to receive orders from a Third Form infant, but he did as he was directed, with a droll look upon his face. The basin and the sponge were soon procured.

Meanwhile, the adversaries had stripped for the combat. Jameson had a swaggering manner, as if he expected to knock his enemy out in a round or two. All the same, he made careful preparations. He realised, in spite of his swagger, that the new boy in the Third would be a tough nut to crack. He took off his waistcoat, and tied his braces round his waist, and rolled back his cuffs. A pair of brawny arms were exposed to view. Wally's were about two-thirds the size of them. But Wally's arms were hard as nails, while Jameson's were just a little flabby. From what could be seen of Wally, it was pretty clear that he was "hard."

"Shove the basin there," said D'Arcy minor. "Stick the sponge in it. You can stand back, too, and don't get in the way."

"Certainly!" said Tom Merry.

"Who's going to be time-keeper?"

"I see you know all about it, young shaver."

"I knocked out every fellow in my Form at the preparatory school," said Wally modestly, "and I've fought with nearly every boy in the village near my pater's house at home. I like to go by the rules, you know. None of your scrambling for me. Still, it's just as you like, Jameson. Will you have rounds or rough-and-tumble?"

"Rats!" said Jameson.

"We'll say rounds, then—three-minute rounds, and one-minute rests."

"Will your lordship deign to honour me by allowing me to keep time?" asked Jack Blake.

"No gammon! You can keep time, but keep an eye on your watch, and don't get mooning."

Blake gasped. But he took up his position, watch in hand. The adversaries toed an inky mark on the floor, which had apparently been placed there on a previous occasion of the same sort. They shook hands in the approved style, and then Jameson hit out. His fist went within an inch of Wally's nose, and then glided upward as the blow was guarded, and D'Arcy minor came in under his guard with left and right. Jameson took the right on the chin, and the left just under the nose, and staggered back, and sat on Gibson's knee.

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Bravo, Jam-face!" yelled the Third Form.

Jameson sprang forward again, his face dark and convulsed with anger. The shout of the Third-Formers showed him upon what an insecure tenure he held his dominion in the Third. The young rascals were ready to welcome any new champion as cock of the Third, and most of them would be glad to see Jameson licked and pulled off his perch, as they would have expressed it.

Jameson's rush was heavy, and hard to withstand by a boy of so much lighter weight. Wally did not try to stop him. He feinted and dodged, and Jameson followed him furiously round the ring, hitting out every moment. But nearly every blow was guarded. It was not till the end of the round that he managed, by sheer weight and strength, to get through Wally's guard, and get home a blow from the shoulder. But that blow was a telling one, with the burly junior's strength behind it. Wally spun half-round, and crashed down on the floor in a heap, and Jameson panted over him triumphantly.

"Time!" cried Jack Blake.

"Rot!" growled Jameson. "Get up, you cheeky young beggar, and be finished off."

"Time!" said Blake, with unpleasant emphasis. "If you transgress the rules of this combat, Jameson, I shall have to take a hand in it myself."

"Oh, rats!" said Jameson sulkily. But he stepped back, and rested on a desk for the one-minute interval. Tom Merry helped D'Arcy minor to his feet. He sponged his face, Wally sitting on his knee the while. Wally gasped for breath. He had had a very hard knock, and it had had its effect upon him. But it was easy to see that his spirit was as undaunted as ever.

"Feel all right?" asked Tom Merry, when the minute had ticked away.

"Of course," said D'Arcy minor. "You don't think I mind a tap like that, do you?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"I should have minded it myself, that's all."

"Well, really," said Wally, in a lower voice, "it was a hard knock, and a few more like that would send me to sleep. I was an ass to let him do it. He won't do it again."

"I hope not. Up you get!"

"Time!" said Blake.

The Third-Formers crowded round eagerly to watch the second round. Tom Merry looked on with keen interest. He was rather a connoisseur himself in these matters. Third Form fights were usually wild scrambles, unworthy of the attention of a fellow in the Shell; but Wally was a rather original Third-Former. The fight in the Form-room was worth watching. Tom Merry was curious to see how it would turn out, and he was beginning to think that the new "infant" would prove the victor, in spite of the size and strength of his adversary. Wally was evidently marvellously proficient, for a junior, in the art of self-defence.

Jameson pushed his young opponent hard, driving him round the ring, attempting to get in another knock-down

blow. A couple more of such heavy hits would have knocked Wally out of time, and both of them knew it. But it was not easy to get in such a drive again. Wally was as watchful as a cat.

At last Jameson saw his opportunity. A careless guard, and Jameson went forward with plunging fists. But it happened to be only a feint—a trap into which the bigger boy had fallen blindly. Wally's left whipped round in time to dash aside his drive, and then Wally's right came crashing forward. Jameson's guard was completely lost; he had given himself quite away. Wally's right bumped on his jaw, and he staggered. Then Wally's left came crashing home, and there was a spurt of red from Jameson's nose. He reeled back, his hands dropping blindly, and Wally sprang forward like a little tiger, both fists coming out together in a grand drive. Crash they went upon Jameson's chest, and the cock of the Third was hurled back as if by a cannon-ball. The bump of his fall on the floor rang through the room.

"Bravo!" roared the juniors. "Bravo, Jam-face!"

"Huwwah!" cried Arthur Augustus enthusiastically. "Huwwah! Bwavo! Wippin'!"

Tom Merry patted his principal on the shoulder. The round was not quite up, and Wally would have been justified in claiming the combat if his adversary did not rise when ten were counted. And Jameson could not have done it. But the youthful Walter Adolphus was evidenly a sportsman. He grinned at Tom Merry.

"What do you think, now, my son?" he asked.

"Jolly good, daddy," replied Tom Merry gravely.

D'Arcy minor laughed a little breathlessly.

"To tell you the truth, Merry, he's a tough nut," he said. "He doesn't know much about fighting, but he's as strong as an ox. I suppose he has found it easy to crow over these kids because he's so big. He was just waiting for a boxer to come along."

"And now one has come along!" laughed Tom Merry.

"Exactly! I think one more round will be enough for him. What?"

"I think so, too."

Jameson would probably have been satisfied without another round, but his backers were urging him on. He felt that he was licked, but the Third Form were by no means tired of the entertainment yet. A dozen voices urged Jameson to proceed, and some lingering hope of yet snatching victory from the jaws of defeat urged him on also. He stood up for the third round, looking decidedly groggy.

The third round was merely a farce, however. The punishment Jameson had received had left him sick and dizzy. His blows were all clumsy, and easily guarded, and he hardly stopped one of those that Wally gave him in return. Wally was a generous foe. He saw that the game was in his hands, and he let his adversary down lightly. The round ended with a smart tap that made Jameson sit down suddenly.

Curly Gibson picked him up as Blake called time. Jameson was looking dazed. One of his eyes was closed, and his nose was swollen and red. His lip was cut, his cheeks growing blue, and the "claret" was flowing in two or three places. It was pretty clear that Jameson of the Third was absolutely "done."

"Going on?" asked Curly.

"No!" grunted his principal.

"Better try another round," urged Curly. "You may lick him yet, you know. You're bigger than he is, and you ought to be able to lick him, you know."

"Tackle him yourself, then!" snapped Jameson.

"I think you ought to go on. You oughtn't to let a newcomer lick you in three rounds. Take him on for a fourth, anyway. It's fun, you know. Ow!" Curly broke off suddenly as the indignant Jameson let out his left. Curly sat down against a form.

"What did you do that for?" he gasped.

"Oh, you shut up!" said Jameson.

"Time!" called out Jack Blake.

"I'm done!" grunted Jameson.

"Well, you look it."

"Give us your fist, old son!" said Wally cheerily. "No harm done."

Jameson hesitated a moment, and then shook hands with the victor. In spite of Wally's coolness and usual cheek, there was no trace of crowing in his manner. He seemed like a youth who had been through too many fights to attach much importance to one more.

"You'll let me have the key of my locker," he said politely.

Jameson grinned faintly through his bruises, and detached a key from a bunch, and gave it to the new junior without a word.

"Thanks awfully," said Wally. "It's all over, you kids. What are you thumping me on the back for, you fathead?"

"Congratulating you," said Sanders of the Third.

"Well, don't congratulate me again like that, or you'll get hurt. Some of you were talking about ragging me a while ago. I'm ready for the ragging. I'd like to get it all over this evening, and start clear to-morrow. Where are the raggers?"

There was no reply. The Third-Formers looked at one another rather queerly. They would as soon have ragged a wild bull as this new junior who had so easily licked the cock of the Third. Wally looked round inquiringly, but no one met his eye.

"Any raggers?" he asked again.

"I think not," murmured Curly Gibson. "That was a little joke, you know."

"Good! I'll have my jacket, Merry, if you've done cackling."

"Certainly!" said Tom Merry.

Jack Blake helped D'Arcy minor on with his jacket. Then he slapped him on the shoulder.

"Jolly good!" he said. "You know how to use your fists, and I don't think the Third will do any ragging in your case, young 'un."

"I don't think they will," agreed Wally, "and the Fourth won't, either. From what I've seen, it seems to me that the Fourth Form puts on a lot of airs here towards the Third. That won't go down with me, you know."

"Weally, Wally——"

"Now, don't you begin, Gussy! What I mean is, no fellow will ever put on airs to me without getting a dot on the nose. That's a friendly hint."

Blake looked at Tom Merry, and they both grinned. There was no doubt that D'Arcy minor was a "coughdrop." Wally set his collar straight—as straight as he ever wore it—and gave his face a rub with the towel, and asked his brother if he looked all right.

"No, you don't look all wight," said Arthur Augustus. "You look vewy wuff and wumpled, and you want a wash."

"Well, I shall have one to-morrow morning," said D'Arcy minor. "Where's that chap, Herries? I want to go round and see my dog again before bed-time."

"Oh, right-ho!" grinned Herries. "Consider me your guide. Come on!"

D'Arcy minor followed Herries from the room. He left the place in a buzz of comment on his latest exploit. Jameson found himself disregarded. Boys who had trembled at his frown now openly discussed his licking before his face. Jameson, like Lucifer Son of the Morning, had fallen from his high estate, and great was the fall thereof. He went away quietly to bathe his injuries, dolefully conscious that he was no longer cock of the Third. Tom Merry & Co. walked away, discussing D'Arcy minor with great interest. Arthur Augustus was looking pleased. He regarded all fighting as "wuff," if not "bwutal," but he could not help being proud of the exploit of his young brother.

## CHAPTER 11.

### D'Arcy Minor takes French Leave.

D'ARCY minor put his hands in his trousers pockets, and whistled cheerily as he followed Herries round the New House to the building where he had left his favourite, Pongo. He did not seem much the worse for the fight. As a matter of fact, he had received only one really serious blow, and he had almost recovered from that. There were a few marks on his chubby face; but he was accustomed to that sort of thing.

The evening was growing old. It was getting near bed-time for the Third Form, and Wally wanted to see his dog safe for the night before he turned in. He had a strong affection for the sneaking, slinking, ragged little mongrel, which could not have been greater if Pongo had been a dog of the finest breed. They entered the building, and Wally whistled for Pongo with that shrill note which was intolerable to any ears but his own and Pongo's.

But the usual reply of Pongo was not to be heard. Wally whistled again, and still there was silence as far as Pongo was concerned. The other animals were not silent. Herries' bulldog gave a very audible growl. There was a scream from a parrot, and a chatter from a monkey. But the voice of Pongo was not heard. Wally looked anxious.

"Pongo—Pongo! Good doggie! Pongo!"

But Pongo did not reply. Wally took a lantern Herries had lighted, and looked round in great anxiety for his pet. Pongo was not to be seen. He was invisible as well as inaudible. It was clear that he was gone. His collar lay on the ground beside the box where he had been placed. The dog had evidently slipped his collar, and escaped.

"He's gone," said Herries.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" said Wally. "He's always

slipping his collar, you know. He goes out after the rabbits of a night, and there's no stopping him."

"He'll jolly well get shot if he goes after the rabbits round here," said Herries. "My dog Towser was shot at twice by that brute Barberry, and he's a nice, quiet animal, as you can see for yourself."

"Yes, I was thinking of that," said Wally, looking anxious. "I wouldn't have old Pongo hurt for anything. If he's got out, I shall have to go and look for him."

Herries laughed.

"You can't go out to-night, you young ass. The gates are locked."

"Have you never got over a gate?" asked Wally.

"Yes; but a kid in the Third can't break bounds."

"That's all you know," said Wally, going out of the building.

"Look here, you young ass, if you are missing at bed-time you'll get a record licking."

"Well, I'll look round inside the walls first," said Wally. "But depend upon it, Pongo has gone rabbiting. He'd get out through a keyhole if there wasn't any other way."

"I don't see how he could get out if the gate hasn't been opened. Better get along to the porter's lodge, and ask Taggles if he's seen him."

"Yes, that's a good idea."

Taggles was sitting in his little parlour, enjoying a glass of gin and water, when a sudden knock came at his door. He was not used to being knocked up at that hour, and the start he gave spilt a considerable portion of the gin and water over his waistcoat. Taggles was fond of gin and water, taken internally. Externally even that charming compound was unpleasant. He rose with a growl to go to the door. Nor was his humour improved when he saw two juniors standing there.

"Young himps!" grunted Taggles. "I'll report yer!"

"Have you seen my dog?" asked D'Arcy minor.

"Blow your dorg." And Taggles would have closed the door, but D'Arcy minor inserted his foot in the opening, and he could not. Wally was not to be got rid of so easily.

"Hold on, old son," he remarked coolly. "I am looking for my dog. He's a little ragged chap, with a cast in one eye, and one of his ears bitten off. Have you seen him?"

"Yes, I 'ave," said Taggles, with much satisfaction. "He ran hout when I opened the gates last for the 'Ead's carriage. He ain't come hin."

"You are sure he went out?"

"Yes, drat yer! You won't never see him ag'in, I 'opes." And Wally's foot, being now withdrawn, Taggles closed the door, and returned to what was left of his gin and water.

"Sorry!" said Herries. "Can't be helped, though. He'll turn up again. I say, where are you going, young 'un?"

"I'm going to look for Pongo."

"You can't. Don't be a young ass!" exclaimed Herries, in alarm. "You'll get into a fearful row. Come in with me."

"Rats!" said D'Arcy minor. "I'm going over the wall. I'm not going to have Pongo shot by any rotten keeper. I'm going to look for him. Give me a bunk up."

"Don't be an ass!" urged Herries.

"Give me a bunk up."

Herries hesitated, but Wally had already taken hold of the ivy. He gave him the required bunk, though with many misgivings. The Third-Former drew himself up on the ivied wall, and dropped down on the other side. Herries stood staring at the place for some moments, and then turned slowly and walked towards the School House. The moon was coming out over the clock-tower, and the night was dry and cold. Herries went in, and looked for Blake, and found his leader in the common-room. Blake at once noted the disturbed expression on his chum's face.

"Where's young D'Arcy?" he asked.

"Gone out!"

"What?" almost yelled Blake.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "What did you say, Hewwies?"

"He's gone out. That rotten dog of his got out of the gates, and he's gone out to look for him. I warned him not to."

"You ought to have marched him in by the scruff of his neck!" grunted Blake.

"That would have been imposs., Blake. My young bwothah would have uttahly wefused to be marched in by the scwuff of his neck."

"Well, there will be a row," said Blake. "Those kids go to bed at nine, and it's close on nine now. Wait till Selby comes to look for him, that's all."

"Yaas, wathah! I am afwaid there will be a wow. There's anothah silly ass gone out, too—that ass Skimpole. Tom Mewwy has been inquiwin' for him, and he can't be found."

"Hasn't Skimmy come in yet?" said Blake, with interest. "My hat! Then he's really gone to look for the poachers, I suppose. He will be looking for a new school soon, if he keeps on like this."

"I'm feelin' wathah anxious about young Wally," said D'Arcy, with a clouded brow. "You see, the matah wanted me particularly to look aftah the youngstah. If he gets into any bothah to-night, and she hears of it, she will think I haven't taken pwopah care of him, though how anybody is to take care of such a young wip as Wally I weally don't know."

"We could go and look for him, and bring him in by main force," suggested Digby.

"And get into a jolly row ourselves," said Herries.

"Hallo, here's Tom Merry looking as if he had lost a threepenny bit. What's the trouble, Merry? Anything wrong?"

"Skimpole hasn't come in."

"Well, let the silly ass stay out, then."

"That's all very well, but I don't want him to get into trouble," said Tom Merry. "It isn't only that he will get a licking for staying out late. That would serve him right. But it looks as if he has really gone looking for the poachers. He may get knocked on the head as likely as not. I wish I had yanked him in and locked him up in a study, now, although he had a pass from Knox."

"If you take it on yourself to keep watch on Skimpole, you'll never be in want of a job," grinned Blake. "Jolly glad he isn't in the Fourth. I suppose you're responsible as head of the Shell. You ought to bring him up better."

Tom Merry laughed, rather uneasily.

"Well, I'm uneasy about him, and I've half a mind to go out and look for him," he said. "He's such an ass. He's bound to lose his way in the wood, if he goes into it, and he never thinks of anything till it happens. He may stay there all night, and it's going to be a jolly cold night."

"It's not a bad idea," said Herries thoughtfully. "If you like, I'll come with you and bring my bulldog. Towser is a wonder at following a scent. You remember how he followed the scent of those burglars who broke into the chapel?"

"Yes—I don't think!"

"If you mean to say that Towser didn't follow that scent——" began Herries warmly.

"My dear chap, I don't mean to say anything about Towser. I'm thinking about Skimpole. He ought to be looked for. I've a good mind to go."

"Yaas, wathah! We might make up a party, and look for young Wally at the same time."

"What's that about young Wally? Where is he?"

"He's gone out to look for that wotten mongwel of his."

Tom Merry gave a whistle.

"My hat! He's starting his career at St. Jim's pretty well. You'd better give him a hiding when you get him in again."

"Yaas, I was thinkin' of givin' him a feahful thwashin' fwom a sense of duty. I weally think I must go and look for him, at any wate. Are you coming, Blake?"

"Well, you'll get into mischief if I don't come with you!" growled Blake.

"I wefuse to accept your company on those terms, Blake. I wefuse——"

"Rats! We may as well all go together, and take the licking together when we come in. We shall be company for one another in Railton's study when he lays it on."

"Yaas, wathah! Pewwaps if we explained to Mr. Wailton, he would, we might get his permish to go out and look for the young wascal."

"More likely get a wigging for letting him go, and then he'd go out, and look for him himself, or send a couple of prefects," said Blake. "And if two prefects had to go out and find Wally, I should feel sorry for him on the way home."

"Yaas, wathah! Pewwaps we had bettah go now and ask Mr. Wailton's permish aftahwards."

"I suppose so. Are you game, Tom Merry?"

"Oh, yes, rather, and the more the merrier. Better get our coats; it's jolly cold. There's a clear moon luckily. We'll meet you at the slanting oak."

"Right you are."

And ten minutes later the juniors were on the outer side of the walls of St. Jim's. When Mr. Selby marched the Third Form off to bed, D'Arcy minor was missing, and when, at half-past nine, the Fourth Form and the Shell went up to their dormitories, they went up without Study No. 6 or the Terrible Three.

## CHAPTER 12.
### A Night Out.

"PONGO—Pongo!"

D'Arcy minor called the name softly as he went down the moonlit lane. The moon, full and round, was sailing above the tower of St. Jim's. The buildings lay a black mass in the midst of the trees. Over the lane and the woods the moonlight fell in a silver glimmer. Save where heavy branches overhung the road, the lane was as light as by day. It was a perfect October night—clear, and cold, and quiet.

Wally D'Arcy kept his eyes about him as he walked down the lane. He called to his dog, and he whistled at intervals; but no sound answered from Pongo. It was clear that the dog had made straight for the woods in search of the unfortunate bunnies. Wally stopped at a spot where a gap showed in the hedge. He bent down, and examined the thick, fallen leaves in the ditch. There were traces that seemed to indicate that a dog had lately scrambled across, to the experienced eyes of the junior. Wally had often had to follow Pongo to recapture him, and save him from vengeful keepers, and it was no new experience to him. He plunged through the hedge.

"This is just where the brute would get in!" muttered Wally. "He's after the rabbits. I'll make him sit up when I catch him. The worst of it is, that it's no good whistling him. He won't come if he's on the scent of a bunny."

Although Wally would not have admitted it to anyone else, he knew very well that, while Pongo was tracking rabbits, his master's voice would only have had the effect of making him slink quietly away beyond the sound of it. Pongo was not a well-disciplined dog.

Wally breathed all sorts of threats as he plunged into the wood. He always did when he was hunting for the truant Pongo. He never carried any of them out, but they were a solace during the hunt.

Crack! Crack!

The dull report of a gun echoed twice through the gloomy wood. Wally started, and a strange thrill ran through his veins.

"Poachers!" he murmured.

Then another thought flashed into his mind. He remembered Herries's remark concerning Barberry, the headkeeper of Sir Neville Boyle. His eyes blazed as he thought that the gun he had just heard might have been levelled at Pongo.

"My hat!" he muttered. "Pongo! Poor old Pongo! If he is——"

He did not finish the reflection, but hurried on in the direction of the shots.

The wood was thick, and dripping with moisture. Only in a few open spaces the moonlight fell. Wally blundered through the thickets. He gave a sudden start at the sound of a rustle close at hand; but before he could escape, a hand of iron was on his shoulder. He struggled instinctively.

"Quiet!" muttered a voice. "Who are you?"

It was a pleasant voice. The strong hand that gripped the junior dragged him into the open, and the moonlight fell upon him. Wally looked at his captor curiously. He wore the garb of a keeper, but he had no gun. Wally had pictured to himself a savage-featured poacher, and he was relieved to see a handsome, kindly, bronzed face, certainly not more than twenty-five years old—pleasant to look upon, though somewhat clouded in expression.

"Who are you?" said the young man, in a low voice, still keeping a tight grip upon Wally.

"I'm D'Arcy minor."

The young man started, and smiled a little.

"You are from the school?"

"Yes," said Wally.

"And you have come out after rabbits, I suppose?"

Wally flushed.

"I'm not a poacher."

"Then what are you doing here?" The young man looked at him scrutinisingly. "You ought to be in bed. The boys of St. Jim's are not allowed out at this time."

"I know that. I've taken French leave," said Wally, with a grin. "You see, my dog's bolted."

"Your dog?" said the other, looking puzzled.

"Yes, my dog Pongo. He's a rare old rabbiter, you know, and he's out after the bunnies. I've come out to look for him."

"At this time of night?"

"I've been out at midnight looking for the young bounder, at home at Eastwood!" grinned Wally. "That's nothing new. Pongo is a terror!"

"You are not allowed here, though," said the young man. "There is a public footpath through the wood, and people have to keep to it."

"Are you a keeper?" asked Wally.

To his surprise the young man coloured at the question.

"No," he replied, after a pause; "I am not a keeper—now."

"Then suppose you toddle along, and don't interfere with me!" suggested Wally. "If you're not a keeper, it doesn't matter to you what I'm doing here. But you look like a keeper," he added, scanning the young man curiously.

"I was one," said the other shortly; "I was one of Sir Neville Boyle's keepers. This wood is on Sir Neville's land."

Wally gave a low whistle.

"Oh, ho! You're the chap they were talking about in the trap, perhaps—young Lynn?"

"My name is Lynn."

D'Arcy minor chuckled.

"I know now. You are engaged to Mary at the School House at St. Jim's?"

"Yes," said Lynn quietly. "That is no affair of yours, however!"

"Oh, it's all right!" said Wally. "I heard Gus—that's my brother Gus—talking about you in the trap when I came from the station. He's awfully sorry about it, because Mary is so cut up; and he thinks you are innocent of what you were charged with, and he says he is going to set matters right—though I'm blessed if I know how."

Lynn smiled faintly.

"It is very kind of him to think so well of me. I am afraid the matter will not be set right unless I am able to set it right myself. Now, you had better cut off to the school, youngster!"

"Thank you for nothing!" said Wally coolly. "I'm looking for my dog!"

"I will look for him if you like. Give me his description."

"A ragged little rotter, with a cast in the eye, and one ear bitten off!"

"Good!" said Lynn, with a smile. "I will look out for him. I shall be about the woods for some time yet. Now you cut off!"

Wally shook his head.

"I dare say that's very good advice," he remarked; "but I can't take it, you see. I'm here to look for Pongo. He may be shot by some rotten keeper—excuse me! I'm not going in till I've found him."

Lynn laid his hand earnestly on Wally's shoulder.

"Don't be foolish, my lad! There are poachers in the wood!"

"Were they poachers I heard firing just now?"

"I don't know; very likely." Lynn looked thoughtful. "It sounded to me, though, like the report of Barberry's double-barrelled gun."

"Perhaps he was shooting at Pongo. Let me go!"

"Listen to me. There are poachers in the wood. The magistrates lately have been very severe with them. They would not hesitate at anything to get rid of a witness. If you saw them at work, you might be bludgeoned! Go home!"

"I'm not afraid!"

"I tell you, you cannot stay here!" said Lynn impatiently. "You must go!"

"I'm not going! I say," broke out Wally suspiciously, "you haven't taken to poaching yourself, have you, now that your governor has sacked you?"

Lynn turned very red. His grasp tightened on Wally, and that young gentleman was very nearly to getting a powerful box on the ear at that moment.

"No," said Lynn quietly; "I have not turned poacher. But I am going to see you out of the wood!" His grip tightened again. "Come with me!"

Wally did not argue the matter. He was determined not to go without Pongo; but he would have been a child in the hands of the powerful young keeper. He walked a few paces beside Lynn without a word, and the young man's grip relaxed. And the moment it relaxed, Wally twisted out of his grasp like an eel, and darted into the wood.

"You young rascal!" cried Lynn. "Come back!"

But Wally was gone.

## CHAPTER 13.
### Skimpole Swears!

TOM MERRY & CO. hurried down the moonlit lane, and entered the wood at a point some distance further on than the place where Wally had entered it. There was a beaten track leading through to the footpath, and the juniors preferred it to pushing their way through dense thickets. They had left St. Jim's impulsively, to look for the truants, and it was not till they were fairly in the wood that the almost hopeless nature of the search was borne in upon their minds. The woods extended for miles, and the two missing juniors might have taken any path, or might be wandering in the recesses of the wood where no path existed. But this latter thought spurred the juniors on. If

Skimpole or Wally had lost his way, a night passed in the open air might turn out a serious thing for him.

"I suppose we had better separate and halloo," said Blake doubtfully. "The trouble is that all the woods on this side of the footpath are on Sir Neville Boyle's land, and his keepers are having rows with the poachers lately. If they heard us, they'd be down on us like a hundred of bricks."

"And they couldn't very well fail to hear us, I should think," Monty Lowther remarked.

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows thoughtfully.

"That's so," he said. "We don't want to have a row with the keepers. It would lead to no end of trouble at St. Jim's. They would be bound to think we came out for rabbits, and Sir Neville might go to the Head about it."

"My hat!" said Manners. "That would make a row!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"All the same, I don't see how we are to find them without shouting. Skimpole would be pretty certain to answer. But when you come to think of it, young Wally would guess that we were after him, and he would keep mum."

"Yaas; he's a cunning young beggah!"

"Let's look round for them first, anyway. We—— Hallo! What's that?"

It was a double report; the same that Wally had heard from a different part of the wood. The juniors started as the dull, heavy sounds echoed through the dark trees.

"Poachers!" muttered Digby.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I don't know. The poachers use snares for the hares and rabbits, you know; and, as for the birds, they wouldn't be shooting them at this time. That was more likely a keeper's gun. Perhaps young Wally's dog has got it in the neck."

"Poor little beast! It may save Wally from a row, though."

"That's pretty clear proof that somebody's out in the wood, and the less row we make the better," said Monty Lowther.

"True. Hark!"

Tom Merry held up his hand, and the juniors stopped breathlessly. There was a rustle in the thicket. The boys from St. Jim's remained as still as mice, in the thick shadow of a big tree. Near them was an open patch where the moonlight fell, and a form was seen to emerge from the thickets into the light. The moon's rays glimmered on a huge pair of spectacles. Tom Merry muttered a word of warning to his comrades.

"It's Skimmy! Quiet, and we'll give him a lesson about wandering at night. He's as much trouble as Wally's dog, and he ought to learn better."

"What's the game?" murmured Blake.

"He's out looking for poachers. Why shouldn't he find some?"

The juniors chuckled softly. They caught on at once to Tom Merry's idea. Skimpole, all unconscious of the proximity of the School House boys, paused and looked round him, blinking in the moonlight. His trousers were drenched from the wet thickets, and he was shivering with cold.

"We'll collar him," murmured Tom Merry, "and make him think he's fallen into the clutches of a gang of poachers. We'll make him swear a fearful oath to get out of the wood and never come back again."

Blake chuckled outright. The sound seemed to catch Skimpole's ear, for he turned round, and stared into the black shadows under the big tree. The glimmer of the moonlight on his spectacles was all that could be seen of his face, and the effect was curious.

"Is anyone there?" said Skimpole, in a voice quavering with the cold. "If anyone is there, I shall be glad to be informed where I am. Lost in meditations upon the deplorable state of society in the present day, I have lost my path in this horrible wood. You need not be afraid to let me see you, my dear sir, if you are a poacher. As a sincere Socialist, I have to admit the right of any man to take as many rabbits as he pleases, in spite of the absurd objections of the person who happens to be the so-called owner of the land. In fact, I may go further, my friend, and explain ——"

Skimpole did not go further, for an excellent reason. Tom Merry had crept round in the dark shadows, and got behind the amateur Socialist. A grip on the back of his neck interrupted Skimpole, and before he could think of resistance, he was forced down into the grass upon his face, and a knee was planted in the small of his back.

"D-d-dear me!" gasped Skimpole. "This is—is most unpleasant! You are hurting my back! I really wish you would not be so violent!"

It was impossible for Skimpole to see his assailants. His face was pressed into the damp grass, and his spectacles were covered with moisture, so that he could not have seen Tom Merry if he had been looking straight at him. He had not the slightest doubt that he was in the grasp of a gang of poachers. One was kneeling on his back, and another was standing on his legs, and two more were holding his arms. There wasn't much chance for Skimpole. He could only gasp and wriggle.

"Hold him tight!" said Tom Merry, in a deep bass voice, which bore little resemblance to his usual tones. "He is a spy!"

"I—I am sorry that you should mistake me for a spy!" stammered Skimpole. "I am nothing of the sort! I came into the wood to make certain investigations——"

"You came to spy on us poachers!" said the deep bass voice sternly.

Skimpole wriggled uncomfortably.

"Tell me the truth, minion!"

It did not occur to Skimpole at the time that minion was a rather curious word for a poacher to use. The deep bass voice sent a thrill of terror through every nerve of the amateur Socialist.

"I—I—I shall certainly tell you the truth!" he stammered. "It is impossible for a sincere Socialist to prevaricate. I certainly did come into the wood to investigate a matter in connection with the poachers, but I had no intention of causing your arrest, I assure you. I merely wished to set the mind of Mary, the housemaid, at rest by proving to her satisfaction that her sweetheart was guilty——"

A chuckle interrupted Skimpole. But the deep, terrifying voice immediately followed:

"It will be safer to kill him and bury him in the wood, mates!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus.

"You utter idiot!" muttered Tom Merry fiercely. "Shut up!"

"I wefuse——"

Fortunately, Skimpole, with his head plunged in the thick grass, was not in a position to hear very clearly. Nor was he in a state of mind to be observant.

"Make that ass shut up, Blake!" whispered Tom Merry.

"I uttahly wefuse——"



D'Arcy was interrupted by a grip of iron on his collar, and Blake's fierce voice in his ear.

"Another word, and I'll squash you!"

Herries and Digby grasped the swell of the School House at the same moment. Arthur Augustus indignantly relapsed into silence. The deep bass voice went on:

"Have you anything to say, minion, before we bury you?"

"Ye-e-es," gasped Skimpole—"yes, rather! I have a strong objection to being buried. I will leave the wood at once, if you wish, and agree not to make any more investigations!"

"Can we trust you?"

"Yes, certainly! A sincere Socialist——"

"It would be safer to bury your trusty dagger in his ribs!" said Blake, in a deep, deep voice. "Finish him with your trusty dagger!"

"I—I—I beg of you not to be hasty! I really—really—— Please—— Oh!"

"Let him swear to keep the secret, then!" said Manners, in disguised tones. "Let him take the fearful oath, and live!"

"Wretched spy and minion, will you take the fearful oath and live?"

"Yes, certainly! I will take anything you like!"

"Hold the dagger to his throat while he swears!" growled Tom Merry.

"I—I can swear quite comfortably without the dagger too near," murmured Skimpole. "I would much rather not have the dagger to my throat, if you don't mind."

"Rats—I mean, silence, minion!"

Jack Blake opened his pocket-pencil, and jammed the point of the lead against Skimpole's neck. The amateur Socialist gave a shudder at the contact.

"P-p-p-please take it away!" he murmured. "P-p-plea——"

"Hold the trusty dagger there while he takes the oath!" growled Tom Merry.

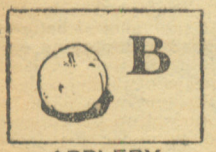
"Ay, ay, captain!"

*(Continued on page 22.)*

# GRAND FOOTBALL PUZZLE-PICTURE COMPETITION.

## FIFTY POUNDS IN CASH PRIZES.

Specimen Picture.




APPLEBY.

**First Prize—**

**£13 0 0: ONE POUND A WEEK FOR THIRTEEN WEEKS.**

**Second Prize—**

**£6 10 0: TEN SHILLINGS A WEEK FOR THIRTEEN WEEKS.**

***And 122 Cash Prizes of 5s. Each.***

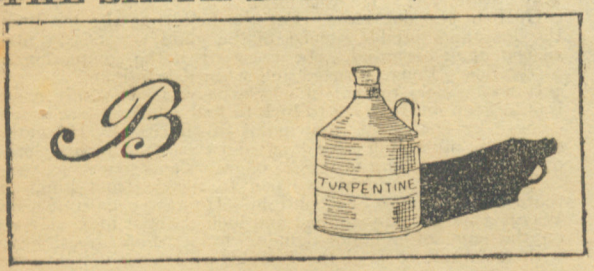
The First Prize will be awarded to the person who gets all or, failing this, most of the pictures right. The Second Prize will go to the reader nearest to the First Prize Winner, and so on. In the event of ties, the Prizes will be divided—that is to say, if two competitors tie for the first place, the first and second prizes will be divided between them, and so forth.

**What Competitors have to do.**—The Competition is very simple. We are publishing thirteen sets of Puzzle Pictures, each set consisting of six pictures. This is the Sixth Set. Keep this set until you have all the others. Each of these pictures represents the **name of a well-known Association Football Player.**

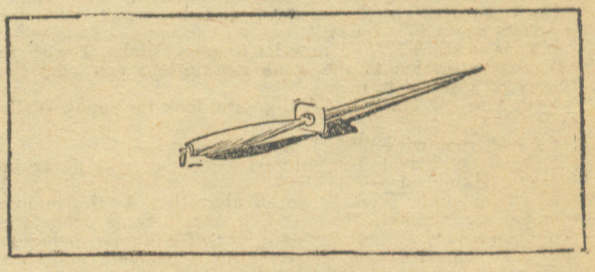
All you have to do is to write carefully under each picture the name of the Player you think it represents—it is NOT necessary to add the name of the player's club. Then place the set away until the others have appeared, when the latest day for sending in competitions will be announced. The Editor of the GEM LIBRARY will not be responsible for any loss or delay in transmission or delivery of the lists by post, nor for any accidental loss of a list after delivery. There will be attached to the final list a form to be signed by each competitor, whereby he agrees to these conditions, and no list will be considered unless this form shall have been duly signed by the competitor. No questions will be answered. Read the rules. The Editor's decision is final.

**The easiest way to solve the Pictures** is to get the issue of "The Boys' Realm" now on sale, price 1d. During the next thirteen weeks "The Boys' Realm" will publish a column of brief biographies of notable footballers, in which will be included all the names of the Players illustrated. Girls may compete. All competitors may get anyone to help them.

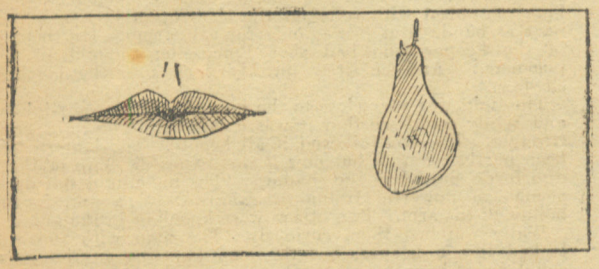
**THE SIXTH SET.** ***(Nos. 1-30 will be reproduced next week for the benefit of new readers.)***



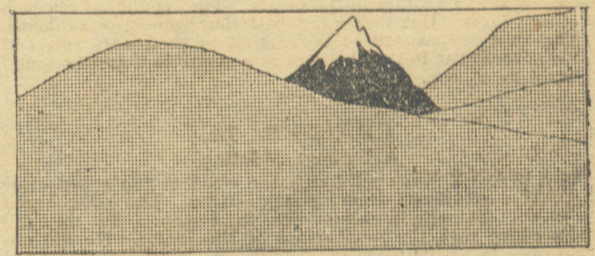

**No. 31**.....



**No. 32**.....



**No. 33**.....



**No. 34**.....


**No. 35**.....


**No. 36**.....

***KEEP THESE PICTURES BY YOU UNTIL NOTICE IS GIVEN TO SEND IN.***

"Now, base spy and minion, repeat this fearful oath after me. 'By all you hold sacred, by the Form-room at St. Jim's, the clock-tower, and the gym., by the first book of Livy, and the last book of Tacitus, that you will keep secret this dread meeting.'"

There was again a chuckle, but it was lost upon the terrified Skimpole. He repeated the rather curious oath, trembling in every limb.

"You will immediately leave the wood and go straight back to school and get to bed, without saying a word to a soul. Swear by the Iliad of Homer and the Æneid of Virgil, by the Georgics, the Bucolics, the Philippics, and the Ars Poetica."

Skimpole swore.

"Shall we let him live now that he has sworn, comrades?"

"Better make all sure by driving your trusty dagger to his heart!"

"Really——" protested Skimpole. "Really, I assure you——"

"Cheese it—I mean, silence, knave! You may go! Go, without once looking back—go, and if you linger by the way, look out for our trusty daggers, that's all!"

Skimpole was allowed to rise. His assailants disappeared in the wood. The amateur Socialist blinked round him in dismay.

"Dear me!" he murmured. "I—I should be most happy to leave the wood at once, as I have a strong objection to being murdered, but I really do not know the way."

"Keep straight forward till you get in the beaten track," said the deep voice from the bushes; "then turn to the right, and it will lead you to the lane."

"Thank you very much!" said Skimpole.

And he plunged away through the wood. The track was only a few paces distant, and he was soon running along it for his life. His footsteps died away in the distance, and the amateur poachers leaned against the trees and gasped with merriment.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "Skimmy grows funnier every day. I don't think we should have disposed of young Wally so easily."

"Well, we've disposed of Skimmy, anyway," said Blake. "He'll go straight home now, and he won't look for poachers again in a hurry."

"Yaas, wathah! And now he is gone, Blake, I wish to call your attention to the wude expwessions you took the liberty of applyin' to me——"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy! We'll go and look for young Wally now."

"I wefuse to wing off! Undah the circs.——"

"Come on!" said Tom Merry. "Gussy will never be finished talking. I——"

The hero of the Shell broke off abruptly. As the juniors plunged on through the wood a sound came from the distance—a low, strange cry—the cry of a human being in pain. It echoed among the trees for a moment, and then died away, and was followed by silence—a terrible and oppressive silence. The juniors involuntarily halted. They looked at one another in the gloom. They could not see each other's faces. But they knew that they were pale as death. That low cry seemed to be ringing in their ears yet, and the silence that followed it was more terrible than any sound could have been.

## CHAPTER 14.

### A Strange Meeting.

WALLY ran on through the wood at top speed after escaping from young Lynn. The discharged keeper's intentions were kind enough, but they did not agree with the inclinations of the junior. He did not mean to leave the wood without Pongo, and he was haunted by the fear that the shots he had heard had been fired at his favourite.

He ran on for some distance, plunging recklessly through bush and briar, shaking drops over himself from wet branches, and at last stopped to listen. His breath was coming in short gasps, and his heart was throbbing wildly. But there was no sound of pursuit; Lynn, if he had pursued him, had missed him in the darkness of the tangled wood.

"I'm out of that!" murmured D'Arcy minor. "Some people are too obliging by half. Now, I wonder where old Pongo is? Pongo! Pongo!"

He called the name softly. He did not want to betray his whereabouts to Lynn, or to the man who had fired the shots, whether he was Barberry, the keeper, or a poacher. He gave a start as he caught the sound of a low whine in the wood.

"Pongo! Pongo!" whispered Wally breathlessly.

The low whine was audible again. It was a dog's whine—the whine of an animal in pain. Wally thought again of the two gun-shots, and his heart beat fiercely. He groped through the wood in the direction of the sound.

"Pongo! Good doggie! Is it you, Pongo?"

The dog whined. Wally groped forward, and his hand touched a warm, palpitating body. The body was wet! Was it the dew? What was it so wet and warm that met the fingers of the junior? The hot tears started to Wally's eyes—his heart beat thickly. He did not need a light to show him what it was. He knew that it was blood!

"Pongo!" he whispered, and the tears dropped hotly from his eyes upon the snuggling muzzle of the dog. "Pongo!"

The dog snuggled into his arms with a low whine. He knew his master. Wally hugged him in his arms, pressing the warm, throbbing body to his chest.

"Pongo—poor old Pongo! Oh, the brutes! The brutes!"

The dog had been shot. Pongo had been shot at before by irate keepers, but he had always escaped with nothing worse than a graze. His luck had failed him this time. Whether he was badly hurt, the boy had no means of telling. But he had been hit, and his ragged coat was wet with blood.

Wally choked back his tears. He picked up the shivering mongrel in his arms, and hugged it under his jacket. Pongo lay there contentedly enough. The boy did not give a thought to the state he was making his clothes in. His only idea was to get away—to get Pongo away from further danger, somewhere where he could examine his wound. Holding the dog close in his arms, he made his way through the black thickets.

But in the run from the young keeper he had totally lost his bearings. He had found the dog, but he had lost himself. The woods were trackless to a stranger in the daytime; at night there were few who could find their way about once off the beaten track. Wally was totally strange to the place. He had not given this aspect of the matter a thought till he tried to find his way homeward. Then he realised that he was hopelessly lost.

"My word!" murmured Wally, in dismay. "My word!"

He had not the faintest idea in which direction St. Jim's lay, or the village, or the road. Black thickets, huge trees with a faint glimmer of the moon on their foliage, enveloped him on all sides. He was lost!

He held the dog close. For the first time the loneliness, the deep and terrible silence, of the solitary woods by night rushed upon his mind. He was glad of the companionship of the dog. Pongo nuzzled and whined faintly.

It was useless to remain where he was. His only course was to keep on, trusting to luck to find a beaten track, or to emerge by chance at some point of the wood. He moved on slowly, stumbling over tangled twigs, tearing his clothes on thorns, stumbling in masses of fallen and sodden leaves.

The thickets suddenly seemed to recede from him, and there was a glimpse of moonlight. He gave a gasp of relief. Was it a path? He stopped and looked about him. He was on the edge of a hollow glade. Deep, thick grass, heavy with moisture, covered the ground, glistening in the moonlight. The shadows of huge trees were thick round the glade. At one point was a glimmer of red—of a light!

There was someone in the glade. For a moment Wally's heart throbbed with relief at the thought of human beings near at hand. But it was only for a moment. He thought of the keeper who had shot Pongo—he thought of the poachers. And he drew quickly back into the blackest shadow.

The light was very close to the ground. It moved slightly, and Wally could see that it was a lantern. The light grew stronger. The boy followed it all keenly. The lantern had been partly covered, but now it was exposed. Two or three dim forms moved in the shadows. The moonlight fell upon a man of powerful frame in gaiters, with a gun in the hollow of his arm. Two others were kneeling in the grass.

Wally watched them curiously. The man with the gun looked like a keeper, but the men kneeling in the grass could never have been mistaken for anything but poachers. They were a pair of powerful ruffians, with caps drawn down low over their brows, and cudgels sticking from the pockets of their coats. What they were doing Wally could not at first make out.

But he knew that he was in danger. He knew that he was watching poachers at work, and that one of those cudgels might descend upon his head if he were discovered there. He clasped a hand over Pongo's muzzle to keep him quiet. The dog understood. No sound came from Pongo save his quick, short breathing.

The boy did not stir. It might be as dangerous to retreat as to advance, if the poachers caught a rustle in the thicket.

"How many?" asked the man with the gun, in a low, harsh voice.

"Thirty brace."

"Good!"

The men rose to their feet. They held a sack between them, and Wally knew then that they had been filling it with their prey—hares, or rabbits, or birds, he could not tell

what. But the third man puzzled him. What was a man clad as a keeper doing watching such a proceeding? Was it a case of collusion between keeper and poacher? It flashed into Wally's mind that that was the explanation.

There was a sudden rustle in the wood, and another figure stepped into the moonlight in the glade. There was a sharp exclamation from the keeper.

"Lynn! You here!"

Wally recognised his old acquaintance. The two poachers dropped the sack, and each grasped his cudgel, and they drew closer together. The man in the keeper's garb seemed too taken aback to move. He stood staring at the young man blankly.

"Yes, Mr. Barberry, I am here!" said Lynn quietly.

"You fool! You fool!"

"Stand back!" Lynn's voice rang out sharply as the two poachers moved towards him. He raised his right hand, and showed a stout blackthorn in the moonlight. "Stand back!"

The ruffians hesitated, and seemed to look to their confederate for guidance. Barberry was staring almost helplessly at Lynn.

"You fool!" he muttered again. "You fool!"

"Not fool enough for your purposes, Mr. Barberry!" said the young man, his voice ringing with scorn. "You lied to Sir Neville about me, but he will soon know the truth now. He knew that someone was in collusion with the poachers, and you made him believe that it was I. He will know better to-morrow!"

"Fool!" said Barberry again.

"I suspected that it was you," resumed Lynn. "Why otherwise should you have lied my character away? I suspected it; and ever since I left Sir Neville's employ I have been on the watch. I knew I should catch you sooner or later if you were guilty—and you are guilty. It is you who are the fool. You could not play this game for ever. You are discovered now."

"Fool, I say! You can never prove——"

"The proof lies in that sack, and in the other which has been taken away."

Barberry started.

"You know nothing——"

"I have been on the watch since nightfall. Five of you have been at work. Two of your confederates have gone with a sack full of rabbits an hour ago. I know their names and where they live. Before morning their houses will be searched by the police, and I think proof enough will be discovered. And you know they will turn upon you to get favour from the magistrates. You know it without my telling you. Your game is up."

Barberry gritted his teeth savagely.

"And—and you are fool enough to tell me so?"

"I want to give you a chance—more than you would have given me. Confess to Sir Neville, and clear my name—and go. Otherwise—prison."

Barberry bowed his head, as if in intense reflection. It was a trick. The next moment he swung the gun suddenly round, and the butt end crashed upon the head of the young keeper. Lynn gave a low, almost strangled cry, and dropped heavily into the grass.

## CHAPTER 15.

### St. Jim's to the Rescue.

WALLY did not move. He could hardly breathe from terror. The young man lay in the thick grass of the glade where he had fallen. Wally could not see him, but he pictured him in his mind. The blow had been a severe one. What had happened to Lynn?

Barberry stood silent, breathing heavily. His two companions stared at the fallen man in terrified silence.

"It was your work," muttered one; "I had no hand in that."

"Nor I."

"Hang you!" muttered Barberry savagely. "Hang your cowardice! If he had gone, all would have been ruined."

He threw the gun into the grass, and stooped beside the fallen man. Lynn was insensible, and the blood was oozing from under his thick hair. The blow had stunned him. Barberry rose to his feet again. He had acted upon the savage impulse of the moment. The fear of exposure and the hatred he felt for the man who menaced him had driven him to the act. Now he was nonplussed.

"Get the sack away," he muttered at last.

"And—and that?" muttered one of the poachers. "You—you dare not——"

He did not finish. Barberry laughed shortly.

"Don't be a fool! Do you think I am likely to risk my neck?"

"But what are you going to do? When he comes to himself——"

"I don't know—I must think."

There was a short silence. The men lifted up the sack again, but they seemed reluctant to go. One of them handled his cudgel, and looked at the inert form of the young keeper. When he came to himself, their liberty depended on him, and it would be so easy to silence him now.

"No!" said Barberry, breaking the silence at last. "No, never that! But—but he can be silenced without—without that. Listen to me! Put some of the hares in his pockets, and leave the snare there. Let him be found. I will take care that one of the under-keepers is sent in this direction, and he will find him. He will be arrested as a poacher before he is able to speak. It will be taken for granted that he was poaching, and was knocked down in a row with one of the gang. Do you see?"

One of the ruffians chuckled.

"I see! It will work, but——"

"I shall be there, to give suspicion the right turn," said Barberry, with a savage grin, all his lost nerve seeming to return to him as he planned the way out of his danger. "Take that sack away, and shove it into Lynn's cottage."

"Lynn's cottage?"

"Yes. Leave about a couple of dozen in it; that will be sufficient. I will see that the sack is found there by the proper persons. Then when he recovers and tells his story, I fancy he will find it hard to make people believe him."

"Good!"

"Get away, then—quick! There's no time to waste."

Wally crouched quite still, half frozen with horror and fear. The shadowy form of the keeper seemed to him like that of some demon as he listened to his words. The depth of cunning amazed and horrified the boy. But he soon had something nearer to think about. The two poachers, carrying the sack between them, moved from the glade, and strode directly towards the spot where Wally was crouching in the shadow of the tree.

The boy had no time to escape. He could hardly have moved without making a sound to give the alarm; but he had no time to move. The ruffians were upon him in a few seconds, and there was a startled exclamation as one of them stumbled over the crouching boy.

Pongo gave a low, fierce growl.

The sack dropped with a dull thud into the grass. The grasp of the poachers was upon Wally the next moment, and he was dragged out into the moonlight of the glade. His heart was beating violently; his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth. He tried to remain cool; he tried to keep his wits about him; but everything seemed to swim before his gaze.

"Who—who is that?" broke in short, gasping syllables from Barberry.

"Some brat; he has been watching."

Barberry pressed his hand to his brow. He realised what it meant to him. His deed had not only been seen, but his plot had been overheard. His look was almost murderous as it was fixed on Wally.

"It is a brat from the school," he muttered. "That—that dog is a brute I shot at an hour ago. I thought I had killed it. Boy—brat—oh, all is lost!"

Wally's terror was passing. His wits began to clear, and he hugged the dog tighter in his arms, not resisting the grasp of the poachers. That would have been futile.

"All is up," muttered Barberry brokenly, "unless—unless——"

He looked fixedly at the poachers. They did not meet his glance. They were desperate men, they had done desperate things, but——

"No," muttered one—"no!"

"He will blab! All is lost!"

"Make him promise——"

Barberry laughed savagely

"A lot of use that would be. Do you think a promise would bind a boy's chattering tongue? If he goes back to the school the whole place will ring with this to-morrow."

He grasped Wally fiercely by the shoulder.

"Brat, what are you doing here?"

"I came to look for my dog."

"Your dog? Oh, I wish I had shot you instead! But it is not yet too late—it is not too late."

He picked up his gun from the grass. What terrible thought was in his mind Wally could guess only too well. He began to struggle.

"Help! Help!"

The boy's cry rang piercingly through the wood. One of the poachers clapped a rough hand savagely over his mouth.

"Quiet, you whelp!"

But the cry had been heard. There was a sound in the wood—of fluttering twigs, of parting thickets, and rustling foliage. The poachers started and listened. Barberry, with his hand on the gun, stood as if suddenly turned to stone. Who were they who were racing at top speed through the dark wood towards the glade?

Wally strove to shout again. He was as amazed by the hurrying footsteps as his captors could be. But the rough hand on his mouth choked his cry.

"Better cut!" muttered a rough voice. "The game's up, Mr. Barberry!"

The keeper did not reply; he seemed almost stunned. The poachers looked at him impatiently, and then, suddenly releasing Wally as the footsteps came closer, they darted into the wood and ran. The sack lay in the grass where they had dropped it. Wally reeled against a tree, the dog still in his arms.

"Help!" he gasped.

"St. Jim's to the rescue!"

It was Tom Merry's voice. And Tom Merry & Co. were bursting from the thickets into the moonlit glade. There was a strange sound from Barberry. It was something between a sigh and a groan. He dropped the gun, and, turning, plunged heavily into the wood. He knew that all was lost now—that only arrest remained—arrest and imprisonment, from which only prompt flight could save him.

"Wally!" cried Arthur Augustus. "Wally! Where are you?"

"Here I am, Gus!" said Master Wally, all his coolness returning as he found himself in the presence of the chums of St. Jim's. "Fancy meeting you!"

"Who was that bolting?" asked Tom Merry breathlessly.

"A couple of poachers and Mr. Barberry."

"What!"

"Fact! He was in league with them; look at that sack."

"My only hat!"

"Bai Jove! Pewwaps you will admit now, Blake, that I was wight."

"I never said you weren't, Gussy."

"I am vewy glad I decided to look into the mattah. It has had most fortunate wesults."

"Why, what have you done?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah, it is wathah bad form to carp in that cwitical way."

"It was you yelled for help, I suppose, you young rascal?" said Tom Merry.

"Yes. They had collared me, you see, and that beast Barberry was picking up his gun. Blessed if I know whether he was going to pot me or not, but he looked like it. Much obliged to you chaps for coming up like this. But I say, look at that poor chap; he's in a pretty bad state, I think."

"Who—what? Why, it's young Lynn!"

"Yes; and it was Barberry clumped him on the head with the butt of his gun."

Tom Merry knelt beside the young man. The moonlight gleamed on his pallid face as Tom raised his head. The junior shuddered. For a moment he feared that Lynn was dead. But he was breathing, though faintly. The blood, oozing from under his hair, was staining one side of his white face. A huge bruise was forming where the blow had fallen. The juniors gathered round anxiously. Most of them knew Lynn, and liked him.

"Is he badly hurt?" asked Blake, in a low voice.

"I can't quite tell. He's stunned, and doesn't show any sign of coming to. We must get him somewhere where he can be seen by a doctor."

"The village is a jolly long way off."

"There's Sir Neville Boyle's place, that's not a half-mile from here," said Tom Merry quietly.

Blake gave a start.

"Sir Neville has sacked him, you know."

"He couldn't refuse to take in a wounded man. Besides, it's pretty clear now how the facts of the case stand."

"Jolly clear!" said Wally. "I heard the rotters talking, and I can tell the whole story. Barberry won't dare to show up again, you can bet on that."

"Well, we'll get him to Sir Neville's place," said Blake. "We can carry him between us. He's no light weight, though."

Lynn was indeed a good weight. But there were seven juniors, none of them weak. They raised Lynn in their arms tenderly enough. He was still quite insensible.

"Good," said Wally; "and the doctor can attend to my dog at the same time. That beast Barberry shot him, but I think he isn't badly hurt. He seems lively enough. Do you notice how he keeps on trying to get at you, Gus?"

"You—you young wascal! Keep the bwute away from my twousahs."

"Certainly! March, you kids!" said D'Arcy minor, with the manner of a master of the ceremonies. And they marched.

## CHAPTER 16.

### Sir Neville Boyle Makes Amends.

LIGHTS were gleaming from the drawing-room windows of Sir Neville Boyle's house. The baronet had company that evening, and the juniors, as they tramped wearily enough up the long drive, heard the sounds of music proceeding from the lighted rooms. The French windows upon the terrace were open, and the portly form of Sir Neville Boyle, in evening-dress, could be seen there.

The baronet uttered a sudden exclamation. He had caught sight of the curious procession on the wide drive. He came quickly forward to the steps of the terrace, and peered down into the darkness.

"What is that?"

"Pway excuse us for this uncewemonious visit at such an extwemely unusual hour," came a polite voice from the gloom; "but there was really no alternative——"

"Dry up, Gussy."

"I wefuse to dwy up. I am explainin' the mattah to Sir Neville Boyle. Undah the circs., sir, I think you will excuse this extwemely uncewemonious call, as we have an injahed man here who is gweatly in need of medical attention."

"What on earth does it all mean?" exclaimed Sir Neville, in amazement.

The voices had been heard, and a number of Sir Neville's guests had come out at the French windows. A crowd of men and women in evening-dress looked down on the juniors in great amazement. The boys from St. Jim's carried their burden upon the terrace, and there was a general exclamation of horror at the sight of the white face with its terrible stains of red.

"In Heaven's name," cried Sir Neville Boyle, "what has happened?"

"Pway allow me to explain."

"This is Lynn, sir," said Tom Merry quietly. "He was knocked down and stunned by your head-keeper, Barberry, in the wood."

"Bless me! He was poaching, I presume?"

"No. Barberry was poaching, and Lynn discovered him——"

"What! You are dreaming!"

"There are plenty of proofs, including an eye-witness to the whole matter," said Tom Merry. "But at present this chap needs care. He has had a fearful crack. Will you send for a doctor?"

"Of course. Whatever the truth is, he shall not want for proper attention," said the baronet.

And in less than a minute a mounted groom was galloping for a doctor. The injured man, who was still unconscious, was carried into the house. The merry party in Sir Neville's drawing-room had had its gaiety damped.

"This matter will need explaining," said Sir Neville. "It——"

"It's all right!" broke out D'Arcy minor.

"Indeed," said the baronet drily. "Is it?"

"Eh? I was speaking of Pongo. It's all right."

"What does the boy mean?"

"He means the beastly dog is all wight, sir," said Arthur Augustus.

"That's it, he's all right," said Wally gleefully. "He's only been grazed. There's a lump of skin gone, and he's lost a lot of blood, but he's all right. I can wrap him up in my jacket and carry him home. I say, we'd better be off. The sooner I get poor old Pong comfortably to bed, the better it will be for him."

"Pway wing off, Wally. Sir Neville is speakin'."

"Sorry, sir! I'm so jolly glad that Pong is all right, you know."

"You boys had better come into the library, and explain this matter," said Sir Neville. And, excusing himself to his guests, he led the way. The juniors were subjected to a pretty keen examination in the library, and the baronet learned the whole story.

"Poor Lynn!" he said. "He has been greatly wronged, but I could not but believe the testimony of my head-keeper. If Barberry is to be found, he shall be arrested. I had not the slightest suspicion that he was such a rascal. I will send you boys back to the school in the carriage, with a note to Dr. Holmes, which may save you from the punishment you deserve—for you deserve it, you know, though the matter has turned out so fortunately."

"We should like to hear what the doctor says about young Lynn first, sir, with your permission," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! I wish to be able to inform Mawy, the housemaid, that I have looked into the mattah, and that it is all wight."

"I can hear the doctor now, I think," said Sir Neville. "I will rejoin you."

He left the juniors in the library. In ten minutes he returned. Tom Merry looked at him with eager inquiry.

"How is Lynn, sir?"

"He has had a nasty knock, but the doctor says he will be quite himself again in a week, I am glad to say. And now, the carriage is ready for you."

"Thank you, sir!"

"One word, pway," said D'Arcy. "You may not be aware, Sir Neville, that Lynn was engaged to Mawy, the housemaid in the School House at St. Jim's, a most wespectable and mewitowious young person."

"No, I cannot say I was aware of it," said Sir Neville, with a smile.

"It is wathah an important mattah to her, sir. You see, they were goin' to be mawwied at Chwistmas, and when you gave young Lynn the ordah of the boot, it quite mucked up their mawwiage pwospects. I was quite touched by Mawy's sowwowful looks, you know, and I pwomised her to look into the mattah and set it wight, and I am glad that my efforts have turned out so successfully. But may I assure Mawy that it is all wight, sir—that you are goin' to take young Lynn on again, and they can be mawwied at Chwistmas all the same?"

Sir Neville laughed.

"Certainly, my lad. And you may tell Mary, also, that I am going to make William Lynn my head-keeper, as a compensation for the wrong I unintentionally did him."

"Bai Jove, that is good news! Thank you vewy much, Sir Neville."

The baronet showed the boys to the waiting carriage, and shook hands with all of them ere they departed. Wally was still nursing his injured pet.

"I think I managed that affaih pwetty well," D'Arcy remarked, as the carriage rolled schoolward. And as the others were too sleepy to argue the point, D'Arcy remained unconfuted.

They arrived at St. Jim's at last. Taggles was so amazed at the sight of the juniors in Sir Neville Boyle's carriage, that he forgot to grumble at the trouble of opening the gate. Tom Merry rang up the School House, and Mary the housemaid came to the door to open it. The girl was looking very quiet, but there were traces of red about her eyes.

Mr. Railton came out of his study, with a very severe expression on his face. Tom Merry took off his cap and presented Sir Neville's letter. Meanwhile, Arthur Augustus was explaining matters to Mary, and Wally was taking his pet away to be housed for the night.

"It's all wight, Mawy," said D'Arcy. "You wemembah I pwomised you to look into the mattah. I have been fortunate enough to pwove young Lynn's innocence. Barbewwy has made twacks—bunked, you know—and Sir Neville is goin' to make Lynn his head-keepah."

The girl looked astounded.

"Oh, Master D'Arcy, it is cruel to joke about such a thing!" she murmured.

"Weally, Mawy, can you possibly considah me capable of jokin' on such a mattah?"

"But—but——"

"It's all true, Mary," said Blake—"true as a die! We'll tell you all about it to-morrow; but every word Gussy says is the solid truth, except that he didn't——"

"Ahem!" said Mr. Railton, having read the letter. "Under the circumstances, you will be pardoned, my boys. Go to bed at once."

"Yes, sir."

"Mary, I am glad to tell you that William Lynn is quite cleared of the charge against him, and that Sir Neville has taken him into favour again," said Mr. Railton kindly. "There, don't cry, my dear, it will be all right now."

Mary was crying, but it was from happiness now. She went away with her apron to her eyes. D'Arcy minor came in with Herries. The new junior presented a shocking sight. He was covered with mud and blood and canine hairs, and Mr. Railton gave him a very expressive glance.

"You had better take your brother to a bath-room before he goes to bed, D'Arcy," he said.

And D'Arcy did. Glad enough were the juniors to get to bed again. And glad, too, to escape the licking they had fully expected—and which Skimpole had not escaped. The next day St. Jim's was buzzing with the story, and Figgins & Co. came over from the New House to hear all the details, and to growl at Tom Merry and Blake for leaving them out of the fun. Arthur Augustus told the story right and left, and worked it out to his own satisfaction that he had looked into the matter and set it right. And he was extremely indignant when he found that most of the fellows were more inclined to attribute the happy result to D'Arcy minor.

THE END.

*(Another long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. next Thursday, entitled, "Darrell's Secret," by Martin Clifford. Order in advance 1d.*

***THE FIRST CHAPTERS OF A GRAND STORY.***


# A THRILLING TALE OF THE COAL-MINES

## By MAX HAMILTON.

### THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

David Steele, fifteen years of age, is forced through circumstances to leave the little North-country village which had been home to him all his days.

Wrexborough is his destination. He tramps on hour after hour, but at last, being too tired to move, falls to sleep on the banks of a canal. He is awakened by voices, and overhears a vile plot. He resolves to frustrate it, and is successful in saving the victim's life.

The next morning the rescued man tells David he is Mr. Scott, a wealthy Wrexborough mine-owner. He exacts a promise from the boy not to say a word about the attempt on his life, and orders Mr. Grafton, his manager, to find David some work to do. He also gets Mrs. Nichols, the wife of one of his men, to board and lodge him. David is dumbfounded on discovering that Markham, one of the men who had made the attack on Mr. Scott, is living under the same roof. On his first morning, David is awakened early, and goes down into the mine. He is shown through the shaft by Mr. Hobbs, an overseer, and is then set to work as a "trammer."

*(Now go on with the story.)*

### Left-handed Billy.

David's new duties were fairly arduous, but he soon found that at least they were simple of comprehension. The little mine ponies, long unused to the light of day, trotted stolidly along between the rails from the "flat" to the spot where the "filler" was waiting to load the coal which the "getter" had brought up, and the "holer," or skilled miner, wielding his pick as he lay outstretched upon the ground, had undercut from the face of the seam.

He soon made acquaintance with several of his mates, lads of his own age, who gave him a hearty if unceremonious welcome, and who were all anxious to hear from his own lips the story of his rescue of "Left-handed Billy," as they one and all termed their employer. In fact, when the dinner-hour came round, and the lads were free to surround David, he had no little difficulty in parrying their questions on his adventure, and at the same time sticking as far as possible to the truth.

One thing he soon gathered from their talk—that Mr. Scott was thoroughly popular with those in his employ.

"A right good chap, our Billy!" declared Jim Cottrell, one of the trammers, heartily. "There ain't a man in the pit as wouldn't be glad of a chance to do what you did for 'im."

"'Cept Markham and his lot," broke in Joe Benson, with a grin. "You forget Markham, Jim. If he saw Left-handed Billy a-tumbling into th' water, I don't think he'd hurry much to get 'im out."

David leant forward eagerly.

"Has Markham got a grudge against Mr. Scott?" he asked eagerly.

Jim Cottrell nodded.

"Ay, that he has," he replied, with his mouth full, "though why, it beats me to say. He's allus a-grumblin', and trying to make others like him; but, bless you, 'e only gets laughed at for his pains, 'cept by a few silly 'uns as foolish as himself. Seems 'e's got a taste for making mischief."

"Do you remember," broke in Joe Benson, "what a row he made when Phillips was turned off? Called a lot of the chaps together, and wanted to lay the case before the Miners' Federation."

"Ay," chuckled Jim, "and my dad spoke up to him straight. Told 'im that if he thought the Miners' Federation 'ud bother their heads about a chap as hadn't been fit for work through drink for months, he was jolly well mistaken. You should 'ave 'eard the others call out 'Ear, 'ear!' when dad finished," continued Jim, turning to David with evident pride in his parent's speech-making powers. "Markham was sick, 'e was. 'E grumbled somethink about taking away a chap's character, and letting his wife and kiddies starve—as if we didn't all know what Phillips was! 'E left 'is own character at the Miner's Rest long ago."

"And as for 'is wife and kiddies," Joe went on, "there weren't no need of the subscriptions t' chaps were going to get up for them, for Left-handed Billy he started 'er in a little shop all on his own, and without saying a word to anyone. A right good 'un he is! Hallo, boys, time's up! Come along and get back to t' tubs!"

---

### What Happened in the Mine.

David Steele was not naturally suspicious, but his experiences of the last few days led him to receive Markham's apparent friendliness with considerable mistrust.

Nor was he wrong in this. In reality, Markham stood in mortal terror of the lad, whose knowledge of past events, if he chose to make use of it, could consign him to a respectable term of penal servitude.

He believed that David was spying upon his actions, and he had the best of reasons for wishing certain transactions in which he was engaged to be kept as secret as possible. Such being the case, he racked his brains for some means of getting the lad out of Wrexborough for the present. Violence—coming from him, at least—was too risky. What then was to be done?

It was only after deep consideration of the subject that an idea struck him.

"Skirling and his lot!" he exclaimed. "Why didn't I think of him before? Skirling'll set his whole gang on the boy for a sovereign, and if that don't make the pit too hot to hold Master David Steele, why, I'm a Dutchman!"

And, with a satisfied grin on his face, he set off at his earliest spare moment to the Miner's Rest, where he was certain of finding Job Skirling and a circle of admiring followers.

He was not disappointed. A glance round the tap-room showed him the burly, bullet-headed figure of Job Skirling—nicknamed, as he would have been proud to tell you, the "Wrexborough Terror."

A big, hulking fellow was Job Skirling, a man with whom few of the better sort of Wrexborough cared to be seen, but one with whom fewer still cared to quarrel. If he had possessed a little more pluck he would have made a first-class prizefighter. As it was, he took advantage of his physique to make himself feared and hated. His "gang," as they were called, consisted of a few of the rougher and younger pitmen who, under his leadership, had succeeded in getting themselves into very bad odour in the district.

Such was Job Skirling, the worthy who turned a contemptuous eye on Markham when the latter accosted him with:

"Hallo, Skirling! I want a word with you!"

"Want a word wi' me, do you, old cockalorum!" returned Job politely. "The question is, how long you'll have to go on wanting!"—a sally which was received with uproarious applause by his neighbours in the tap-room.

It would not at any time have suited Markham to quarrel with the "Wrexborough Terror," but to-night less than ever. So he betrayed no anger at that gentleman's remark, merely approaching his mouth to Skirling's ear to whisper:

"I can put a bit o' money in your pocket, Job!"

Job Skirling looked up incredulously, but Markham's face convinced him that he was in earnest. Money never came amiss to the "Wrexborough Terror," who was generally in debt for his score at the Miner's Rest. Signing to Markham to follow him, he shouldered his way into the street.

"How much is the job worth?" was his first inquiry.

"Twenty bob!"

"H'm! What's to do?"

"Look here," said Markham. "You know that kid, Dave Steele, that the boss has been making such a fuss about?"

"Yes—stuck-up little beggar!"

"You're right," returned Markham; "he is a stuck-up little beggar. More than that, he is a sneaking little beggar—a spy o' Scott's. I've found him out in his tricks, currying favour with the overseers by preaching, and I want the place made too hot to hold him."

"Well, why don't you do it yourself?" inquired Job.

"'Cause I haven't got a dozen chaps to back me up, and a dozen can do a sight more to make it disagreeable for him than me by myself. Tell you what, Job, I believe it was he split on you to Hobbs t'other day, when he was so down on you!"

Skirling's eyes sparkled angrily. He was too vain and stupid to see that Markham was making a tool of him.

"Did he, the young cub?" he muttered. "Then I owe him one, as well as Hobbs. Here, hand over the quid, and consider the trick done. I'll make his life a terror. He'll find it the best plan to quit Wrexborough before I've done wi' him!"

The sovereign changed hands, and Markham returned home chuckling at the thought of the enemies he had raised up against David Steele. If any man could make a boy's life unbearable, that man was Job Skirling. Markham guessed rightly that to whatever bullying he might be exposed, David would be too proud to complain to the authorities, and that very pride would make it all the easier to render his existence intolerable, and force him in sheer misery to leave the Wrexborough pit.

Partly from fear, and partly from admiration of their leader, the Skirling gang were well disciplined, and when the word was passed round that Dave Steele was to be bullied into leaving the mine, the whole crew prepared to obey orders implicitly.

They began by throwing every possible hindrance in the way of his work, and more than once David was sharply reproved by the overseer for his slowness in carrying out his duties when he had, either by force or by a trick, been purposely delayed by some member of the gang. In vain the boy remonstrated; blows, and the taunt that he was "Scott's spy" were the only satisfaction he received. David was no coward, but there was not a single one of his tormentors for whom he was physically a match. He was, therefore, practically helpless in their hands—a fact which Job Skirling himself demonstrated by intercepting him in one of the lonelier galleries of the mine and inflicting an utterly unprovoked thrashing upon him, which he wound up with an assurance that there were plenty more of the same kind to follow.

From his fellow "trammers"—boys of his own age—David got plenty of sympathy, for there were few of them that had not at some time or other smarted at the hands of the Skirling gang; but more than sympathy they were powerless to give, and they, as well as the victim himself, were quite unable to guess at the reason for this sudden ill-treatment and organised animosity.

Job Skirling fulfilled his promise that the boy's life should be made a terror to him. It was with a feeling of relief that another day was over that David knocked off work each evening. His enemies had told him plainly that they meant to drive him out of the mine, but by that very statement they had roused all the pride in the lad's nature, and he determined that he would never give in to them. But if he was obstinate, so was Job Skirling, who, quite apart from his promise to Markham, had begun to grow furious at having his authority defied by a "blooming kid!"—a frame of mind that was strengthened by Markham's cunningly-worded taunts on his lack of success.

"I'll teach the little beggar to defy me," he growled in answer, "next time I come across him!"

That next time was not long in coming. On the following day, as David was leading his pony from the "flat" to the face of the seam, the little animal suddenly stopped short, and, with unaccustomed obstinacy, refused to budge an inch. In vain David tried to coax him forward. Planting his fore-feet firmly on the ground, the pony resisted all his attempts.

"Why, what's the matter with you, Toby?" the lad said, patting the creature's neck soothingly, for Toby was trembling all over.

"Won't go on, won't 'e!" said a voice in his ear. "I'll show you how to make him!"

And Job Skirling—for he it was—planted a well-aimed kick in the little beast's ribs. Even when it was repeated again and again, however, Toby did not stir; but, with his ears laid back, struggled to retire rather than advance.

His anger overcoming all considerations of prudence, David sprang to the pony's head.

"Leave him alone!" he said fiercely. "He's in my charge, not yours; and I'm responsible for seeing that he's properly treated!"

The answer was a blow that sent him reeling backwards

and Skirling, delighted at the opportunity of tormenting his victim, seized Toby by the head, and by main force dragged him and his load a few paces onwards, pausing now and again to inflict a brutal kick on the struggling pony.

"You're responsible, are you?" he jeered. "Well, then, you'd better try and stop me from treating your mangy beast as I like!"

"You let him go!" cried David, as, still giddy from the effects of the blow which Skirling had dealt him, he rushed once more at his antagonist. "Let him go, you brute!"

With a snarl, Skirling turned once more on the boy, and raised his arm for another blow—one that was never given, however. For a sudden, rending crash struck upon David's ears, while at the same moment a blinding cloud of dust almost choked him.

He staggered back, wondering what had happened. He was in utter darkness. His own lamp, which he had placed upon the ground when he rushed at Skirling, as well as that of his antagonist, had in some way, of which he was as yet ignorant, been extinguished.

A moan, that seemed to come from somewhere near his feet, made him stoop and feel for Skirling; and his late enemy seized his hand and clung to it desperately.

"Don't leave me!" he almost sobbed. "I can't move, Dave. There's a great bit of rock on the top of me. Ye won't leave me alone to die in the dark, will ye, lad? I'm sorry for what I did to ye, I am indeed. Don't leave me—don't leave me!"

His voice rose nearly to a scream. David realised how poor a creature was this bully who had made his life a misery. There was little of the bully now about the wretched man who clutched the lad's hand, frightened out of his wits by the prospect of loneliness and death.

"I won't leave you," David returned contemptuously. 'But what has happened? I don't understand!"

"A bit of the roof given away," said Skirling. "The walls must 'a been 'creeping.' I suppose that blessed pony of yours could feel it coming. Oh, I wish I hadn't been such a fool as to meddle with the beast! My leg's broke, for sure. It hurts awful. And we're cut off from the shaft. Most likely we'll die afore they get us out!"

And the "Wrexborough Terror" fairly gave way and began to blubber. Perhaps it was as well for his self-esteem that the darkness hid the contempt on David's face.

"Well," said the latter, "if we're cut off from the shaft we're not the only ones. There's two or three others at the end of the gallery. And, hallo, there's a light! They're coming to see what's the matter!"

David was right. Three miners who had been working at the end of the gallery, warned by the sound of the falling rock that something serious had occurred, were hurrying to the scene of the catastrophe, and, as they reached it, the light from the lamps showed what had happened. As Skirling had surmised, a portion of the roof had given way, blocking up the gallery and burying beneath the débris David's tub and the unfortunate pony, whose instinct had vainly warned him of danger. Both Skirling and David had narrowly escaped the same fate; the former, in fact, had been knocked down and bruised by a shower of rubble.

It did not take the new-comers long to realise their position, but the phlegmatic coolness with which they accepted the situation was in marked contrast to Job Skirling's moans and cries.

"Eh, lad, not quite so much noise about it!" said Nathan Benn disdainfully. "Here, Dave boy, lend a hand while we get him clear o' the rubbish!"

"Take care!" shrieked Job, as they began to clear away the stones from his recumbent form. "My legs is broke!"

"What, both o' them?" returned Benn coolly. "No fear! Take my word for it, you wouldn't make so much noise if they were. Now, then," he went on as, having freed Job from the heap of rubble, he knelt down beside him and ran his hand along the prostrate man's legs, "where's the damage? It's not in the bones, for they are sound enough. It strikes me you're more frightened than hurt, Job Skirling!"

Even the peril in which they were placed could not prevent a grin going round the little group at the expense of the "Wrexborough Terror."

"Stand up and don't fool!" went on Nathan Benn sternly. "Eh, but it'll be a good laugh when t' chaps hear how Job Skirling cried like a baby when t' rock fell in!"

If ever a man looked like a pricked bladder, that man was Job Skirling at that moment. Benn wasted no more words on him.

"Now, lads," he said, turning to the others, "while the lamps hold out we'd better set to work wi' our picks on the rock, to meet t'chaps as'll be digging away on t' other side."

The suggestion was at once acted upon. And Benn, who was a cool-headed, sensible fellow, arranged his little party of five to the best advantage. While two used their picks, two removed the fragments of rock they had displaced, and the fifth rested for half an hour at a time till his turn came round again.

Of the depth of rock through which they had to cut they were, of course, ignorant, and every now and then they would pause and knock loudly, in the hope of obtaining an answering signal. It was not until the last of their lamps was just expiring that one came, however; but when it did come, it was received with a cheer from five thankful throats.

Only a few minutes later their lamp went out, and they were left in utter darkness—a darkness that could be felt. Further work was impossible. All they could do was to sit and wait for a deliverance that might come too late.

Those long hours of darkness were a horrible strain upon the nerves. More than once Job Skirling gave way entirely, and burst into incoherent sobs; the others sat for the most part grimly silent. David had not the vaguest idea of how long they had been entombed. He only knew that it seemed to him years since he had looked upon the light of day. A stupor, from which he in vain tried to rouse himself, was creeping over him.

As a matter of fact, the time during which the five men had been imprisoned might now have been reckoned by days, not hours; and foul air and lack of nourishment were doing their deadly work. Skirling had long ceased his lamentations, and Benn his attempts to raise his comrades' spirits. The exhaustion that precedes death was stealing over them. Even hunger had ceased to be painful, and their ears had become dulled to the sound of the distant blows upon their prison wall.

Gradually, however, these sounds grew nearer; and at length, in an interval of consciousness, David awoke to the fact that voices were close at hand.

It took him a minute or two to realise what those voices meant, then he called weakly to his fellow-prisoners, but received no answer. The horrible fear that he was the only one left alive forced itself upon him. Shuddering, he rose, and staggered in the direction of the sound. As he did so a ray of light met his eyes. He gave a faint cry, that was answered by a glad one from without.

The rescuers were still some distance away, but they had reached a point at which the fallen rock was more loosely piled together. In fact, by creeping under a huge slab which was supported in its place by smaller boulders, it was possible, though dangerous, in view of a subsidence, for a slight lad like David to work his way through the débris.

At another time the boy would have thought twice before taking the risk, but in his eagerness for release he did not hesitate, and began to creep painfully along the tortuous little tunnel that led to safety. Exhausted as he was, it was no easy job, and when he was seized by the shoulders and dragged out into a group of miners, his senses had almost left him.

It was Scott himself who supported him in his arms, while Grafton held a mixture of beef-tea and brandy to his lips. It brought new life to him, and he was soon able to answer the questions put to him.

"Are the others alive?" asked Scott anxiously.

"I don't know, sir. I know they are unconscious, for none of them answered when I called."

Scott groaned.

"Poor fellows—and it may be hours yet till we can reach them, or even pass them food—if they are able to take it!"

"Let me take it to 'em, sir!"

It was David who spoke.

"Nonsense, lad! I can't let you risk your life again. It was a more dangerous job than you imagined, crawling through that opening—the wall might have 'crept' at any moment, and come down on you. Besides, you are only fit for a rest."

But David stood his ground.

"I got through to save myself, so I can go back to save the other chaps," he said doggedly. "I'm the only one that can, for no grown man could squeeze himself through."

There was a murmur of applause. Scott hesitated, and then laid his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"You're right, David," he said. "But I wish to Heaven I could take your place!"

And he turned aside, covering his face with his hands, while David, with a couple of flasks stowed in his pockets, and provided with a lamp, recommenced his perilous journey. His head was clearer now, and he realised fully how perilous it was, how his every movement was liable to bring down upon him some mass of tottering rock that would crush him out of recognition.

As for the rescue-party, they stood in breathless silence until a distant "All right!" told them that the dangerous passage was accomplished.

"Bravo, Dave!" shouted Scott. And the miners echoed his words excitedly.

It was some hours later when they forced their way to the spot where the poor fellows lay, and found them alive—thanks, in all probability, in some cases at least, to the nourishment that David had brought and administered. The news of the boy's plucky feat had been carried to the pit's mouth, and

loud as were the cheers that greeted rescuers and rescued, the loudest were for David Steele. In fact, but for Scott's interference, the boy would have found it difficult to escape from the throng that surrounded him.

And the fact of his increased popularity was not the only result of the accident in the pit for David. From that day forward Job Skirling and his gang molested him no more. Whether the "Wrexborough Terror" felt any gratitude or admiration is doubtful, but the tale of his cowardice had spread, and Job found himself deserted by even his most faithful followers. From henceforth Markham had nothing to hope from his ally or David to fear from him.

### David Makes a Discovery.

For some time David's life in the mine continued uneventful enough; but the round of his daily duties did not prevent him from speculating on the mystery that surrounded his employer.

Above all, he watched Markham.

Days passed, however, and nothing in the latter's conduct pointed to any further development of the mystery. Neither was Scott's nocturnal visit repeated. He and Markham, if they met, must have chosen some other rendezvous. In fact, it was hardly likely that they would venture on the experiment of drugging a possible listener every time they wished to talk in private.

More than once the boy almost decided to tell Scott that he had been a witness of his strange visit; but the idea that his employer might think he had been spying restrained him, and this reflection decided him, for the present, to hold his tongue and keep his eyes open.

Thus a week or two went by, and he was almost beginning to believe that no further light would be thrown upon the matter, when one day his interest in it received a fresh and unexpected fillip.

It was on a Sunday afternoon. He had set out for a stroll, and, leaving Wrexborough behind him, he had wandered up the hills that surrounded it and away over the moor beyond, when, while still two or three miles distant from home, he was overtaken by a sudden storm of rain. Ordinary rain was not of much account to a country-bred boy; but this was a regular downpour, and David, who was not desirous of spoiling his Sunday best, made a bolt for the only shelter in the neighbourhood—some tumbledown buildings which stood in melancholy decay around what was known in Wrexborough as "th' owd shaft."

The old shaft was the mouth of a worked-out pit. Beside the black opening, round which the shrubs and gorse had grown, stood the weather-beaten walls of what had once been the engine-house, and a shed or two, and it was in one of these latter that David took refuge from the storm.

He had been sitting down for some five minutes when the crazy door, which tottered on its hinges, was suddenly pushed open, and a man entered the building.

The place was in semi-darkness, the only light proceeding from the open door and the various holes in the battered roof. The new-comer, therefore, did not see David, whose presence he was so far from suspecting that he never even looked around him, as, walking straight up to the wall opposite the door, he thrust a piece of paper which he had been carrying in his hand into the interstice of two of the planks, turned on his heel, and left the shed as quickly as he had entered it, pulling the door to behind him.

The whole thing had been done so quickly that before David had had time to realise that the stranger had not, like himself, sought the shed for shelter from the weather, he was gone.

The boy sprang to his feet.

The light in the shed was dim. He had not seen the features of the man who had so suddenly appeared and vanished; but something in his gait and build was familiar.

He ran to the door, opened it, and looked out, then rubbed his eyes.

The stranger had disappeared.

For a moment David could not believe his own sight.

The moor lay undulating before him, its wide expanse unbroken by even a tree. There was no one to be seen.

He ran round the sheds and the engine-house, examined them inside and out, called—to no avail. In the space of a few seconds the stranger had vanished as completely and mysteriously as if the earth had opened and swallowed him up.

Had it swallowed him up? Had he fallen down that black yawning hole leading to the bowels of the earth?

The boy's eyes grew round with horror at the thought. Had he, in leaving the shed, unaware of the proximity of the disused shaft, stumbled into it?

But if that were the case, surely a cry would have escaped him, a shriek of horror as he felt himself falling through the yielding air, a shriek that would certainly have reached David's ears.

Puzzled and bewildered, half inclined to believe that his eyes had played him false, David rose from the kneeling posture in which he had been peering over the edge of the shaft.

"I must have been dreaming," he muttered. "It's a rank impossibility for a man to disappear entirely without a sign or a sound in about half a minute. I must have been dreaming. And yet——"

He ran back to the shed as the thought struck him.

No, he had not been dreaming. The stranger had thrust something—a piece of paper—between the joints of the planking, and that piece of paper was there still, though so tightly rammed into its hiding-place that if David had not seen it put there he would certainly never have discovered it. As he smoothed it out and held it to the light, he read a few lines in pencil traced upon it. They ran as follows:

"Everything is ready for to-morrow night. Be here by ten without fail. I have made sure of him. This time we are certain of success."

There was neither signature nor address. What did it mean?

The missive in itself was mysterious enough; but even more mysterious was the complete disappearance of the man who had brought and, no doubt, written it. Who was he? And who was the correspondent with whom he adopted such an extraordinary method of communication?

"Upon my word," thought the boy, "I seem to do nothing but tumble into mysteries. Here's another—a regular Sherlock Holmes problem. It's a jolly sight easier to work out than the Scott and Markham business, though; for, after all, I've only got to watch who comes here for letters to get some sort of a clue. And that's exactly what I will do. 'Everything is ready for to-morrow night.' I wouldn't mind betting a good deal that the gentleman who wrote that has a pretty fishy job on hand—helping himself to somebody else's spoons and forks, perhaps, or something of that kind. I wonder how long it will be before his friend calls for his note—which I'd better put back where he expects to find it."

The next thing was to find a coign of vantage for himself. To stay in the shed was impossible. It was only by chance that the bearer of the missive had not noticed him.

The old engine-house offered the best post of observation. From it he could see anyone entering the shed, while himself remaining unseen.

"Not that that matters much," he reflected, "for the man who comes for that letter is not likely to guess that I've had a look at it already."

Feeling like a detective on a hot scent, he ensconced himself at his post, his eyes fixed upon the door of the shed.

Nearly an hour passed by. The sun was nearing the horizon, and detective business began to lose some of its attraction. In fact, the boy was seriously considering the advisability of postponing his investigations for the present, when the sound of an approaching footfall fell upon his ear, and the next instant a man came into view, and walked straight to the door of the deserted shed.

David drew a long breath of astonishment.

The man was Markham.

*(To be continued next Thursday.)*



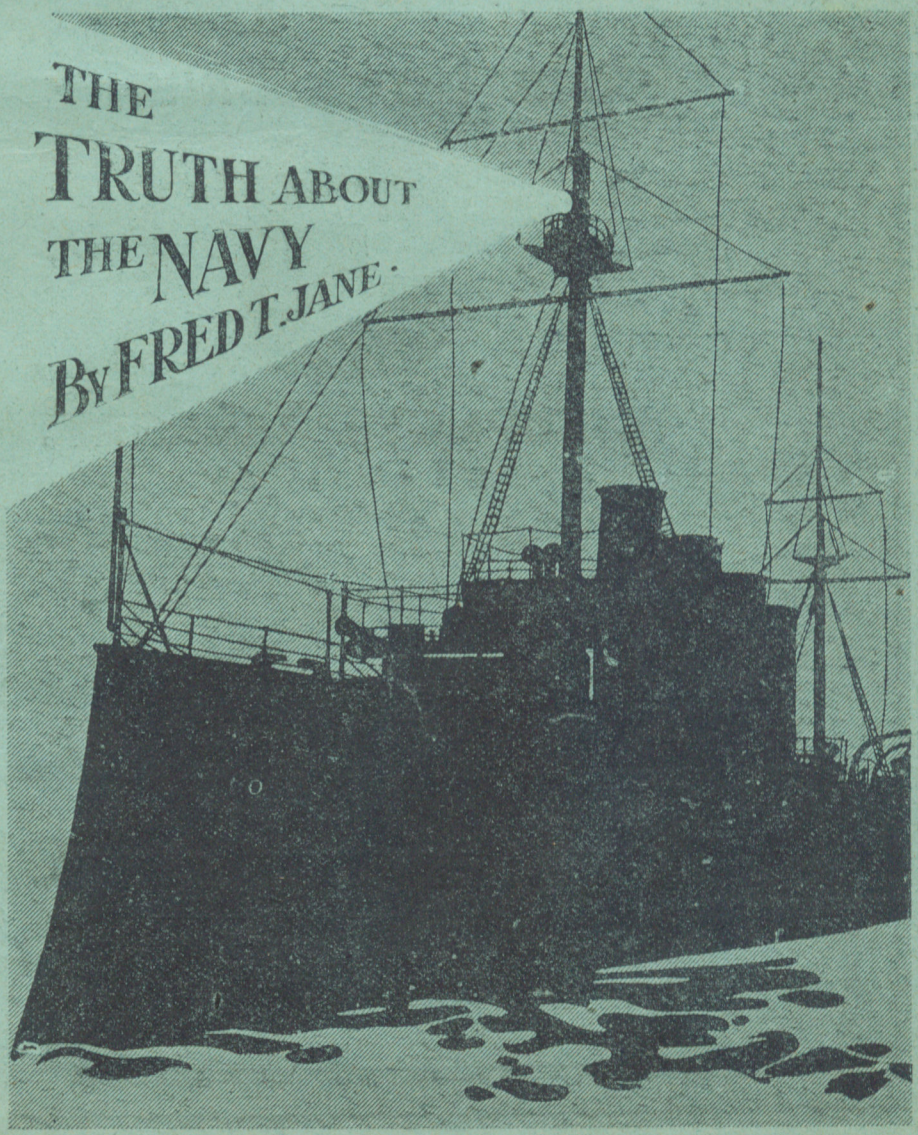
Printed and published weekly by the Proprietors 23, Bouverie Street, London, England. Subscription, 4s. 4d. per annum.
Saturday, October 17th, 1908.

*See This Week's*

# PENNY PICTORIAL

*for a most remarkable Series of Articles,*

entitled




Plain Speaking About the Navy.

Sexton Blake, Detective.

Splendid Football Articles, &c. &c., in the PENNY PICTORIAL.